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Some maps were created with the help of software found on dungeondraft.net, dungeonfog.com, or inkarnate.com. Some graphic elements use resources from freepik.com.

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To the Legends of the RPG Industry,

We cannot express how honored we are to have had your special participation in our project. Your immense contributions to the RPG industry have paved the way for so many of us to explore worlds of fantasy and adventure.

From groundbreaking creations to innovative systems, your influence can be seen in countless games and campaigns that have brought wonder and joy to so many. Your creations have inspired us all to do our best and to never stop imagining.

Thank you for everything you have done for the entire community of RPG enthusiasts around the world. You are true legends, and your impact will continue to be felt for generations to come.

With deepest gratitude and respect,
The Dragori Team

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Introduction

Welcome to "Adventures in the Realms of Madness." This book presents a suspense-filled narrative tailored for 5E, in which your party will navigate the treacherous waters of political assassination, tracking a group of fanatics. As the story unfolds, the adventurers will unravel the enigma of the mastermind and the Cult's dark schemes.

The characters will explore unique cityscapes, make allies and enemies, and invade an underground cultist stronghold to discover the villain's final plan. To stop him, they will journey into the Penumbral Plane's dreadful realm and seek a profane temple to face the eldrich Penumbral Dragon. This abomination, vying for divinity, aims to unleash the Avatar of Z'ulvath, the Penumbral Father, by completing a sacrificial ritual.

The balance of the world hangs by a thread, hinging on the courage of the brave souls who undertake this dangerous quest. This campaign takes the characters from level 3 to level 12, testing their bravery and determination.

Story Overview

Adventures in the Realms of Madness starts as a thriller investigation and evolves into an exploration of the Penumbral Plane, a dark and nightmarish mirror of the material plane filled with horrific eldritch creatures. The plot behind the adventures can be summarized as follows:

Tenebrizon and the Cult of Shadow Wing

The Cult of Shadow Wing, serving the Ungods, yearns for the Penumbral Plane to consume Tanares. Composed of four factions, the Cult's most influential sect, the Shadow Lords, bows to Lypoec, the Penumbral Avatar Dragon. This powerful dragon ensures obedience through oppression, coercion, and manipulation while serving Z'ulvath, the sire of the Ungods.

Among many penumbral dragons serving the Shadow Lords, Tenebrizon—one of the most ancient and powerful—grows discontented. Weary of his perpetual second-in-command position, Tenebrizon seeks to surpass Lypoec. He found an opportunity when uncovering a Theocracy of Kepesh's secret scheme.

The Kepesh Conspiracy

The Theocracy of Kepesh, a recently emerged realm in the south of Tanares, reveres the god Ba-Ka, god of spirits and magic, under the rulership of the Lich Pharaoh Kalistessenâmun.

They currently possess an ancient divine artifact that could hasten the construction of a Vandanamalika—a monumental mystical building of immense magical power, enabling magic on the level of deities. They aim to secretly and swiftly build it before other Tanares factions are known.

Tenebrizon's infiltrated cultists uncovered this secret, but instead of informing Lypoec, Tenebrizon decided to seize the opportunity himself, planning to summon an avatar of Z'ulvath to consume Tanares and gain the favor of the Ungods.

Tenebrizon plans to seize the Kepesh Vandanamalika by mystically transporting it to the Penumbral Plane just before its completion.

The Malrokian Curse and a Cold War

The Kemet Invasion left its mark on Tanares, fracturing it into numerous factions, each competing for dominance. Amidst these divisions, an uneasy peace exists—a cold war borne of the Malrokian Curse.

Whenever mortals wage wars, the resulting destruction and corruption greatly empower the Ungods, causing massive cataclysms that can wipe out civilizations, making large-scale open conflict unthinkable.

Seeking power, each faction is building its version of the powerful Vandanamalika. This device is seen as a grand solution to stop the Ungods, and would allow the first faction to complete it to gain power to seize the continent without a war.

As a result, the factions engaged in covert operations to sabotage each other, leading Tanares into a cold war. Now spies, assassins, diplomats, and merchants become prominent as factions vie for advantage without resorting to open conflict.

Current Political Maneuvering

The Kepesh still needed many magical components to finish their Vandanamalika, even with the divine artifact. They began paying thieves and mercenaries to acquire them. However, as these escalated, the geopolitical balance teetered in the abyss of war. In response, a precarious truce was formed between the Allied Forces, led by the Republic of Freelands and the Realm of Yama, and the Tanarean Empire. This truce aims to counteract the Kepesh's heists and uncover their plans.

With the heists being countered, the Kepesh Vandanamalika's construction stalled, muddling Tenebrizon's plan. The ancient dragon, knowing that each passing moment risks exposure of his plans, was forced to act. His strategy is to shatter the truce between the Empire and the Allied Forces, diverting their attention from the Kepesh's heists to a conflict with each other, giving room for the Kepesh to advance on their construction.

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The Murderer's Machinations

Tenebrizon covertly aided an Empire spy to acquire secret documents from the Republic that, if exposed, could tarnish the reputation of Sedura, the Minister of Defense of the Republic. Now, this spy is undercover as an Imperial Diplomat within the Republic and attempting to return to the Empire. Tenebrizon intends to assassinate her to provoke mutual suspicion between the Empire and the Republic.

He intends to make the Republic suspect the Empire of using spies to steal secret documents during a truce, while the Empire will suspect the Republic of assassinating their diplomat (and undercover spy) in cold blood.

The draconic mastermind entrusted his Shadow Wing servants with hiring an assassin to kill Vang. His servants found an unscrupulous mercenary, Gary Landen, a redeemer chosen for his smooth talking, a seemingly bumbling socialite appearance, concealing the skills of a professional assassin. The grand stage is an upcoming high-society art gathering at a noble's mansion, where diplomats and representatives of various influential factions will attend, each holding their secret motivations.

Using one of the many plot hooks provided or creating your own, the characters are prompted to join the gathering. Still, the action will really begin once Vang's body (the undercover spy) is found dead, creating a wave of accusations that forces an urgent investigation, pushing the characters into the heart of a dire political situation, ultimately leading to the revelation of Gary Landen as the perpetrator.

Tenebrizon's Power of Possession

The party, upon unmasking the murderer, demonstrating remarkable abilities or unique talents, can attract Tenebrizon's attention. If this occurs, he will seek to bring them suffering, harm their allies, spread damaging rumors, and exploit their psychological vulnerabilities. All while guiding them to his lair to destroy them personally and use their souls as the last pieces to complete the Vandanamalika ritual.

Throughout the adventure, Tenebrizon will maintain interest in the party's progress, using his unique power of possession to keep a close watch. Granted to him by the Penumbral Father, Tenebrizon can dispatch a fragment of his soul to possess any mortal he touches.

Tenebrizon's twisted sense of superiority and obsession with demonstrating his might fuel his need to bring despair to his victims before finally crushing them. Keep in mind that Tenebrizon, when possessing mortal bodies, does not wield his full might. Nonetheless, he will not hesitate to sacrifice the lives of possessed victims to inflict torment on others, even without any gain for it, except feeding his feeling of superiority.

The PCs will encounter him in various bodies multiple times throughout the adventure. Whenever an opportunity presents itself, Tenebrizon will delight in possessing individuals close to the party, reveling in their anguish as they're forced to harm those they hold dear.

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The Possession Rules

1 - The Touch. Tenebrizon must touch the creature he wishes to possess, either with his real body (in the Penumbral Plane) or with an already possessed body. Since Tenebrizon's real body cannot leave the ritual preparations at this time, he first touches a willing cultist. Using the dominated cultist, he travels to Tanares through planar traveling magic, thereby enabling him to touch other mortals to transfer his soul fragment.

2 - The Resistance. If a creature is unwilling, it must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw to resist being possessed. If it fails, the creature's mind becomes suppressed as Tenebrizon assumes control. If it succeeds, it becomes aware it was the target of a potent mental assault. Tenebrizon is unable to possess that creature for 24 hours.

3 - One at a Time. Tenebrizon is limited to possessing one creature at a time.

4 - In Two Places at Once. Tenebrizon's body and mind can still operate within the Penumbral Plane while possessing a creature. He simultaneously exists in two places, sharing all senses and thoughts. His real body remains unaffected by events impacting the possessed one.

5 - The Curse of Death. If a possessed creature drops to 0 hit points, it undergoes a mental collapse and dies after the end of the next round. Casting *remove curse* or a comparable effect on the creature at 0 hit points can prevent this death. No form of "nonlethal" attack avoids this outcome.

6 - Traumatic Exit. Tenebrizon can vacate a creature's body at will. Upon leaving a host, including when transitioning to another body, he may inflict 6d6 psychic damage on the creature he departs from.

7 - No Memory. A creature retains no memory of events that occurred while it was possessed, and no magical effect, short of a *wish* or similar power, can restore the memory of that period.

8 - Target's Body, Tenebrizon's Mind. When possessing a body, Tenebrizon can utilize only the host's stats, abilities, and physical proficiencies. He gains access to the target's memories and mental skills. He can also apply his knowledge, making all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma checks, with his stats and proficiencies if they are higher. (see his stats in Chapter 8).

Note: Tenebrizon avoids possessing the PCs for two reasons:

- Doing so would corrupt their souls with penumbral essence, rendering them useless for his sacrificial ritual. Becoming pure again takes years.
- The characters are his main prey. He takes pleasure in outwitting his primary targets and prefers them to remain conscious as he manipulates them.

Pursuit of the Murderer

After Gary has killed the diplomat, the characters can investigate and gather evidence to unmask the criminal, uncovering that Gary was the perpetrator but not identifying who hired him. With tension rising between the Empire and the Republic, the characters will be asked to find the organization behind the assassin.

While exploring the city of Heroes Rise, they will become acquainted with the residents of the Republic and form alliances. Locating and exploring Gary's hideout will reveal his connection with the Cult of Shadow Wing and a trail leading to the Capital of the Tanarean Empire.

The characters can follow Gary's mercenary group through the Penumbral Plane, using a Penumbral Rift, or they can try to go legally to the Imperial Capital by acquiring travel documentation, which can only be obtained by forging counterfeit papers or currying favor with an imperial agent or other powerful faction representative.

The Imperial City

In the capital of the Empire, the characters must search the expansive cityscape for the Cult of Shadow Wing secret fortress. To gather clues and assistance, they must investigate other conflicts within the city and piece together the information while dealing with Tenebrizon.

The penumbral dragon, who is killing civilians and devising schemes to torment the characters, leaves subtle clues to guide them to his lair. The clues and the allies obtained will lead the PCs to the Shadow Wing Fortress, hidden under the Hogaw's Wind Inn in Oldtown District.

Deep within this underground fortress, the party will confront Gary's Mercenaries, finally getting concrete evidence exonerating the Republic and the Empire, showing the entire setup created by the Cult. However, victory is fleeting, as they also uncover Tenebrizon's plan to use a Vandanamalika for a grand ritual.

With the clock ticking, the characters, unaware that their souls are the last piece Tenebrizon needs for his ritual, will be forced to venture into the Penumbral Plane to find and stop the mad dragon.

Tenebrizon's Shadow Temple

Plunging into the Penumbral Plane, the adventurers face the unparalleled horrors of the Penumbra. Tenebrizon's sanctum is a twisted maze filled with his most formidable Penumbral servants and numerous souls bound to empower his ritual.

Each soul casts a projection of its life into the Penumbral Plane. The characters must find ways to release these souls or face an empowered Tenebrizon.

To further torment the adventurers, Tenebrizon exploits his possession ability to hunt down individuals dear to them. While the characters brave the Penumbral Plane, their most cherished allies in the Material Plane will be captured one by one and brought to Tenebrizon's lair, setting a grim stage where he plans to extinguish their lives before the adventurers' eyes upon their arrival.

The ultimate confrontation with the ancient dragon will be a desperate struggle for survival against an adversary imbued with the raw power of the Penumbral Plane and charged with the imminent energies of the nearing complete Vandanamalika. Tenebrizon envisions this duel as a grand spectacle of his dominance, an opportunity to shatter the

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heroes' spirits and flaunt his superior power. Will the adventurers hold fast and become the heroes who vanquish this insane penumbral dragon, or will the abyss claim their souls?

Adventure Structure

This campaign unfolds over eight meticulously designed chapters, each crafted to immerse the players in the unique world of Tanares.

Chapter 1 begins with the adventurers receiving an invitation to a noble art gathering. There, they will mingle with a diverse array of NPCs hailing from various factions. The event is abruptly interrupted by a murder, thrusting the adventurers into a thrilling investigation. If they successfully unmask the culprit, they will reveal Gary Landen as the orchestrator behind Diplomat Vang's demise.

Chapter 2 has the characters navigating the historical city of Heroes Rise, searching for clues about Gary Landen's escape. As they interact with the residents of the Republic, they will encounter unsettling creatures from the Penumbral Plane, later revealing that the Cult of Shadow Wing infiltrated the city and opened a penumbral rift concealed within their hideout, from where they are summoning creatures to wreak havoc and cover for Gary's escape.

In **Chapter 3**, the adventurers invade the hideout, which is a small shed concealing a deep underground maze. This maze is guarded by devoted Shadow Wing acolytes who have repurposed an old taii'maku laboratory as their lair. There, the characters discover that Gary's mercenary group has fled to the capital of the Tanarean Empire. They are faced with a crucial decision: follow Gary's trail through the treacherous Penumbral Plane or acquire the necessary documentation for a more conventional entrance into the Empire.

Chapter 4 outlines the first potential path, delving into the Penumbral Plane in pursuit of Gary. The adventurers will face a brutal test of endurance, as they traverse a realm steeped in sheer madness. Detailed encounters and environments will deliver the experience of traversing the plane in chilling detail.

Chapter 5 details the alternative course of action, outlining quests and methods for obtaining the requisite paperwork for entry into the Tanarean Empire through lawful acquisition or less savory means.

In **Chapter 6**, the adventurers will finally enter the Tanarean Empire, arriving at its capital city. The adventurers will then search for both Gary's mercenaries and the hidden lair of the Shadow Wing. In a city of grandeur and splendor, they will have ample opportunities to forge alliances and undertake quests on behalf of various organizations and NPCs, all potentially providing leads on their targets.

Chapter 7 heralds the discovery of the Shadow Wing's lair concealed within the capital. They discover a subterranean labyrinth filled with deadly creatures and sinister cultists. The adventurers must exercise caution lest they fall victim to its many perils. Gary's mercenary group awaits within, finally presenting the party with the chance to uncover Tenebrizon's sinister plans: his strategy to acquire and utilize a Vandanamalika in a secret location in the Penumbral Plane.

In **Chapter 8**, the party urgently delves into the perilous depths of the Penumbral Plane, racing against time to find and halt Tenebrizon before he completes his dark ritual. Their path leads to the plane's first layer, guarded by penumbral creatures and Tenebrizon's servants; this region was shaped by the memories of the many souls Tenebrizon imprisoned to make his ritual, who, unaware of their plight, are feeding Tenebrizon with power. At the center is the corrupted pyramid that has become the Shadow Temple of Tenebrizon. It was once the Kepesh Vandanamalika but was since then mystically relocated to the penumbra and is now the dragon's lair, where he awaits, eager to seize the souls of the adventurers. The chapter reaches its apex in a fierce assault on the temple, setting the stage for a climactic confrontation with Tenebrizon.

Suggested Character Level per Chapter

Chapter	Suggested Start Level
1	3rd
2	4th
3	6th
4	6th
5	6th
6	7th
7	10th
8	11th

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Character Advancement

The journey begins with the characters at a novice level of 3, evolving throughout the adventure to culminate on an experienced level of 12 upon the defeat of Tenebrizon. As the dungeon master, you may opt to track the party's growth via experience points or utilize a milestone system, granting the characters a level advancement at the dawn of each new chapter *[plus one extra level in the middle of chapter 2 and two extra levels during chapter 6]*. It's recommended that you align the party's progression with the levels suggested for each chapter, as outlined in the Suggested Character Levels per Chapter table.

If using experience points, you may need to adjust the experience gain rate to ensure characters remain at appropriate levels for the campaign. These modifications may be necessary if the party undertakes significantly more or fewer quests than expected or if they encounter more or fewer combat situations than planned. Feel free to modify experience points for each enemy and adjust encounters to enhance player enjoyment.

Running the Combat Encounters

Each combat encounter in this adventure was created to introduce unique elements and challenges for your PCs. While various standard and random encounters unfold throughout the journey, the most critical battles include unique battle maps and specific rules. These mechanics elevate the tactical depth of combat, though they may demand additional preparation on your part as the GM. Should you deem these rules overly complicated or detract from the desired combat experience, feel free to cast them aside and use only the ones that fit your group style.

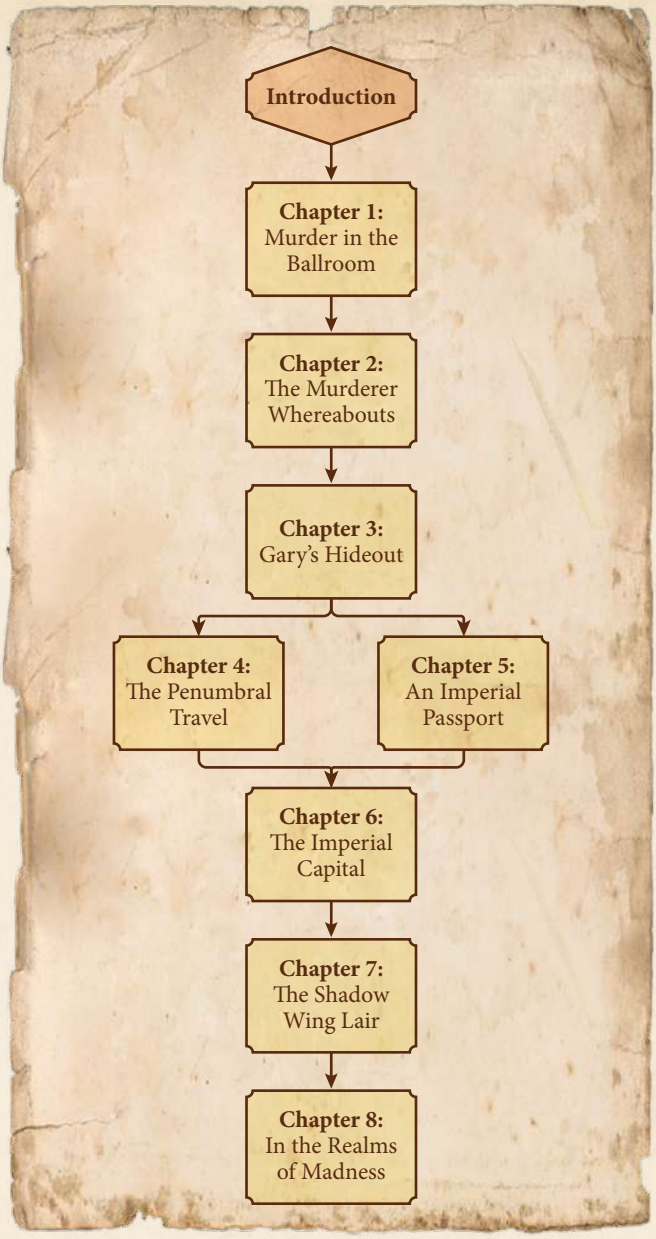
Special Combat Rule

For your convenience, any such additional rules will be neatly laid out in a distinct box such as this one.

Balancing Encounters for Varied Party Sizes

This adventure is tailored for four characters at the appropriate level for each chapter, although it can comfortably accommodate a party size ranging from three to six with minimal modifications.

Don't hesitate to adapt the encounters to challenge your players best. Depending on party composition and character creation choices, the group's strength may deviate from the average. As the GM, you wield the power to adapt each encounter to an appropriate difficulty level, ensuring the adventure is fun and engaging.



The Involved Factions and Kingdoms

During the adventure, many different factions will be present in one way or another. You can read more about them in the Tanares Campaign Setting, but here is a summary of how each of them fit during this adventure, detailed in Appendix C. Consult it whenever you need to use an NPC of these factions to aid you in better roleplaying their interests in this story.

Each chapter will include information about the presence of each of these factions in different areas or situations.

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The Adventure Mood

This adventure is designed to blend the atmosphere of a suspense thriller with action-packed exploration. To evoke the desired mood, consider the following advice, adjusting and balancing as needed to suit your preferences.

World's End Tension

Everyone fears a cataclysmic Malrokian Curse; war could erupt at any time, and the world is on a knife-edge. Make your players feel this burden, and let your NPCs convey it in their words. Even the villains are suspicious and paranoid; no faction agenda is safe.

- When describing places, include common folk, children playing, and farmers. Show the good people living in peace, then insert hints of war, such as a rusty sword stuck in the ground or a military officer checking a passerby's documents for spies. Depict peace but constantly remind the characters that war hovers ominously.
- Encourage characters to make Insight checks when interacting with NPCs. On a successful roll, give them subtle hints about the NPC's nervousness, gaze direction, or potential secrets they could be hiding, even if merely personal ones. If the characters fail the check, pause momentarily before proceeding, letting the characters fear what they missed. In this cold war, paranoia reigns, spies lurk everywhere, and all conspiracies can be real.

Elegance and Appearances

Wherever you find spies and diplomats, you also find elegance and a world of appearances. Social facades are thicker, and international negotiations always occur at high society events where power figures mingle.

- When describing diplomatic situations, detail the fancy drinks, the elegant dresses, and the works of art. Then, during the description, add a minor flaw, something out of place: the man in the charming suit is wearing worn-out shoes, one of the art pieces is a counterfeit, or the woman drinking expensive wine mispronounces the grape variety. Highlight the flaw and continue the description, not giving special attention to the issue. Create a facade of elegance but expose a fault; this will help build the sense that all this elegance is just a mask.
- When NPCs converse with the characters, use "smart" clichéd words and phrases extensively. NPCs aim to appear wiser, more powerful, and wealthier. Hint to the characters that the NPCs might be trying too hard to appear intelligent. Phrases like "think outside the box," "a perfect storm," "every rose has its thorn," "all I know is that I don't know," and "the grass is always greener on the other side" initially seem wise, but overuse of such clichés will help the characters see that the NPC is less than they claim.

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Eldritch Horror

Tanares is shrouded by the Penumbral Plane, a realm where eldritch extraplanar creatures follow nightmarish logic and feed on mortal sins and negative emotions, while the Ungods await the moment their plans come to fruition to consume Tanares.

To better represent this theme, focus more on psychological than physical horror. It's not just about fear but about the incomprehensible and the knowledge that the things lurking behind reality are beyond reason. When they finally arrive, resistance will be futile.

- When you describe penumbral monsters, depict their reflections in the terrified eyes of the characters' companions. Mention how the number of tentacles changes each time a character tries to count them. Each time you describe the creature's actions, subtly alter its form, as if it assumes a slightly different aspect every time the characters look at it.
- When describing the Penumbral Plane, introduce a dissonance between the characters' feelings and their physical reactions. Describe a horrifying creature approaching. When the characters finally decide to act, describe how the world around them blurs, how they hear the sound of a group running, only to realize that they are the ones fleeing! Then, return to them the control over their actions, now that they realized their involuntary primal and visceral reaction.

Tenebrizon's Prey

- The deranged ancient penumbral dragon will do everything in his power to shatter the characters' minds. To effectively communicate this, ensure his presence is frequent, even if it's just to taunt the characters. Tenebrizon can take control of significant individuals and appear in public places, gesturing to the characters just enough for them to recognize him. Make him a constant presence, but don't overuse him in combat against the players. He is there to observe, tease, laugh at them, kill their friends, and lure them to his lair, not to engage them prematurely.
- Choose some NPCs with good relationships with the group for Tenebrizon to possess or kill, but be careful not to overdo this. The characters should become paranoid but not entirely hopeless about protecting their allies, or they may stop caring. Tenebrizon will feed them a glimmer of hope, only to snatch it away bit by bit.
- When describing people possessed by Tenebrizon, let the characters roll their Insight against Tenebrizon's Deception. If they succeed, provide some hints. Perhaps the possessed NPC is using the incorrect hand as their dominant one; their shadow briefly displays a tentacle or their reflection becomes dark and distorted but reverts to normal when the character looks again.

Suspense

A sense of suspense is important to set the correct tone for an adventure in Tanares. Uncertainty and mystery are key to creating anticipation for how the plot will unfold. Drop hints frequently but always stop short of letting the characters know everything. Every time they discover one truth, it should lead to new questions. They should feel the satisfaction of discovery and the uncertainty of what will happen next.

- When describing a room the characters have just entered, clearly describe the contents and then introduce an unfamiliar noise or smell coming from the next room. Release the tension when they finally discover what's in a room, but maintain the suspense by introducing a new unknown element in the next one.
- If an NPC is about to reveal a secret or information, have them instead ask the characters to meet again the following night at a discreet location. Then, let the characters deal with their other duties. This shows how carefully secrets are traded and produces a sense of anxiety and uncertainty, enhancing the suspense.
- Use a low, almost whispery voice when describing the most mysterious locations. Keep sentences short, pausing briefly between each one. Your description might go like this: "The room is dark." (pause) "On a table, a candle flickers." (pause) "Near the window stands a woman in a white dress." (pause) "She looks at you." (pause) "It seems she is inviting you in." This technique helps build the scene's tension and creates the necessary anticipation.

How to use and roleplay Tenebrizon

Tenebrizon is an ancient penumbral dragon of immense power, and his goal is to surpass Lypoec, the lord of the penumbral dragons. Tenebrizon has a cadre of servants and followers within the Cult of Shadow Wing, but he knows that even they would betray him if commanded by Lypoec, which fuels his intense resentment for his rival's power.

His plan involves stealing the entire pyramid that the Kepesh are constructing to create a Vandanamalika and transporting it by magic to a secure location in the Penumbral Plane under his control. He then intends to sacrifice a group of powerful souls to align himself with the mystical construction and activate the Vandanamalika. This action will summon an avatar of Z'ulvath, the Penumbral Father, to Tanares. In doing so, he hopes to finally allow the Ungods to triumph in their struggle against the Tanarean gods, thereby gaining the favor of the Ungods and proving his superiority to Lypoec once and for all.

Tenebrizon will start the adventure by possessing one of the NPCs from the noble party in Chapter 1. At the start of each chapter, you can select one of the NPCs from that chapter for Tenebrizon to possess, or you can choose to roll from a table. He can switch between NPCs during the chapter as you deem appropriate and logical for the story.

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Most NPC entries will briefly describe what Tenebrizon might try to do if he possesses that NPC. **These suggestions don't necessarily need to be followed,** as Tenebrizon can have other plans based on the characters' behavior or the direction of your story. Feel free to draw inspiration from these suggestions to fit his goals into your narrative best.

Tenebrizon should not hinder the characters' progress in the story; instead, use him to propel the group forward. If you feel the characters are procrastinating or hesitant, Tenebrizon can kill an allied NPC or perform some twisted evil act, only to emerge later and blame the heroes for not preventing his actions.

(To better understand the mood and overall theme of this villain, envision him as having the same insane style as some of the villains confronted by a certain crime-fighting billionaire bat.)

Tenebrizon should be a persistent threat, looming and stalking the party at every corner but providing them with the necessary hints to find his Temple.

He believes he has already succeeded; Tenebrizon is confident he has garnered enough time to gather the resources needed for his ritual. Now, luring the adventurers to his Temple and capturing their powerful souls to complete his ritual is his only remaining task. He believes everything is under his control.

Tenebrizon is insanely evil, megalomaniacal, and sadistic. But behind all this, he conceals a complex psyche. In reality, he fears Lypoec, is worried that he might be too weak or not intelligent enough, and is concerned that his plans aren't sufficient. Tenebrizon toys with his prey to assert dominance and demonstrate his power to the world and himself.

He possesses a brilliant intellect, but Lypoec has always exploited his weakness – a hidden inferiority complex. Tenebrizon could accomplish much more if he could only let go of the compulsion to prove himself and act more effectively.

Feel free to portray Tenebrizon in your own way, but as a guide, you can use the following tips to roleplay him more accurately:

- Behave with unwarranted arrogance and superiority. You never lose; you are toying with the adventurers, and each of their supposed victories is part of your plan, or at least, that's what you tell them and yourself.
- Relish in speaking with your prey; you want them to fear you. Inform them of who you will kill next, and let them attempt to protect that person. If they succeed, kill someone else and claim it was your plan all along – you believe it was. If they fail, appear in front of them to mock their loss and attack their pride.
- If there's nobody the adventurers care about, kill innocent people. If they show indifference towards the innocent, frame the adventurers in the eyes of the authorities. Seek what will anger them and do exactly that. Make it personal.
- When interacting with the characters, display a unique blend of insanity, elegance, and ingenuity. You are not a mad beast; you are an ancient being of vast knowledge with a twisted, genius intellect.
- You never lose your temper or accept provocations. You never lose control and continuously exude a sinister elegance. However, if Lypoec becomes a topic of conversation, you will do as much as possible to conceal your discomfort and try to steer the conversation elsewhere as quickly as possible. If pressed on this topic, you might finally explode in a burst of full wrath.
- Nothing will sway you from your path, but let the characters try to persuade you if they wish. Rebut their proposals, highlight the flaws in their logic, and assail their gods and beliefs with reason and cynicism. You want to prevail both philosophically and physically against them.
- Don't provide the characters with free information or hints. Let them struggle and strive for each step towards your lair. If they're stuck, give them only crumbs of knowledge, but make them pay and suffer for that. You want them to exert effort in reaching your Temple so you can crush all their hopes and dedication when you finally confront them.

As a final note: Aim not to use Tenebrizon too frequently or too sparingly. Tenebrizon should appear roughly once every two or three game sessions. If he's too prevalent, the characters will grow accustomed to him; too scarce, and they might need to remember about his presence. He should always linger in the back of the characters' minds but not dominate the adventure completely.

Tenebrizon's stats can be found in Chapter 8.

Adapting this Adventure for other Campaign Settings

This adventure is specifically designed to best suit the Tanares Campaign Setting, showcasing its main factions, mood, and style.

If you wish to use part or all of it in another setting, you can adapt the entire adventure to another setting or use an isolated chapter in your ongoing campaign. To facilitate that, we added a list of suggestions to help you make the necessary adaptations. You can see it in Appendix D.

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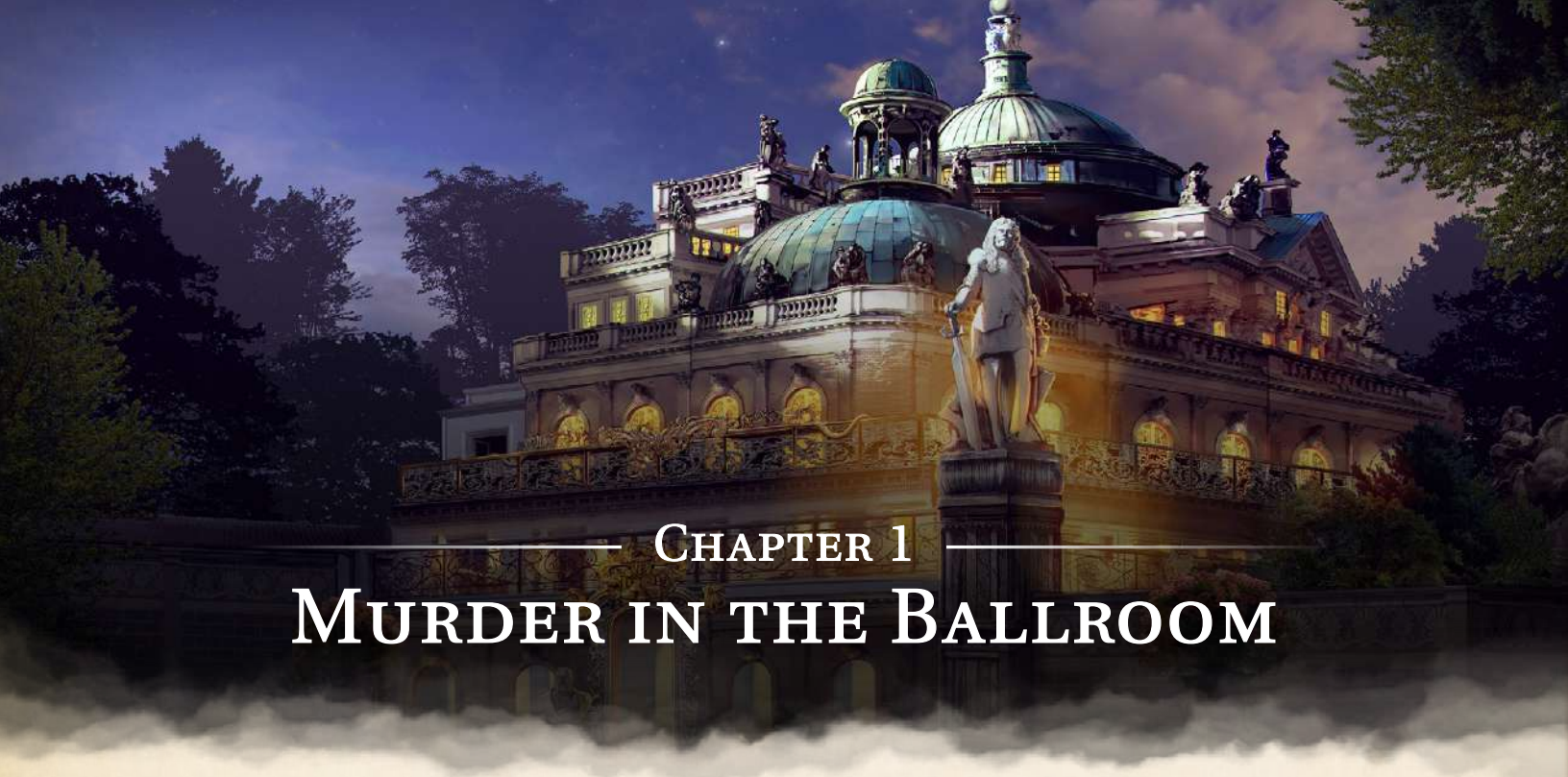

Chapter 1
Murder in the Ballroom

The adventurers are invited to an art gathering to mingle with nobles and faction envoys. They may obtain valuable insights into different factions' agendas amid the party's luxury and intrigue. The festive atmosphere abruptly shatters when the body of Vang, an Empire diplomat, is discovered murdered under mysterious circumstances. The investigation provides an opportunity for the characters to prove their worth. They may unearth the culprit based on their interactions and deductive prowess. Such a feat can earn them the respect of the influential figures present.

Before reading any further, do not skip the "How to use and roleplay Tenebrizon section on pg. 12." It is extremely important that you read it to run this adventure.

Running this Chapter

The characters will participate in a noble's art gathering event. To start the adventure, use one of the four hooks presented in this chapter or create your own.

- Being invited after saving the host's daughter from a goblin attack.
- Uncovering a counterfeit piece of art that Zalir, the host, intended to buy.
- Being contracted by the host to provide security for the event.
- Receiving an invitation from a politician of the Republic who knows one of the PCs.

All hooks will be explained in detail later in this chapter. Some may involve combat, while others are more diplomatic or direct in nature; choose the one that best fits the party or your story.

Don't worry about keeping track of all the NPCs in this chapter or all their details and history. They serve as tools and inspiration, but you can adapt, change, or improvise as you see fit. There is no right or wrong way to interpret them.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter opens with an invitation to an elegant art gathering hosted by Zalir, a prominent noble within the Republic and founder of the Relic Hunter's Guild, known for his appreciation for ancient art and historical artifacts.

Behind the event, however, a covert scheme is unfolding. Zalir is seeking a stolen cache of documents that could be used to defame his friend Sedura, the Republic's Minister of Defense. He suspects that Vang, an infiltrating spy posing as a diplomat, is the one carrying these documents. Zalir organized this art gala at Sedura's request, aiming to enable her agent to discover the whereabouts of the stolen documents. Diplomats from numerous nations are enticed to the event to lure Vang into this trap.

However, the cunning ancient penumbral dragon, Tenebrizon, manipulates the situation. After possessing a Republic politician and leaking the documents to Vang, Tenebrizon seeks to sow chaos. His attention has since shifted, and he now inhabits the body of one of the party attendees.

Upon their arrival, the characters mingle with guests representing various factions. The event comes to a halt when Vang's lifeless body is discovered, revealing a murder commissioned by the Shadow Wing and executed by Gary Landen.

During the investigation, the adventurers can interrogate witnesses and explore potential leads as they piece together the circumstances surrounding Vang's assassination. The investigation's trajectory may point to several primary suspects:

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- **Zalir**, the host and Republic noble, founder of the Relic Hunter's Guild, and war hero. His past alliance with Sedura during the Kemet Invasion could draw suspicion if the existence of stolen Republic documents comes to light, as he can be accused of commanding the assassination to recover them.
- **Karrine**, an envoy from the Magocracy. She shares a fraught history with Vang—both were members of the same adventuring party but parted on bad terms. If it's found that a powerful magic ring is missing from Vang's possession—a ring Karrine long accused Vang of stealing—it could cast further suspicion on her.
- **Hare'Kupec**, a Kepesh diplomat, attending the event to acquire ancient Kepesh art. He is unaware of the crime, Tenebrizon's involvement, and the existence of the Vandanamalika. Despite his innocence, he may become a scapegoat, with Yama diplomats accusing his people of being the major beneficiaries of a halting of the diplomatic negotiations between the Allied Forces and the Empire through this crime.

The actual perpetrator, however, is Gary Landen. Contracted by the Cult of Shadow Wing, he was ordered to execute Vang. Tenebrizon schemes to incite a conflict between the Empire and the Republic, disturbing their negotiations against the Kepesh and facilitating the heist of mystical items, all in his pursuit to seize the nearly complete Vandanamalika.

Sequence of Events

- The adventurers arrive at Zalir's mansion, directed by one of the plot hooks.
- The gala begins with a showcase of artistic masterpieces. The characters are free to converse with the various guests.
- An auction ensues. Certain guests go to the auction, while others linger in the main hall. Notably absent are Vang, Zalir, Karrine, Joirin, Hare'Kupec, and Gary Landen, all preoccupied with their own agendas.
- The characters can interact with the other attendees and participate in the auction.
- Major Lik, the Empire's envoy, discovers Vang's corpse in the ballroom. The event stops as accusations begin to fly. Zalir implores the adventurers to assist in the investigation.
- The adventurers explore various rooms in Zalir's mansion and interview the guests, gathering clues.
- After a period of time, a Republic detective arrives with guards to collect evidence and evaluate the adventurers' findings. The chapter concludes based on the results of the investigation. A possible climax could involve an attack on the mansion by penumbral creatures, depending on the unfolding events (as detailed later in this chapter).

Important Clues

This section contains a summary of various important clues that the characters can uncover during the investigation. Some clues lead to the true culprit, while others may not, but they are nonetheless helpful for the narrative flow of the story.

Primary Clues

Clue	Details
Blackened Gold Coins	Found in Vang's hand. Indicates that Gary, a redeemer, is the only one without an alibi. His purse was found near the crime scene.
Thief's Testimony	Flevar, a thief, overheard Gary's conversation with Vang, including Gary's name being spoken.
The Poisoning	Vang was poisoned before being stabbed. Gary was seen by guests flirting with Vang. The kitchen staff knows he had got wine and two glasses with them.

Secondary Clues

Clue	Details
Kepesh Poison	The poison used on Vang was Kepesh-related, initially pointing to Hare'Kupec. Gary used it to mislead the investigation.
Strength and Position of Stabs	Suggests a taller, less physically strong individual, reducing suspicion towards the shorter, weapon-inexperienced Karrine.
Vang's Bird Familiar Pet	Killed by redeemer necrotic energy ray, suggesting a necromancy capable killer, possibly pointing to Hare'Kupec.
Vang's Missing Ring	Vang's ring (a conflict point between Karrine and Vang) is missing from the body, planted in Zalir's office by Gary.
Republic Stolen Documents	Gary stole from Vang's room and planted documents in Zalir's office, framing him. Joirin's missing key could also point to Zalir.

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Plot Hooks

The beginning of this adventure is set against the backdrop of a lavish art gathering. There are various ways to engage the characters in the event. You may use one of the following hooks or create your own:

Goblin Ambush (combat-focused). The characters are en route to the city of Heroes Rise, seeking rest after a long journey. As they overtake two slow-moving wagons, they inadvertently find themselves embroiled in a goblin ambush. Their victory against the goblins earns them the gratitude of the individuals in the wagon, including the daughter of a notable Republic noble. She offers the adventurers an invitation to her father's party, promising a reward for their bravery.

Art Forger (investigation-focused). A well-to-do art dealer harbors suspicions that an acquired piece of art is a forgery. He enlists the characters' help to investigate the matter and recover the original work. The trail leads them to an old, abandoned warehouse housing a counterfeit operation. After securing the genuine artwork, they receive an invitation to the event and a share of the profit once the piece is successfully auctioned off.

In Need of Security (diplomatic-focused). Zalir, the founder of the Relic Hunters Guild and a distinguished noble of the Republic, is hosting an important event featuring an auction of art and historical objects. His valuables have been targeted in past theft attempts, and he requires additional security for the event. He is willing to compensate reliable mercenaries who can act as undercover guards, protecting the auction items during the gathering.

Friends of the Republic (fast action). A Republic politician urgently seeks a trusted ally to manage a critical crisis. Confidential documents have been stolen from the Republic—documents that must not be publicized. The politician suspects Vang, a member of the Empire's diplomatic corps, as the culprit. He sees an upcoming noble's party as the perfect opportunity for the adventurers to investigate the matter. Offering them an invitation, he assures them of a handsome reward upon successful resolution of the crisis.

The Goblin Ambush *(Combat Focused Hook)*

The characters' adventure begins en route to the city of Heroes Rise. The specifics of their travel and their motivations behind the journey can be decided collaboratively with your players.

As dawn breaks, the sun peeks through patches of gray clouds. They travel along a dusty road that winds through a dry landscape, the ankle-high grass of the woodland rustling in the incessant wind, shedding leaves from the wilting bushes.

The characters find themselves aboard a modest wagon, pulled by a solitary horse, navigating a narrow path through the woods. They're approximately a quarter-day's journey from the city of Heroes Rise. They observe two heavily-laden stagecoaches trundling along at a leisurely pace in the distance.

The journey has been taxing, with the rugged path causing your wagon to shudder. However, the tranquil woods enveloping you impart a sense of peace.

The unhurried progress of two stagecoaches before you mandates a momentary reduction in your wagon's speed. Just as you are about to overtake them, an arrow, ablaze, whizzes past, piercing the still, dry air, and striking your wagon from the woods. The sudden intrusion frightens the horse, causing your wagon to come to an abrupt halt.

In an instant, a burst of heat engulfs you. BOOM! An explosion blinds you momentarily. A fireball annihilates the lead wagon, instantaneously snuffing out the lives of the horses and the wagon's occupants. The path forward is blocked, as flames voraciously consume the wagon and its contents.

In the aftermath of the explosion, you detect rapid movements closing in from all directions. Turning to assess the situation, you spot a cohort of goblins wielding weapons, poised to attack the halted wagons. A goblin witch, with a scroll burning in her grasp, is among them.

Emerging from the forest ahead of the group is **Brath**, a formidable bugbear, flanked by a trio of **goblin infiltrators** and a single **goblin witch**–the one who reduced the lead wagon to cinders with a scroll-sparked *fireball*. Brath directs the assault, intent on quashing all resistance before ransacking the wagons for valuable spoils.

Call Upon Your Players to Roll for Initiative

Brath's battle experience leads him to always choose the most vulnerable targets. He and his goblin infiltrators will maneuver to shield the **goblin witch**. Should they roll well in the initiative, they intend to box the party within the confines of the wagon, blocking all escape routes. Their objective is to eliminate all foes, but should the tide of battle turn against them, they won't hesitate to retreat.

The wagon serving as the party's transport is made of wood with steel reinforcements, and its body is covered by a heavy cloth canopy. Exit routes include climbing over the driver's seat at the front or making for the rear exit. A successful DC 12 Intelligence check allows a character to perceive that they can use an action with a cutting weapon to slice through the cloth, creating an opening for escape.

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Goblin Infiltrator

Goblins specialized in infiltration and looting; often used as scouts, they swiftly attack their targets in large groups, overwhelming their targets before they know what hit them.

Goblin Infiltrator

Small humanoid (goblinoid), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (leather armor), 15 (with shield)
Hit Points 10 (3d6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (−1)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	8 (−1)	8 (−1)

Skills Stealth +7
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages Common, Goblin
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Nimble Escape. The goblin can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Actions

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Goblin Witch

Some goblins show particular aptitude in handling magic on the rare occasions they find grimoires or scrolls; as valuable members of their tribes, a single spell can tip the scales of an encounter.

Goblin Witch

Small humanoid (goblinoid), neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 14 (4d6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (−1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	8 (−1)

Skills Stealth +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Goblin
Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Nimble Escape. The goblin witch can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of her turns.

Spellcasting. The goblin witch is a 1st-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The goblin witch has the following wizard spells prepared:
Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *message*
1st level (2 slots): *magic missile*, *thunderwave*

Actions

Ritual Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Scroll Specialist. The goblin witch can use her action to activate one of her scrolls, ignoring their class prerequisite; Intelligence is her spellcasting ability for these. If the goblin witch tries to use a 2nd-level magic scroll, she must succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence check. On a failed check, the spell disappears from the scroll with no other effects.

The scrolls in her possession are:
- *Cure wounds* ***at 1st level (3 uses).***
- *Thunderwave* ***at 2nd level (1 use).***
- *Web* ***at 2nd level (1 use).***
- *Locate animals or plants* ***(1 use).***

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Brath, the Bugbear

Bugbears excel at ambushes. This is especially true for Brath. His aggressiveness and strength make him a natural leader of goblinoid tribes and a good plundering companion.

Brath, the Bugbear

Medium humanoid (goblinoid), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (hide armor, shield)
Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	8 (−1)	11 (+0)	9 (−1)

Skills Stealth +5, Survival +2
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Goblin
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Brath hits with it (included in the attack).

Surprise Attack. If Brath surprises a creature and hits it with an attack in the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) damage.

Actions

Morningstar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage if melee, or 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage if ranged.

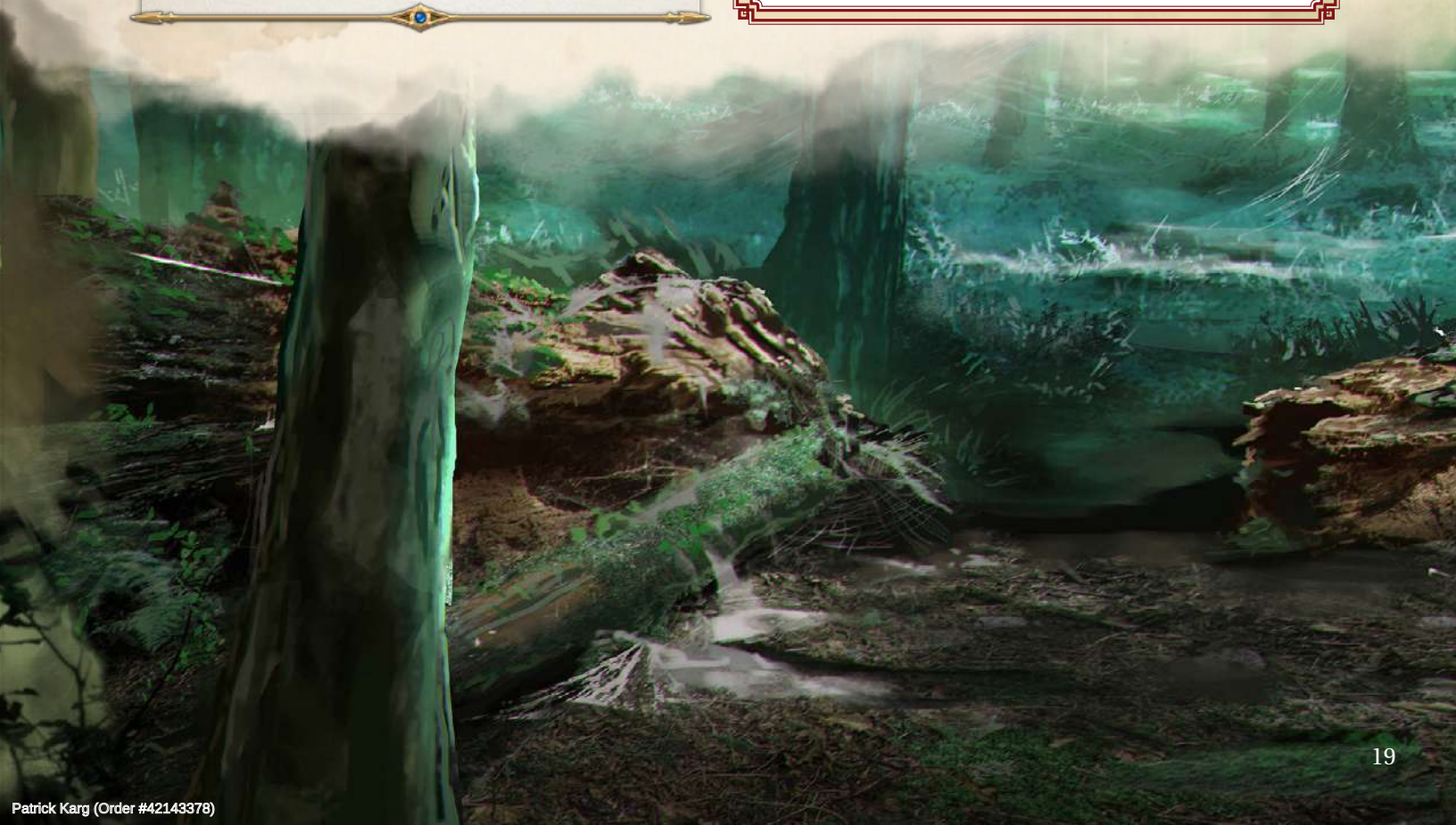
Special Combat Rule - Flaming Arrows

Three other goblins, positioned 500 feet from the characters' wagon, shoot flaming arrows using large bows. They draw these bows with their feet while lying on the ground.

These goblins will be the last ones on each initiative, and they will avoid joining the battle, preferring to flee if someone gets too close to them.

At each of their turns, they will shoot an arrow, but they have a terrible aim with these bows. Roll 1d10 for each of them to check what they end up attacking.

D10 Roll Result	Consequence
1 to 6 Dry Shrub	Check the number of each shrub on the map, the shrub of the rolled number takes the arrow and catches on fire *(for the remainder of the combat)*. While on fire, it deals 1d4 fire damage to any creature that enters or starts its turn in its space or in any space adjacent to it. If the same shrub is shot multiple times it has no additional effect.
7 Wagon	The character's wagon is hit. If no hero uses an action to douse the flames or remove that arrow, at the end of the next round, the wagon will catch on fire *(for the remainder of the combat)*. While on fire, it deals 1d4 fire damage to any creature that enters or starts its turn in its space or in any space adjacent to it. If the Wagon is shot multiple times it has no additional effect.
8 to 10 Creatures	The arrow targets one creature at random (except those that have full cover from a shot falling from above). The goblin makes an attack with +3 to hit that deals 1d6 piercing damage + 1 fire damage on a hit.



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After the Dust Settles

Once the skirmish subsides, two survivors from the incinerated wagon will approach the characters: Lassus, an elderly human coachman, and a young girl introduced as Lady Jenny.

Lady Jenny, a shy wizard apprentice (NG **mage**, see page 49 to find her spell list), is the adopted daughter of Zalir, an important Republic noble and war hero. Zalir is also the founder of the Relic Hunters Guild, and he took Jenny under his wing following the loss of her family in a war over a decade ago. She is treasured above all else by Zalir.

Lassus, Zalir's attendant, (CG **spy** , but with Speed 20 ft., and he can't Dash) was once a member of the Relic Hunters. An injury forced him to abandon his life of adventure, and he now performs everyday tasks for Zalir while keeping a watchful eye over Lady Jenny.

Upon meeting the characters, Lady Jenny suggests that her father could reward them. She hands over an invitation to an art gathering event, explaining that Zalir will be able to pay them after he sells off some art pieces at the auction. If they approach Zalir for payment at the event, he will provide 120 gp per character.

Lady Jenny and Lassus then retreat to the remains of the destroyed wagon, where they begin to pray. If inquired, they reveal that the wagon had been carrying workers known to them. They pray to Tamera and Bauron, seeking peace for the departed souls. Lady Jenny, in particular, is visibly distraught over the incident.

If asked about her presence at the scene, Lady Jenny will reveal that she was returning to her father after collecting art pieces from a nearby noble for the auction. The loss of the workers weighs heavily on her, much more so than the loss of art pieces.

Neither Lady Jenny nor Lassus can explain why the goblins attacked. Lassus shares suspicions of a criminal conspiracy targeting Zalir's wealth, attributing it to his renown as a war hero and his perceived adversaries, the Kemets and Gullog. However, his speculation is far from the truth. Unbeknownst to him, the real culprit, Tenebrizon, has been stirring up rumors about Zalir's wealth while possessing mortals, taking perverse delight in watching Zalir's frantic attempts to safeguard his assets for the party.

Should the party decide to loot their fallen foes, they will find:

Goblin Witch: 5 gp, a staff suitable for use as an arcane focus, and any spell scrolls she didn't use in combat.

Brath, the Bugbear: Hide armor, three javelins, a shield, a morningstar, 12 sp, and 12 gp.

Goblin Infiltrators: Each carries a scimitar, leather armor, a shortbow with 10 arrows, 4 cp, 7 sp and 1 gp.

If you use the special combat rules, any captured goblin archer will possess a peculiar longbow, 2d10 arrows, leather armor, a shortsword, 5 cp and 9 sp.

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Upon the party's readiness to attend the event, you may proceed to the **"Arrival at the Mansion"** section.

The Art Forger *(Investigation Hook)*

Admöerio Shosshan is an elf noble and art dealer (see more of Admöerio in the "Guests and Hosts" section), who is looking for a group of adventurers to help him investigate a merchant who sold him some paintings. He is sure one of the artworks is a forgery.

Admöerio may approach the characters at a Heroes Rise tavern or send them a letter so they can meet and talk there.

A figure with an uncommon grace makes his way towards your table. This elf, dark-skinned and draped in regal attire, bows courteously before drawing up a chair and seating himself, all without an introduction.

"May I have the pleasure of purchasing the next round as we make our introductions?" he asks, signaling the barmaid even as he speaks. "My name is Admöerio, and I work as an art consultant. It may seem peculiar, an art specialist seeking the company of adventurers, but I assure you there's a reasonable explanation. You see, I believe I've been the victim of a swindle. A painting I purchased, it appears, was switched out after my inspection. They delivered a forgery, but I am convinced the original remains to be found."

Just as the barmaid arrives with a fresh round of drinks, he pauses in his tale, taking a moment to savor the aroma of the wine before tasting it and giving the barmaid an approving nod.

"The investigation I need undertaken involves the retrieval of the original painting," he continues. "The trickster behind this ruse is a merchant and moneylender by the name of Deryls. However, the law's protracted process would likely not allow for the artwork's recovery in time for a prestigious art event due to take place in the coming days. And that, my new friends, is where I believe you come in."

Admöerio, the art consultant, believes that Deryls, the conniving merchant, will swiftly attempt to sell the original artwork for a tidy profit. He asks the adventurers to assist him in locating the genuine piece.

For their assistance, the elf is offering a substantial reward: 40 gp for each adventurer who agrees to aid in the investigation paid upfront, and an additional bonus of 80 gp each upon the successful recovery of the original painting. However, he clarifies that the bonus can only be paid after the auction at a noble's party. Should they recover the artwork, he pledges to secure them invitations to this event.

Admöerio's knowledge extends to the locations of Deryls' residence and the shed where he stores his wares. If asked for proof of his dealings with Deryls, he can present a sales contract testifying to the artwork's authenticity. If the adventurers press him, he can show the counterfeit painting, although such doubt may annoy him.

This original artwork is hidden in Deryls' home or storage shed. A man motivated purely by profit, Deryls (NE human **bandit captain**) has little regard for morality or integrity, except for his family's welfare. He is a doting husband and a father to three children; their safety is his primary concern. His shrewd business operations are shrouded in craftily worded contracts, effectively erasing any trace of illegitimate activities. Despite his notorious bad reputation within the city, concrete evidence against him remains missing, allowing him to continue his lucrative endeavors.

Blind to Deryls' misdeeds, his family perceives the city's chatter as baseless gossip. He employs guards (NE **thug**) to do his dirty work. His residence and his shed are each manned by a trio of these men, while two additional guards serve as his personal bodyguards. When Deryls is present at either location, five guards will be present. In total, Deryls commands a force of 18 men, with approximately eight on duty at any given time unless he calls for a full gathering.

Deryls has coerced a promising young painter named Johlin (N human **commoner**) into creating the forgeries. Driven by the desperate need for funds to buy medicine for his ill mother, Johlin has been entangled in Deryls' scheme.

Feel free to elaborate on Deryls' residence or his city-based shed as needed for the investigation. The characters' inquiry should eventually uncover the original artwork.

Upon retrieving the artwork, Admöerio will fulfill his promise, granting the adventurers invitations to the party. After the conclusion of the event (and the investigation), he will pay the remaining 80 gp to each adventurer.

When the adventurers are prepared to proceed to the party, guide them to the **"Arrival at the Mansion"** section.

In Need of Security *(Diplomatic Hook)*

Zalir is looking for mercenaries and adventurers willing to act as guards for his upcoming art gathering. The last weeks have been rough for him, as many of his men were attacked by bandits while trying to bring new art objects for the upcoming auction.

He is unsure why this is happening, but he suspects the Empire is behind it to divert his attention from their diplomatic corps, as Zalir received notice that **Vang** might be carrying important stolen documents.

The one behind it is **Tenebrizon**, who is spreading false rumors in the underworld about Zalir's riches and the value of the art pieces he is gathering, so he can enjoy Zalir's desperate attempts to keep things in check for the party.

*(See more of Zalir in the **Guests and the Hosts** section)*

Zalir is placing advertisements on taverns in Heroes Rise, and is using his contacts to gather adventurers and mercenaries with good reputations. He carefully checks each possible prospect, as bandits had already tried to join his guard to steal from under his nose.

The characters may receive information about Zalir in a tavern or by their trusted contacts. If they have a good

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reputation, Zalir will be more receptive to them, while a bad reputation might cause him to be suspicious at first.

Zalir will receive them at his mansion, instructing his butler **Joirin** to guide them to his office.

Passing through the grand entrance hall, you are surrounded by an array of sculptures and canvases displaying an eclectic blend of artistic styles. Your path eventually brings you to an imposing door, its surface etched with the emblem of a compass – the recognized symbol of the Relic Hunters Guild.

As the door swings open at the behest of the butler, he motions for you to enter. Within, you find yourself in a spacious office. On either side, shelves laden with ancient tomes rise towards the ceiling, their well-worn spines hinting at years of accrued wisdom. In front of you, a table is creaking under the weight of numerous scrolls, each seemingly older than the last. Framed by the mountains of parchment, a tall man stands, his bald head and dark complexion contrasted by the rich blue and purple of his robe. As he spots your group, his stern expression melts into a warm, welcoming smile.

"Come in, come in. Don't be shy," Zalir encourages, pointing towards the array of chairs before him. "You may have heard my name already, but allow me to formally introduce myself. I am Zalir Draconis, the not-so-modest founder of the Relic Hunters Guild. I would be most pleased if you'd introduce yourselves."

Zalir's demeanor is amicable, but his true intention is to investigate the adventurers' motivations and trustworthiness. He intends to determine whether they are suitable to act as guards during the upcoming event.

To accomplish this, Zalir will delve into the characters' pasts and motivations, urging them to reveal more about themselves. He may ask questions such as:

- *"What inspired you to take up the life of an adventurer?"*
- *"Where do you hail from? Perhaps the Empire or the Seashores?"*
- *"Is there someone who can vouch for your work?"*
- *"I, too, have adventured in my time. I recall when the Kemets set this entire city ablaze. What's the most challenging situation you've faced?"*
- *"Do you align yourself with any faith? Perhaps Celestianism?"*
- *"Do you have you any experience in guard duty?"*

Should a character attempt to deceive Zalir, a DC 20 Charisma (Deception) check is required. If failed, Zalir perceives the deceit. While this won't immediately disqualify them from the job, Zalir will grow increasingly wary with each detected lie.

Characters may also attempt to convince Zalir of their aptitude for the task with a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check. While this doesn't immediately earn his trust, Zalir will be more inclined to consider them for the role.

If Zalir remains undecided, he might propose a small task, such as overseeing the delivery of wine from Sara's Tavern to his mansion or investigating a lost piece of artwork last seen at the port. Use whatever task best suits your narrative *(See Chapter 2 for a description of the city)*.

Should the characters earn Zalir's trust, he will offer them 120 gp each for three days of work. Their duties will involve protecting shipments for the first two days, and on the third, they will blend in with the party guests, acting as undercover security to deter potential thieves.

During these initial two days, the characters will have the opportunity to assist with deliveries, familiarize themselves with Zalir and Joirin, and study the mansion's layout. You may choose to provide them with a map of the mansion, allowing them to strategize for the day of the event.

Consider introducing a group of human thieves – consisting of one thief (NE **spy**) and three bandits (NE **thug**, with Stealth +3). These criminals could be attempting to infiltrate the mansion to snatch valuables or ambush one of the caravans carrying goods that the characters are guarding.

When the day of the event finally arrives, the characters will already be inside the mansion as the guests begin to pour in *(see "Arrival Section" for more details)*.

Friends of the Republic *(Simple Hook)*

This hook is an efficient option if you aim to expedite the start of the adventure and rapidly guide the characters into the noble's party.

Assume that one or more of the characters have a standing relationship with a politician from the Republic. The nature of their connection is malleable - they could be old drinking companions from the local tavern, have family ties, or perhaps the group previously lent their assistance to the politician. Tailor the identity of this politician to best suit your narrative or the characters' backgrounds.

This friendly political figure will confide in the characters, entrusting them with knowledge of a severe crisis brewing within the Republic. Classified documents of the Minister of Defense Sedura have been stolen. The politician is not privy to the exact contents, but acknowledges the documents' significance.

His suspicion is directed towards **Vang**, a recent addition to the Empire's diplomatic corps. He surmises that Vang is probably the one currently in possession of the stolen documents. The politician proposes a plan: the characters are to attend an art gathering held at Zalir's mansion, the noble war hero and founder of the Relic Hunters Guild. Their mission is to uncover where Vang is stashing the documents. For their services, the politician offers each character a reward of 120 gp upon retrieval of the documents.

Should the characters inquire whether the politician will be present at the party, he will explain his absence. Direct involvement in the investigation into the missing documents requires discretion–he fears that his presence would raise Vang's and the Empire envoy's guards' suspicion. If this explanation is incompatible with your chosen NPC, you may substitute a different reason for their non-attendance.

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Alternatively, you may decide to have the NPC accompany the characters to the party, utilizing the **noble** stat block for this purpose.

If the characters agree to assist, they will be provided with an invitation letter. The politician then secretly communicates with Zalir, informing him of the characters' task. Consequently, Zalir will regard the characters as allies during the event.

Once the characters are prepared to attend the event, you may start the "Arrival at the Mansion".

Tenebrizon's Possession

At the outset of this chapter, you have the opportunity to designate a random NPC who will be attending the event as the one possessed by Tenebrizon.

Each NPC profile will include a specific segment outlining Tenebrizon's potential actions if possessing that character. However, as a GM, you can devise strategies for Tenebrizon based on the objectives established thus far in the narrative.

Bear in mind that Tenebrizon displays both profound intelligence and deep-seated madness in his actions. His purpose is not to annihilate his victims outright but to torment them–leading them towards his lair, ensuring they suffer significantly along the journey.

In this chapter, Tenebrizon will exercise exceptional caution to maintain his disguise. His primary objective is to ensure Vang's demise and subtly manipulate events to precipitate a diplomatic conflict between the Empire and the Republic.

For the choice of the possessed guest, you can select one from the provided list, create a new NPC, or roll a die according to the table below:

D8 Roll	Guest *(check the "Guests and Hosts" section)*:
1	Joirin
2	Lady Kyzoko
3	Samurai Kyomoru
4	Admöerio Shosshan
5	Master Armur Jasperin
6	Bishop Razun
7	Marianna Lisprolis
8	Karrine

Tenebrizon possesses the capacity to shift from one host to another via touch. However, he avoids doing so in situations akin to the ongoing party, as such an act could reveal his presence.

Unbeknownst to even Gary Landen, Tenebrizon lurks within the event. However, Gary has received intelligence about an infiltrated ally he presumes to be from the Cult of Shadow Wing. He believes that this ally will create opportunities conducive to his operations.

Arrival at the Mansion

On the day of the event, as dusk begins to fall, the characters should either be en route to or already at Zalir's mansion, should they be under his employ. The mansion itself, adorned with a petite garden at the front, boasts a single entrance accessible through a metal gate. A number of guards are deployed around the mansion's perimeter, with two stationed specifically at the gate to validate the invitations of arriving guests.

Contrary to what might be expected, there are no guards inside. The exceptions to this rule are the personal bodyguards of diplomats and two guards at the top of the stairs to the first floor. Curiously, there are no checks for weapons or prohibitions against carrying them. This is standard etiquette within this circle as many attendees, including Zalir himself, are skilled spellcasters and always considered armed.

As the night progresses, and all diplomats have made their arrivals, their remaining attendants, not permitted entrance, retreat to secure lodging at the Heroes Rise tavern.

Several guests plan to stay overnight at Zalir's mansion. Therefore, their personal belongings are carried inside through the back entrance, destined for rooms on the superior floor.

Once the characters have gained access to the mansion's interior and the event is well underway, proceed with the following narrative:

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The great hall pulses with life as attendees arrive and fill the space, their elaborate attire fluttering against a backdrop of exquisite sculptures, delicate ceramics, and vibrant paintings. The flood of guests flows ceaselessly, adding to the burgeoning crowd.

Nobles arrive with their entourages in tow, yet only the most intimately associated companions are permitted to join them within the confines of the mansion. From your vantage point near the window, you catch sight of the Empire's crimson banners fluttering in the breeze, a clear indication of the presence of their diplomats. A stream of diverse flags soon follows, signifying the arrival of representatives from various factions.

Near the mansion's entrance, Zalir, the distinguished host, along with his butler, are engrossed in welcoming the arriving guests. Currently, they are engaged in conversation with a notably short and robust old man clutching a peculiar purple tome - a dwarf, by the looks of it.

The mirthful strains of classical gnome music begin to waft through the air as the musicians strike up a lively tune. The party truly comes alive. While some guests appreciate the artwork scattered throughout the mansion, the majority are engrossed in the art of socializing.

At this point, the characters should be free to explore, talk with different guests, and look at the artwork. They can also check some parts of the mansion, such as the kitchen, the ballroom, or the guest's dorm area (upper-floor dorm doors are locked).

The Party

The grand party extends across three main locales within the mansion: the Hall, the Inner Hall, and the Dining Room. For the occasion, these rooms have been meticulously prepared and interconnected with open doors, while all other doors are kept closed (but most are not locked).

At the top of the stairs in the Inner Hall, two vigilant guards stand, blocking the way to the upper floor. Only guests who have been assigned a room (Vang, Lik, Hare'Kupec, Ket'Atal, and Master Armur Jasperin) and individuals working for Zalir are permitted passage.

- Should the characters be working as disguised guards for Zalir, or if they've been invited by the politician to assist in recovering the Republic's documents, the guards have been briefed to allow them access to the upper floor.
- Conversely, if the characters do not meet these prerequisites and attempt to go there, they will be respectfully but firmly informed that the upstairs area is off-limits.

Throughout the event, the characters are free to converse with various guests and traverse the mansion at will. The timing of the murder's revelation is at your discretion, ideally when the characters are in a public setting or have a credible alibi, reducing the likelihood of them being implicated as suspects and thereby complicating their investigation.

The characters will most probably begin entering the Main Hall. After sufficient exploration and socialization, move to "**The Murder**" section to introduce the investigative phase of this chapter.

1 - Main Hall
2 - Ballroom
3 - Dining Room
4 - Office
5 - Library
6 - Inner Hall
7 - Guests' Bathroom
8 - Games Room
9 - Music Room
10 - Butler's Dorm
11 - Servants' Rooms
12 - Servants' Bathroom
13 - Kitchen
14 - Corridor
15 - Zalir's Room
16 - Jenny's Room
17 - Balcony
18 - Lik's Guestroom
19 - Vang's Guestroom
20 - Hare'Kupec's Guestroom
21 - Ket'Atal's Guestroom
22 - Master Armur's Guestroom
23 - Guests' Bathroom
24 - Vang's Bathroom
25 - Hare'Kupec's Bathroom
26 - Zalir's Bathroom
27 - Jenny's Bathroom
28 - Jenny's Closet

1 - Main Hall

The hall before you is a veritable gallery, paintings balanced on easels capturing the attention of strolling guests. Each piece of art is accompanied by a small plaque, revealing the artist's name and providing a snippet of the painting's backstory. Catching your attention on the eastern wall is a solitary painting. It depicts a figure garbed in a purple robe, his gaze fixed upon a distant castle on the horizon.

In one secluded corner of the room, a duo stands apart from the crowd. An elven woman donned in a kimono is accompanied by a samurai, his red armor glinting under the ambient light. The entrance door swings open to admit a bishop, clad in the vibrant hues of white and red. Following close behind him are the Empire's envoys: a bald man armored in a gleaming plate, a red cloak billowing behind him, and an elegant, tattooed middle-aged woman dressed in a stylishly revealing outfit.

At the center of the room, a man laden with gold jewelry catches the eye. He is sporting a broad Kepesh-style collar, engraved with religious symbols, a vigilant bodyguard shadowing his every step. Nearby, a finely dressed woman, attired in sophisticated black and red clothing and leaning on a cane, accepts a glass of wine from a beautiful maid. Engaged in boisterous conversation with the two women is a man whose long white hair matches his extravagant attire, his smile revealing a mouth full of golden teeth.

Both the doors leading to the Inner Hall and the Dining Room are open, beckoning with the promise of more artful delights beyond.

Many of the guests pause for long minutes looking at the painting on the eastern wall, some of them discussing the historical value of this piece that will be the main attraction of the auction.

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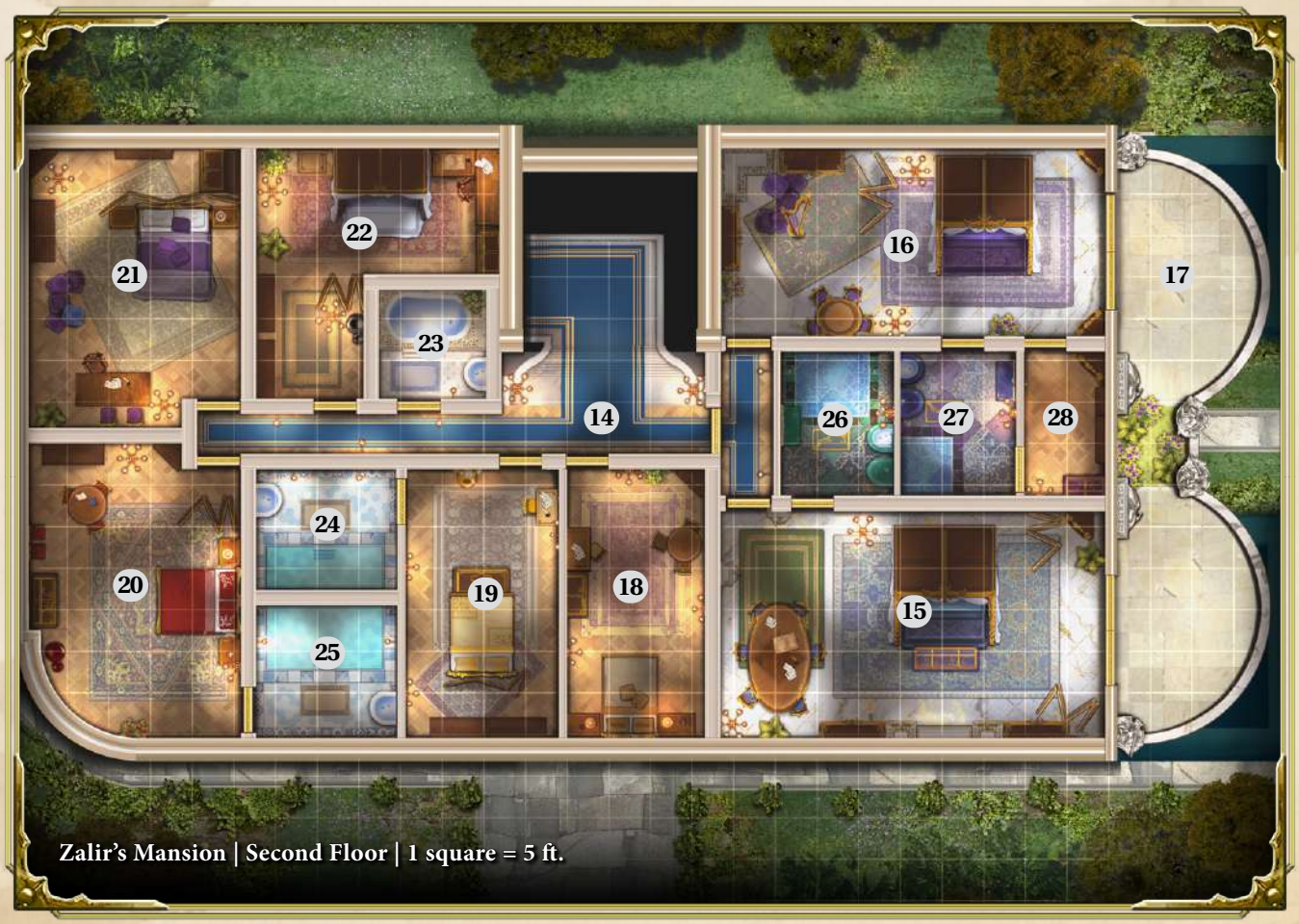
Zalir's Mansion | First Floor | 1 square = 5 ft.



Zalir's Mansion | Second Floor | 1 square = 5 ft.

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Painting - Phantom of the Fortress

The Phantom of the Fortress - unknown, 19 I.A.

This painting depicts the first—and only—librarian of this fortress, which was one of the first prison complexes and Ironhand outposts in Imperial history. More than one hundred years ago, a noble madwalker of exquisite natural talent wanted to be famous, recognized the world over. Moreover, he wanted to put his estate at the Empire's disposal, making it valuable—or rather, invaluable. He posed to himself the challenge of recovering and learning the ancient knowledge of building portals, so that he might build one right here. It once belonged to an equally ancient civilization, extinct in the Cold War, centuries ago. He succeeded. The cost: his life. It is said that, greatly distressed for dying before his efforts were recognized, his spirit swore never to leave the estate, pledging his services to the first person to speak his name out loud. Legend says he scribbled his very difficult name in the most important excerpt of the book collection currently in the library on the second floor. The problem is, almost all the books there have annotations in nearly illegible calligraphy. With the vast estate now an Ironhand outpost and prison complex where most of its occupants are illiterate, the spirit seems destined to roam endlessly, masterless...

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You can show the previous page if any of the characters take an interest in it.

All the guests will move between the Dining Room, the Main Hall, and the Inner Hall during the party. After you describe this room and the NPCs have time to move, you can decide which NPC is in each room at any time.

2 - Ballroom (locked door)

Before the crime has happened:

There are three doors in the ballroom, but all of them are locked and only **Zalir** and his butler, **Joirin**, have keys to them *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

Read this to your players only if the characters entered this room before Vang was murdered.

A magnificent ballroom with a highly polished wooden floor made especially for dancing. There are huge windows at the entirety of the outer walls giving an ample view of a beautiful garden filled with red roses.

While the investigation has yet to begin, this place will be empty as it was not prepared to be used for the party. If the characters take too long inside this room, which could spoil Gary's plans to kill Vang there, Tenebrizon (using the guest he is possessing) will help Gary by asking Zalir and his butler to fetch the characters as he needs to talk with them. The talk will depend on which NPC Tenebrizon is possessing. However, he will always try to offer some job with a reward or give useful information to the characters to avoid raising their suspicion.

After the crime has happened:

The door to the Inner Hall is unlocked. The doors to the Music and Game room are locked.

Read this to your players only if Vang was already murdered.

Stepping into the grand ballroom, you are immediately struck by the breathtaking vista of a manicured garden laden with red roses, displayed proudly through towering windows. Suddenly, a chill breeze infiltrates the room, carrying with it an unsettling hint of blood.

Your gaze falls upon the polished wooden floor where a woman lies motionless. Recognition dawns as you realize her to be Vang, one of the Empire's envoys. Her chest is stained with blood, pooling ominously around her. Nearby, shards of broken glass glisten on a red rose, its petals sodden with spilled wine and mixing with the scarlet of her lifeblood.

An odd sound trickles down from the ceiling, soon swallowed by the rising clamor as guests pour in to witness the chilling scene. The murmur of hushed whispers and brewing speculation swells, and the palpable tension threatens to suffocate the room.

Vang's Body

Examination of Vang's body will reveal:

- Her demise was caused by stabbing wounds to her chest, though there's no weapon in sight.
- Her right hand, tightly clenched around a small piece of ripped leather, holding several entirely blackened coins if pried open.
  - A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check identifies this blackening as the result of a Redeemer consuming gold pieces to attune their mystical powers.
- A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine) check upon examining the body uncovers signs of poisoning; her wide eyes and contorted face indicative of severe tremors. Knowledge of this fact allows a DC 14 Intelligence (Nature) check to identify the toxin as a Kepesh poison, extracted from a particular desert naja. In addition, a DC 17 Intelligence (History) check informs of the Kepesh's historical use of this poison to hunt clerics of opposing faiths, as it incites pain and tremors, hindering concentration for spellcasting.
- A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check on the wound suggests the assailant was likely taller, judging from the angle of the stabs. Each wound, though shallow and not indicative of strength, is precise - the work of a knife-wielding expert. The body's positioning and wounds suggest that Vang was conscious and defensive during the assault.

Flevar, the Thief on the Roof

Should the characters decide to inspect the noise emanating from the roof, they'll find Flevar. The thief was attempting to infiltrate the mansion to pilfer valuable artwork but was sidetracked by the conversation between Gary and Vang. Unaware that a murder was transpiring, his focus remained on his initial goal.

The characters may choose to pursue Flevar, who lies in wait for an opportune moment to sneak into the mansion. If he discerns pursuit, he'll attempt to escape, even empty-handed. If ignored, he'll seize the opportunity to infiltrate the office or a hall, grabbing whatever he can before fleeing. Should they continue to explore the mansion, characters may get additional chances to detect and chase Flevar.

If you plan to use this character or if he is apprehended, refer to his entry in the "Guests and Hosts" section.

The Dead Familiar Pet

If the PCs investigate the ballroom further, a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check will lead them to a dead raven nestled behind the door leading to the Inner Hall. The bird's flesh is decayed, yet oddly free from the smell or signs of natural decomposition. A DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check might attribute this to a necrotic effect. Those trained in Religion or History know of the Kepesh's necromancy prowess and their ability to manipulate necrotic energy, though it is also known that clerics, redeemers, and most wizards can produce similar effects.

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Should the bird be shown to Major Lik or Karrine, they'll identify it as Anu, Vang's familiar pet.

Behind the scenes of what happened. After **Gary** stabbed **Vang**, the familiar pet was commanded to get help. Gary panicked for a moment as the creature flew, but the doors were closed, and before it could find a way out, Gary launched a necrotic Redeemer Ray at the bird, killing it. He knew the necrotic energy could pass as Kepesh magic, so he left the bird to be found.

The Rose Garden

Inspecting the garden-facing windows will reveal that they're rather stiff and require some force to open initially. Successfully opening all windows or a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check will reveal that one window opens more readily than the others.

A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check while scouring the garden will uncover a leather purse prickled with thorns and containing several blackened coins *(the few non-blackened coins amount to 4 gp)*. No Perception check is required if they search specifically near the looser window.

- A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check uncovers that this blackening effect is typically a result of a redeemer offering gold pieces to boost their powers.

If the purse is shown to Admöerio, Marianna Lisprolis, or Major Lik, they'll mention that Gary Landen was seen with a similar one. Furthermore, the ripped leather found clenched in Vang's hand perfectly matches this purse.

3 - Dining Room

As you step into the grand dining hall, you find that it has been cleverly repurposed for the auction. Rows of chairs are neatly arranged, three chairs deep, all facing the expansive dining table that now serves as the auctioneer's counter. It sits proudly at the far end of the room.

In a tasteful display of culture and artistry, numerous paintings and taii'maku tapestries grace the walls, each accompanied by an informative plaque bearing their name and a brief backstory.

Among the guests present, some have elected to utilize the chairs, engaging in hushed conversation, while others amble leisurely, their attention captured by the exquisite artwork.

This room, along with the Main Hall and the Inner Hall, serves as a transit point for the majority of the guests. Thus, any particular guest can be positioned here at your discretion.

At some point, Zalir will take the initiative to gather attendees for the auction, presided over by Admöerio Shosshan. As the most eminent art specialist at the event, Admöerio assumes the role of the auctioneer. However, before the auction can commence, the discovery of the murder will transpire, thereby preventing the event.

4 - Office

This room is locked. Only **Zalir** and his butler, **Joirin**, are supposed to have keys to it *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

Entering this room, your attention is immediately drawn to an exquisitely crafted table of elven make at the center of this small office. Its surface is etched with delicate leaf patterns that whisper tales of antiquity. Over the table lay numerous scrolls, each appearing older than the last. Flanking the table are two chairs, with a third one positioned thoughtfully behind it.

To each side, shelves brimming with ancient tomes stretch towards the high ceiling, their time-worn spines a testament to years of collected wisdom.

A variety of eccentric objects adorn the walls while others are arranged with meticulous care on the shelves. From the skulls of arcane creatures to ancient orbs of cryptic origin, each piece, while seemingly lacking in obvious market value, tells its own story and holds an air of immense personal significance.

At the room's end, a wooden door stands closed. Its surface is adorned with intricate and enigmatic arcane patterns.

Most of the items adorning Zalir's shelves are mementos from his various adventures and explorations. Though they hold little monetary value, each item, whether gifted by friends or discovered by Zalir himself, holds a sentimental value. However, none of them are dangerous or expensive.

The scrolls strewn across the table signify Zalir's current scholarly pursuits, which predominantly focus on the Malrokian Curse.

An investigation of the table reveals a series of drawers. Within them, a collection of documents outlines a detailed plan to assassinate Emperor Baleroth, complete with strategies and countermeasures designed to overcome the Emperor's magical and physical security. These documents are of paramount importance to the Republic, which wishes to reclaim them, and equally so to the Empire, which aims to exploit them in their campaign against Sedura. In an attempt to create further discord, Gary strategically placed these documents here, hoping they would be discovered during the murder investigation.

A peculiar pattern marks the wooden door situated behind the table. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals it as a magical alarm that alerts Zalir if the door is opened or the sigil is destroyed, regardless of Zalir's location, provided he is on the same plane. This spell is considered a 5th level spell against attempts to dispel or otherwise neutralize it. Although safeguarded by this magical protection, the door itself is not locked.

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5 - Library

As you step into the room, a rich, musty scent of age-old parchment greets you, evidence of the countless ancient tomes that fill the library to the brim. The close proximity of the shelves lends a certain claustrophobia to the space, a predicament exacerbated by their sheer quantity. Navigating further into the room requires an average person to move sideways.

The absence of windows bathes the library in darkness, the only exception being a faint, ghostly light spilling in from the adjoining office. At the heart of this quiet sanctuary, a small table stands alone, on top of which rests a delicate glass orb, its purpose as enigmatic as the room itself.

Housed within these library walls is a treasure trove of knowledge, precious to Zalir. Although none of the tomes bear magical properties, their content is deeply mystical, and they contain a wealth of information that would fetch hundreds, even thousands of gold pieces from discerning collectors.

Each book in Zalir's collection is meticulously marked with a hidden arcane sigil, discreetly etched within the cover and on one random page. This secret mark serves as Zalir's safeguard, enabling him to track any book that leaves his possession. The knowledge they contain is great, and Zalir is wary of it falling into the wrong hands.

The orb perched atop the table is a simple magic item. Upon uttering a specific command word, it levitates and emanates a light comparable to the effects of the *light* cantrip. Bereft of windows, this room relies on this orb for illumination, acting as Zalir's reading light. *[The command word is Jenny, the name of Zalir's adoptive daughter.]*

Emblazoned on the ceiling is another arcane symbol. With a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, the characters can discern the pattern before stepping into the room (grant them advantage if they light the room before entry or possess dark vision). This symbol serves as an *alarm* to Zalir, alerting him to any trespassers within the room, provided he resides within the Material Plane. This counts as a 6th-level spell for dispelling purposes or similar attempts. To destroy the sigil without triggering it would require significant damage to the stone ceiling. If the characters do spot the symbol, a DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check would be required to understand its function.

Should the characters express interest in delving into any particular mystical subject, there's a 70% chance Zalir's library contains a tome covering that specific topic.

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6 - Inner Hall

Emerging from the Main Hall, you find yourselves in a grand foyer. This Inner Hall is a hub connecting numerous sections of the mansion. A grand staircase sweeps upwards, leading to the upper floors. At its summit, the vigilant gaze of Zalir's only two guards posted at the party monitor those who venture towards the upper floors of the manor.

This hall is adorned with a panoply of statues and carvings crafted from a mixture of materials. Bronze plaques accompany each masterpiece, presenting the name and a brief backstory of the artwork.

Guests stroll within this space, some pausing to admire the artifacts, while others dart in and out of the first door to the right - the location of the guests' bathroom.

Stationed at the top of the stairs, the two guards maintain a vigilant watch, their main objective being to thwart any unauthorized attempts to ascend to the upper floors. Their field of vision, however, purposely offers no visibility of the guests on the ground level - Zalir does not want the guests to feel observed.

The upper floors are strictly off-limits, accessible only to **Zalir**, **Vang**, **Lik**, **Hare'Kupec**, **Ket'Atal**, **Master Armur Jasperin**, and those employed by **Zalir**. These individuals are the designated guests, with the privilege of being hosted in the upper quarters.

This room acts as a nexus of sorts, with guests continuously transitioning between here, the Main Hall, and the Dining Room. As such, it's within your discretion to determine which guests can be found in this locale at any given time.

7 - Guests' Bathroom

Stepping into this lavishly appointed restroom, you're greeted by the gleam of white marble accented by glimmers of gold. This elegant but pretty standard bathroom is markedly quieter than the party beyond its confines, owing its peace to a robust wooden door, complete with a metal lock that can be fastened from within.

Adorned with elegance, this luxurious bathroom exudes sophistication, its details meticulously executed in polished bronze thinly coated in gold. The room is equipped with fresh towels and an ample supply of water.

A steel lock secures the door from the inside, guaranteeing a degree of privacy for the occupants. Should any guests choose to conduct a private conversation within, their words will remain safely contained within the marble walls, impossible to discern from beyond the door.

8 - Games Room

This room is locked. Only **Zalir** and his butler, **Joirin**, should have keys to it *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

The room before you is bathed in warm, inviting light and populated with comforting furnishings. Within its confines, a dragon chess table and a card table stand ready for play. Arrayed about the room are numerous sets of cards and a fascinating collection of ancient games from distant lands. A well-stocked home bar and a set of inviting armchairs cluster together, providing a cozy space traditionally used for leisurely, smoke-filled discussions.

9 - Music Room

This room is locked. Only **Zalir** and his butler, **Joirin**, should have keys to it *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

Upon entering this room, you are greeted by a collection of high-quality instruments. The centerpiece is an elegant black grand piano, exuding an aura of refinement. Accompanying it is an array of exotic creations, each meticulously crafted, hailing from ancient eras or far-flung corners of Tanares. Among these rarities, a Kemet harp stands out, boasting a long, gracefully curving central spine and a sound box shaped like a shovel.

10 - Butler's Dorm

This room is locked. Only **Zalir** and his butler, **Joirin**, have keys to it *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

This bedroom has a big single bed covered by satin sheets, an elegant drawer, a small table, and a chair. On the foot of the bed, there is a sturdy chest.

This is Joirin's bedroom; no one enters here except him. His modest belongings are stored here, each of little material worth. Joirin hoards all that he can, fostering dreams of purchasing a comfortable home for his beloved niece.

Contained within a chest are his life savings amounting to 8,312 gold pieces, alongside a blood-stained dagger *(bearing traces of Vang's blood)*. The hilt of this weapon proudly displays the crest of the Republic army. A deliberate plant by Gary, the dagger is intended to serve as damning evidence linking Zalir and the Republic to the assassination of Vang in the eyes of the Empire.

11 - Servants' Rooms

The bedroom has a single bed covered by good linen sheets, a drawer, a small table, and a chair. On the foot of the bed, there is a simple chest.

Each bedroom is identical and they are used by Zalir's servants. They have simple clothes and some of the possessions of each servant. Each chest has 3d10 gold pieces.

12 - Ginny's Bedroom

The bedroom features a single bed adorned with white silk sheets. Beside it stands a dressing table and a chair, while near the door, a drawer and a reinforced chest are located.

This bedroom belongs to Ginny and contains her personal items. On the dressing table, one can find a few pieces of jewelry (worth a total of 120 gp) and her makeup kit.

Under the bed lies a small locked chest, the key to which is always carried by Ginny. Inside the chest is a locket containing a painted family portrait (worth 350 gp). The DC for lockpicking the chest is 18. While the chest can be broken open like any other reinforced small chest, doing so will create a loud noise.

13 - Kitchen

Drawing near, your senses are ensnared by the savory scent of a baking pie and a soup simmering on a hearth. Stepping inside, you behold an older woman and a younger man working in a spacious kitchen.

A casserole dish bakes within a big iron oven, whilst the tantalizing aroma of the pie wafts from another, smaller clay oven. This kitchen is amply equipped and generously stocked, boasting a wine cabinet that showcases a diverse selection of vintages and labels.

The kitchen is run by two individuals: Ginny and Hedron.

Ginny (CG human **commoner**), is an elderly woman on the cusp of her 70s. Having worked for Zalir since the aftermath of the Kemet Invasion—which claimed her family—she retains a youthful vigor in her duties, thanks to a health-preserving magical ring gifted by Zalir. A passionate cook and culinary conversationalist, Ginny delights in recreating ancient recipes sourced from Zalir's historical studies. She speaks her mind with a refreshing candor, paying little heed to hierarchy, and beneath her fearless exterior beats a heart of gold.

Ginny's Ring of Health
Ring, rare

The user suffers no ill effects of aging and is immune to diseases, including magical ones. The user still dies of old age as normal.

Hedron (N human **commoner**) is a young man serving as Ginny's assistant and apprentice. The son of an Ironhand officer killed during the Kemet Invasion, Hedron secured his position in Zalir's mansion thanks to Ginny's friendship with his grandmother. Now passionately invested in his culinary vocation, he offers unyielding support to Ginny and Zalir while nursing a deep-seated resentment towards the Ironhand and the Empire, whom he blames for his father's demise.

The kitchen has a door that leads to the mansion's courtyard, serving as a functional area for laundry and supply reception. Connected to both the gardens and the front entrance, this

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space can be secured by two steel latches from the kitchen interior, usually kept locked except during daylight hours.

After the Murder

If Ginny or Hedron are asked about Gary or about someone taking wine or glasses from the kitchen, they will reveal that a man with golden teeth requested two glasses and a bottle of wine. He filled the two glasses and left the remainder of the bottle. If asked, they can offer the leftover bottle to the characters. An analysis comparing the wine in the bottle to the spilled wine will reveal an exact match.

14 - Corridor

This extended corridor features seven identical, locked doors. Each guest room can be accessed either with the master key or a designated key specific to the occupant. The door to Zalir and Jenny's quarters can be opened solely by Zalir or his butler, Joirin. However, unbeknownst to them, Gary has surreptitiously stolen Joirin's key, granting him access to all seven rooms.

15 - Zalir's Room

This room is locked. Only **Zalir** and his butler, **Joirin**, should have keys to it *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

Before you lies a spacious bedroom. Dominating the scene is a large double bed, its satin sheets bearing the intricate embroidery of a compass in gold thread. A grand table stands proudly alongside a plush chair, while the room's walls are adorned with a collection of fine antiquities. Two doors catch your eye: one promises access to an expansive balcony.

This is Zalir's personal bedroom; no one enters here except him. He stores only clothing and beautiful but worthless antiquities here.

16 - Jenny's Room

This room is locked. Only **Jenny**, **Joirin**, and **Zalir** have keys to it *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

You step into a bedroom marked by striking features. A large double bed, its satin sheets elegantly stitched with crimson roses, stands out. In one corner, a grand red dressing table asserts its presence. Nearby, a table pairs with a red velvet chair, providing a cozy corner for reflection. Your eyes are drawn to three other doors, one of which opens onto an expansive balcony.

This is Jenny's bedroom; no one enters here except her. She stores almost nothing here besides makeup and some spell material components inside the table drawer (worth 74 gp). Most of her clothes and accessories are in her closet (see "***28 - Jenny's Closet***").

17 - Balcony

You emerge onto an expansive balcony that adjoins the master rooms. The city and the port unfurl before your eyes, a breath-taking vista laid out under the skies. A small, meticulously tended garden, a patchwork of vibrant red roses, adds a touch of verdant charm to this lofty perch.

There is not much on this Balcony. If the characters get here and they have not captured nor caused **Flevar**, the thief, to flee the mansion, it's possible for the characters to encounter him here trying to break into Zalir's room, or even to see him sneaking somewhere else since this place offers a great view.

18 - Lik's Guestroom

This room is locked. Only **Major Lik**, **Zalir** and his butler, **Joirin**, should have keys to it *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

Upon entering the bedroom, your gaze falls upon a spacious single bed, swathed in satin sheets. Adjacent to it, a reinforced chest and a modest table with a chair stand at attention. The décor is simple and elegant, with a harmonious blend of white and olive hues.

This is one of the guest rooms. This one was designed to be used by Major Lik, one of the envoys from the Empire.

Servants have brought his personal belongings to this place and locked them on a chest. The key is with Lik only. There is not much in there except his clothes, 31 pp, 13 gp, and 53 sp.

19 - Vang's Guestroom

This room is locked. Only **Vang**, **Zalir** and his butler, **Joirin**, should have keys to it *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

Upon entering the bedroom, your gaze falls upon a spacious single bed, swathed in satin sheets. Adjacent to it, a reinforced chest and a modest table, bedecked with numerous makeup and accessories, leans against the nearby wall. A chair sits next to the table, and right beside it, another door beckons. The décor is simple and elegant, with a harmonious blend of white and olive hues.

This is one of the guest rooms. This one was designed to be used by Vang, one of the envoys from the Empire.

Servants have brought her personal belongings to this place and locked them in a chest. The key is with Vang only. You can find her clothes, 42 pp, her grimoire, and spell components (worth 273 gp).

The grimoire contains the following spells:

1st Level: *alarm, burning hands, charm person, color spray, feather fall, hideous laughter, sleep*
2nd Level: *alter self, blur, hold person, invisibility, levitate*
3rd Level: *bestow curse, dispel magic, fireball, fly, major image*
4th Level: *confusion, dimensional door, locate creature*

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Over the table, there is a wooden hairpin that is, in fact, a magic item Vang is using to hide the Republic's Stolen documents. The documents are inside a dimensional space created by the mundane-looking wooden hairpin. This magic item can store an object and conceal its own magical aura.

Vang's Wooden Hairpin
Wondrous item, uncommon

With a word of command, you can store one object of up to 3 pounds that has no more volume than 16 cubic feet. The weight of the hairpin remains the same independent of what is stored in its dimensional space. Placing or retrieving an item from it requires an Action and knowing a secret word of command.

This item does not produce any magical aura, except if the magical detection used is *true seeing* or another similar spell of 8th level or greater. Any attempt to identify the magical properties of this item is made with disadvantage.

Tenebrizon, having possessed the Imperial spy who initially gave this item to Vang, was privy to both the secret word and the object's existence. Consequently, he alerted Gary about it. Using the master key to gain entry, Gary stole the documents, leaving the hairpin in place.

Distrustful of Zalir, Vang opted not to store the hairpin in the chest. Wishing the item to appear entirely worthless, she had the servants place it nonchalantly on the table amid some makeup, unaware of its true value, a ruse that backfired as she did not expect anyone to know about the item.

20 - Hare'Kupec's Guestroom

This room is locked. Only **Hare'Kupec**, **Zalir** and his butler, **Joirin**, should have keys to it *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

Upon entering the bedroom, your gaze falls upon a spacious single bed, swathed in satin sheets. Adjacent to it, a reinforced chest and a modest table with a chair stand at attention. The décor is simple and elegant, with a harmonious blend of white and olive hues.

This is one of the guest rooms. This one was designed to be used by Hare'Kupec, one of the envoys from the Kepesh.

Servants have brought his personal belongings to this place and locked them in a chest. The key is with Hare'Kupec only. There is not much in there except his clothes, a holy symbol of the Kepesh god made of gold (worth 150 gp), 75 pp, 10 gp, and 20 sp.

21 - Ket'Atal's Guestroom

This room is locked. Only **Ket'Atal**, **Zalir** and his butler, **Joirin**, should have keys to it *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

Upon entering the bedroom, your gaze falls upon a spacious single bed, swathed in satin sheets; over it, there is a silver dagger with the symbol of a bird with the skull of a man. Adjacent to the bed, a reinforced chest and a modest table with a chair stand at attention. The décor is simple and elegant, with a harmonious blend of white and olive hues.

This is one of the guest rooms. This one was designed to be used by Ket'Atal, the guard of Hare'Kupec, the Kepesh envoy.

Servants have brought his personal belongings to this place and locked them in a chest. The key is with Ket'Atal only. The trunk only contains simple Kepesh clothes and 33 pp, and two steel longswords engraved with Kepesh inscriptions (his spare ones).

22 - Master Armur's Guestroom

This room is locked. Only **Master Armur**, **Zalir** and his butler, **Joirin**, should have keys to them *(Gary has secretly stolen Joirin's key)*.

Upon entering the bedroom, your gaze falls upon a spacious single bed, swathed in satin sheets. Adjacent to it, a reinforced chest and a modest table with a chair stand at attention. The décor is simple and elegant, with a harmonious blend of white and olive hues.

This is one of the guest rooms. This one was designed to be used by **Master Armur Jasperin**, the envoy from Ahimoth.

Servants have brought his personal belongings to this place and locked them in a chest. The key is with Master Armur only. The chest contains his clothes, some documents in a ciphered language, 43 pp, and 55 gp.

The documents are very hard to decode, but they are Third Eye *(a criminal faction - see Tanares Sourcebook)* letters that Master Armur must deliver to a cell in Heroes Rise. It is a command for local agents to spy on Sara for a contractor in the empire but has no valuable information for the characters. If Sara (the tavern owner) is warned, the characters will gain her gratitude and a free round of the best drinks she has in her tavern.

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23 - Guests' Bathroom

Upon stepping into this bathroom, you're met with an aura of elegance. Crafted entirely from white marble, accented with details of olive-colored stone, the room gleams under soft light. Beneath your feet, the cool touch of the marble floor contrasts with the room's warmth. A stone tub beckons invitingly, alongside an array of fresh towels. A door with a steel lock promises privacy to any occupant, able to be fastened securely from the inside.

Only guests with access to the upper floor can use this bathroom. It is elegant, clean, and organized. It has a tub and a magical stone that can heat the water. Removing the stone requires destroying a part of the tub and will cause the item to lose its properties.

24 and 25 - Vang's Bathroom and Hare'Kupec's Bathroom

Both exclusive bathrooms are identical.

Upon opening the door, you are greeted by a bathroom steeped in elegance. Dressed in white marble from floor to ceiling, it boasts tasteful accents of olive-colored stone. At its center, a luxurious bronze tub flanked by soft, clean towels. To ensure privacy, a sturdy steel lock is affixed to the door, ready to be secured by anyone within.

These bathrooms were made to be an exclusive part of the best guest rooms. They are elegant, clean, and organized. They have a bronze tub and a magical stone that can heat the water. Removing the stone requires destroying a part of the tub and will cause the item to lose its properties.

26 - Zalir's Bathroom

You enter a very elegant bathroom, adorned in resplendent white marble. The space is imbued with striking obsidian details. The same marble paves the floor, extending to an obsidian tub that promises indulgent soaks. Soft towels lie within reach, ready to cocoon you in their embrace. For privacy's sake, a sturdy steel lock is affixed to the door, ready to be secured by anyone within.

This bathroom is an annex to Zalir's room. It is elegant and luxurious. It has a tub made of a single piece of carved obsidian with a magical stone that can heat the water. Removing the stone requires destroying a part of the tub and will cause the item to lose its properties.

27 - Jenny's Bathroom

Pushing open the door, you find a decidedly elegant feminine bathroom. Dressed in radiant white marble, the room boasts delicate rose gold accents. The floor is paved with the same bright marble that extends into a luxurious tub. Towels, adorned with intricate embroideries, wait at the ready. For any seeking privacy, a steel lock sits on the door, offering privacy to those within.

This is an annex to Jenny's room. It is lovely and elegant. The tub is made of a single piece of carved marble and contains a magical stone that can heat the water. Removing the stone requires destroying a part of the tub and will cause the item to lose its properties.

28 - Jenny's Closet

This room is locked. Only **Jenny** has keys to it, and neither she nor the key are in the mansion. This door is enchanted with the *arcane lock* spell, granting it +10 on any DC to break open or pick the lock.

As the door swings open, an array of clothing greets your eyes. Arrayed before you in this expansive closet are drawers and hangers, each draped with numerous dresses, robes, and hats lining the walls - each piece more beautiful than the last. A selection leans towards the elegant and girly, embracing soft fabrics and vibrant colors. Meanwhile, others seem mystical and wizardly, including mantles, robes, and hats of common use to mages.

If the characters search the drawers, they can find Jenny's many jewels. There is a total of 38,000 gp in jewelry of different kinds, all very cute and discreet, as Jenny does not like very flashy jewelry or clothing.

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Gary, the Murderer

Key Concept. Underneath the guise of a flamboyant womanizer lies a deadly and professional assassin.

Description. Gary Landen (NE human, see page 243), 46 years old, is an accomplished assassin who blends rogue and redeemer abilities. His long white hair, golden teeth, and ostentatious attire create the image of an extravagant charlatan.

He shuns sneaking around, favoring a social approach to his work. He portrays himself as a flashy social climber while concealing his identity as a cunning conman and lethal assassin.

History. Born into poverty, Gary experienced a troubled childhood. His father abandoned the family when his mother fell ill, instilling in Gary a deep-seated mistrust of people, leading him to use his cunning to survive on the streets, becoming a con artist and gold-digger.

His life took a turn two years before the Kemet Invasion when Gary began experiencing divine visions from Tamera and Bauron, prophesying a prosperous future if he fought against the Kemets. This gave him the miraculous powers of a redeemer, which he combined with his cunning to kill Kemets.

He gained wealth and recognition; however, his increasing greed, combined with a blind trust in the gods' visions of his future, led to his capture by Kemet leader Gullog. Seeing potential in Gary, Gullog offered him two choices: work for the Kemet or die. Feeling betrayed by the gods for being captured, Gary chose survival.

His role became luring humans to the Kemet wizards at Fisherman's Wharf to be brainwashed. He fulfilled this until the tide of the war began to turn, prompting him to betray Gullog and flee. Since then, he has utilized his skills as a mercenary and assassin.

Personality and Objectives. Gary trusts no one, including the gods. He holds all religions and deities in contempt, especially the Celestianist Church. His ultimate goal is the accumulation of wealth. To him, gold is the only reliable truth.

He presents himself as charming and romantic, feigning closeness to everyone, pretending to be hurt if rejected. Some people perceive him as friendly; others find him intrusive. Regardless, his theatrics often make people underestimate him.

Current Situation. A Shadow Wing cultist hired him to assassinate Vang. He is unaware of Tenebrizon's plan and does not care to ask, as he is well-paid. He believes that a member of the cult will assist him covertly during the party.

Gary is masquerading as a wealthy merchant from Seashores, purchasing art for his mansion. He stole the master key from Joirin, the butler, replacing it with a fake, granting him access to most parts of the estate. His *hat of disguise* and *boots of elvenkind* will aid his activities, allowing him to steal secret Republic documents from Vang's room and stash them in Zalir's office.

If the characters talk with Gary before Vang's assassination, he will attempt to win their trust while subtly increasing the tension by discussing the horrors of the Kemet Invasion, the risk of a Malrokian Curse, and the looming threat of war due to Kepesh's magical item heists.

Gary's magic items: Gary has a cape that works as a *hat of disguise*, *boots of elvenkind*, a *potion of invisibility* and a *gem of penumbral movement*.

Gem of Penumbral Movement
Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)
This item was given to Gary by the cultists of Shadow Wing to facilitate his escape. It was created by Tenebrizon and can only be used once. The user may smash the brittle gem to teleport through creating a brief penumbral breach to one known place in up to 1,000 feet, as if using the *teleport* spell.

Gary is carrying this item to use as a way to escape Zalir's Mansion if necessary. He will probably do so after Mr. Fleur, the detective starts suspecting him, but before he can be searched or arrested. He can also use a potion of invisibility to flee if necessary.

Gary's Stats Block: See *page 243*.

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Guests and Hosts
(Most Important NPCs)

Zalir, the Host

Key Concept. A scholar of Tanares' history unwittingly transformed into a war hero by the forces of circumstance.

Description. Zalir (NG human **archmage**, proficient in Athletics and Insight, double proficiency in History), the founder of the Relic Hunters Guild and hero of the Kemet Invasion, is a wizard who specializes in the study of ancient relics and artifacts.

Despite maintaining a mansion in Heroes Rise, he spends much of his time at the Relic Hunter Headquarters in Fisherman's Wharf, from where he helps Sedura against the schemes of rival factions.

History. Zalir's early career was as a member of D.E.A.T.H., where he immersed himself in studying dragons and ancient history. A harrowing capture, which led to his rescue by a band of heroes, resulted in him fostering a friendship with Sedura. When the Kemet invaded, Zalir aided the resistance, leveraging his extensive knowledge of Kemet's ancient history and supplying heroes with magical weapons.

Amidst the chaos of the Kemet Invasion, Zalir collaborated with Taram, Avelum, Isendden, and Orthus in their attempts to avoid a Malrokian Curse and halt Golgöggoth's scheme of eradicating free will from all creatures of Tanares.

Later, Zalir helped establish the Republic. His efforts during the war rewarded him with knowledge, mystic artifacts, and significant standing among the nobility.

Personality and Objectives. Zalir, a man of wit and sharp intellect, is benevolent and hopeful. He always talks excitedly and tries to make jests. Although he typically leans towards logic over emotion, the horrors of war have left him scarred, compelling him to prioritize others' needs over his own.

His attire, while practical, often bears historical significance. His humor, although it frequently fails, never deters him from trying to lighten the mood, often in an exaggerated manner. Discussions involving history, ancient cultures, or magical lore incite him to long preachy monologues. Once aware, he promptly apologizes and tries a joke.

Goal at the Party. Zalir's primary objective is to locate the stolen Republic's secret documents. He relies on Joia for assistance, who possesses a duplicate of his mansion's master key.

Vang is his primary suspect, prompting him to track her and Major Lik's movements cautiously. The auction and potential profits from selling art hold little importance; they are mere diversions. His secondary goal is to enhance the Republic's relations with Yama and persuade the Kepesh to abandon their heists.

If asked where he was at time of the murder. Zalir will insist he was in his office, preparing contracts and receipts for the auction. This is partially true, as he also monitored Joia's progress in locating the stolen Republic documents.

Important information he knows:

- ***Republic's Secret Documents.*** Zalir is aware the documents harmful to Sedura have been stolen. Vang is a prime suspect. However, he will only confide this to those he deeply trusts are allies of the Republic.
- ***The Truce.*** He can elucidate the pact negotiated among the Republic, the Empire, and Yama to deter the Kepesh's heists.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. Zalir cannot fall victim to possession by Tenebrizon. Recognizing Zalir's potent wizardry, war hero status, and formidable mental resilience, Tenebrizon deems the risk of exposure too great to attempt possessing him.

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Joirin, the Butler

Key Concept. A loyal, stoic butler formerly a merchant, striving to ensure a good life for his sister and niece.

Description. Joirin (LN human **noble**, with Perception +4), Zalir's butler, ensures the mansion remains orderly. Standing tall with wheat-colored hair, he has just marked his 50th year.

History. Joirin was a traveling merchant who became acquainted with Zalir while the latter was still in D.E.A.T.H. Fully immersed in his work, Joirin remained unmarried, his sole family being his sister.

Throughout the war, Zalir tasked Joirin with delivering supplies to Wharfugee, promising fair payment. As the war raged on, his sister bore a child fathered by a wounded Kemet she had fallen in love with after secretly treating his injuries. Despite initial apprehension, Joirin grew to accept this new family member.

The Kemet remained hidden, their family working on a small farm. Their peaceful existence was shattered when farmers discovered him and, during the night, placed fire on their house. The Kemet died from the burns, protecting his daughter while fleeing, while Joirin's sister suffered burns but recovered.

Fearing for his half-Kemet niece, Joirin sought Zalir's aid, resulting in the trio finding refuge in Zalir's mansion, with Joirin becoming the butler. Once Baraelmer established Winterhold, the first winter elves' city on Tanares, Joirin and Zalir agreed it would offer the girl a safer, more accepting environment.

Personality and Objectives. Joirin is a model of dedication. When assigned a task, he plunges into it with focus. A man of few words and even fewer friends, his loyalty and commitment to those close to him is notable. He is known for his formal manner, politeness, and monotonous speaking.

Joirin exhibits a strong dislike for loudness, smooth-talkers, and impoliteness. He profoundly respects Celestianist priests, clerics, and paladins, viewing their commitment as the noblest. Joirin dreams of securing a tranquil, prosperous future for his niece and strives to amass enough wealth to build a comfortable home for her.

Goal at the Party. Joirin is tasked with monitoring Vang and seizing an opportunity to search her room for the documents (unaware that Gary has already stolen them). Striving to ensure the seamless functioning of the party, he also assists Zalir in maintaining vigilance against potential spies.

If asked where he was at the time of the murder. Joirin will truthfully state that he was on the upper floor, ensuring all guests' belongings were secure and no more servants were there. The stair guards can corroborate this alibi.

Important Information he knows:

- ***The Master Key.*** Joirin can confirm that only he and Zalir possess the keys to the Ballroom and other secured areas. If requested to unlock a door, he will discover his master key was replaced with a useless counterfeit.
- ***Intrigue at the Party.*** He knows that the party hides layers of subterfuge beneath its surface, with representatives from various factions seeking intelligence and influence on one another, especially concerning a series of magic item heists around the continent attributed to the Kepesh.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. He will use Joirin to distract anyone obstructing Gary's path. Tenebrizon, while maintaining Joirin's persona, would subtly drop hints about investigating Vang on Zalir's orders, amplifying the chaos upon discovering Vang's body. If necessary, Tenebrizon can command the guards or divert Zalir's attention to facilitate Gary's plans.

In a cruel twist, Tenebrizon might engineer the theft of Joirin's savings *(8,312 gp stored in his room's chest)* by Flevar, the thief on the roof, if he becomes aware of the thief's existence. In any case, he will try to get rid of the gold as he seeks to destroy Joirin's dreams of securing a home for his niece, deriving a perverse pleasure from the butler's despair.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Vang, the Empire Diplomat (Victim)

Key Concept. An aging and self-conscious femme fatale wizard growing concerned over her fading allure.

Description. Vang is a mature wizard and a former adventurer, now approaching her 50th year. She still carries signs of youthful beauty, complemented by tanned skin and brown hair styled in a bun. She lives comfortably on the wealth she received from adventuring, supplemented by minor tasks performed for nobles.

History. Vang (NE human **mage**, with Charisma 16, Deception, Persuasion and Stealth +6, employing an exclusive spell list detailed below) is a proud graduate of Crystal Tower. As a student, she was known for her beauty and frosty demeanor; her daring personality pushed her to a prosperous career as an adventurer. However, the success of her group came to a sudden end. A disagreement over the distribution of loot culminated in a conflict between Vang and her teammate, Karrine, centered on a magic ring. The ring vanished amidst the quarrel, with Karrine and Vang accusing each other of theft. Vang stole it, a secret no one ever found.

Vang believed she deserved it more than Karrine. In Vang's view, as the group's primary spellcaster, she was carrying most of the weight, and Karrine was in the group only because their cleric had feelings for her. This notion is a partial truth, as Karrine was inexperienced, and Vang was envious of the cleric's attention to her.

After the group disbanded, she settled in the Empire's capital, working sparingly as a mage-for-hire to nobles. Recently, she accepted a job from the Empire to take the guise of a diplomat, infiltrate high-ranking circles, and gather information for Emperor Baleroth to use against the Republic. She was manipulated by Tenebrizon, who possessed a Republic politician and made her think he had fallen for her charms, allowing her to steal critical documents about Sedura.

Vang's Spell List

Unlike a typical mage NPC, Vang is limited to casting spells up to the 4th level, with her exclusive spell list as follows:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation*
1st level (4 slots): *burning hands, charm person, color spray, hideous laughter*
2nd level (3 slots): *alter self, hold person*
3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse, fireball, fly*
4th level (3 slots): *confusion, locate creature*

Personality and Objectives. Vang has an icy yet enticing aura. She converses in a whispery, honeyed tone, maintaining an air of superiority. Her beauty, a crutch throughout her life, is starting to fade with age, shaking her self-confidence, which she tries to hide. Her adventurous background makes her much more dangerous than researcher wizards, and she does not rely solely on her magical prowess but also on wits and experience.

She never settled down or started a family but had a daughter 15 years ago. She gave the child up for adoption, a decision she now deeply regrets. The Emperor promised her to use an ancient Malrokian divination artifact to locate her daughter if she completed her mission, which is her true goal.

Role at the Party. Her participation serves as an excuse to come to Heroes Rise, meet Major Lik, and depart on his ship instead of taking a portal, which has magical scanning security and could find the document. She must attend the event to avoid suspicions but will try to remain discreet. She will find Gary's flattery appealing, seeing it as a chance to escape the party and enjoy private time with a charming man.

Important information she knows:

- ***Karrine Enmity.*** If questioned about Karrine, Vang will recount their story and express disdain for her, falsely alleging that Karrine stole a magic ring from her in the past—a lie she consistently maintains.
- ***The Familiar Pet.*** If she encounters someone demonstrating a strong allegiance to the Empire, she might introduce Anu, her raven familiar, instructing the bird to seek out that person in case of danger. The bird will never reach them, but this could give the characters a clue.
- ***Republic's Documents.*** She will not divulge this information under any circumstances except the influence of powerful magic coercion.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. Vang cannot be one of Tenebrizon's hosts. His plan involves Vang's death, and he cannot afford any magical examinations to discover traces of his presence on her body.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Karrine, Tower's Magocracy Envoy

Key Concept. A genius, 'nerdy' wizard with an underlying yearning for friendship. She is a loving mother devoted to her family.

Description. Karrine (NG human **mage**). Her Intelligence 20 provides her a +2 extra bonus to Arcana and History checks, and her spell save DCs in relation to a regular mage. She is an envoy of the Magocracy. Now 37 years old, Karrine is a former adventurer devoted to the internal politics of Mage Tower while focusing on her family. Dressed in elegant attire that retains the adventurous flair of her former life, ever by her side is a cane, seemingly a tool for walking but concealing a magical *rod of rulership*.

History. A child prodigy of the Crystal Tower, Karrine achieved the rare honor of graduating at the age of 16. She joined an adventuring party at the invitation of its cleric, Jarden. While Karrine lacked a flair for adventuring, she was charmed by Jarden's tales and stories, developing an infatuation with him. Her weak body and naivety were compensated by her genius intellect, which often outshined Vang's knowledge. However, her youth and lack of experience made her indecisive in dangerous situations. As the group thrived, Karrine accumulated substantial wealth; unfortunately, they dismantled after a dispute about a powerful magical ring found within an ancient ruin. Coveted by both Karrine and Vang, it vanished mysteriously, leading to mutual accusations. Jarden sided with Karrine, prompting Vang to accuse him of favoring romantic interests over the group's success. After the group disbanded, Karrine married Jarden and relocated to Mage Tower, where she became a well-regarded researcher and influential member of the Magocracy. Together, they have two daughters and a son. Karrine ventured to the event alone while Jarden remained in Mage Tower, caring for their children.

Personality and Objectives. Possessing a keen intellect, Karrine dislikes those who disregard knowledge. She is honest and straightforward, favoring clear-cut politics over superfluous pleasantries. While she enjoys fine food and wine, she has little interest in wealth. What truly captivates her are enigmatic magic items, ancient tomes, and magical research. Karrine carries a concealed desire for friendship, deeply affected by the dissolution of her party and Vang's betrayal, whom she saw as a friend, idolizing the older, experienced wizard. Now, Jarden and her children are the pillars of her life, but Karrine still dreams of forging new friendships and recapturing the camaraderie of her adventuring days.

Role at the Party. Karrine represents the Mage Tower's Magocracy. Aware of Kepesh's thefts, she is in a tough spot as the Magocracy is their ally. She seeks to calm the situation and protect the Magocracy by asserting that the heists are the unlawful acts of bandits, not activities instigated by the Arcanum (Kepesh and Magocracy faction). Karrine will strive to comprehend each faction's position and tone down the accusations. She will also avoid Vang during the party and speak ill of her if asked, accusing Vang of stealing a magic ring in the past.

Important information she knows:

- ***Enmity with Vang.*** When asked about her past adventures with Vang, Karrine shares a sorrowful tale of betrayal and the theft of a magic ring.
- ***Familiar Pet Recognition.*** If Karrine sees the deceased raven, she identifies it as Anu, Vang's familiar pet.
- ***The Kepesh's Intentions.*** If inquired about the Kepesh, Karrine speculates that while the components could be used to build a Vandanamalika, it is not proven. It could be just bandits trying to gain wealth as all countries pay high for tameranium and other rare components. The Kepesh cannot be blamed for these activities; they are only buying rare products as any other country. Given the poverty of their population, it is expected that more individuals may resort to crime to support their families.

If asked where she was at time of the murder. Karrine will point out that she was at the auction, and everyone saw her.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. Karrine will be compelled to publicly oppose Vang, inciting the party to turn against her following the murder. Tenebrizon will try to cause as much discomfort as possible to Vang, so she leaves with Gary. If complications arise for Gary, Tenebrizon will do what is necessary to create opportunities for Gary. If possible, he will boast information about the magic items

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Karrine and the Magocracy possess, as well as her deep care for her children and husband, including details about their names and looks. Tenebrizon will make nagging, arrogant, intimidating, and offensive remarks to attract people's rage and set Karrine's family as a target for their vengeance. He will do this solely to relish in her suffering, as she will have to live in fear of losing her few loved ones.

Hare'Kupec, Kepesh Diplomat

Key Concept. An altruistic historian unwittingly transformed into a fervent disciple of a deity, widely regarded as heretic, whom he sincerely considers benevolent.

Description. Hare'Kupec (NG human **priest**, with Intelligence 16 and History +7), a Kepesh diplomat and cleric of Ba-Ka, excels in studying ancient Kepesh history. He dons the typical vestments of his faith and carries his god's symbols. Given his official position, he wears a wide gold collar and abundant gold jewelry of Kepesh style.

History. Hare'Kupec, originally named Harold, hailed from a village on the Empire's fringes. He was sent to live with relatives in the capital to study history at the Imperial Academy. When the Kemets attacked, he tried to return to his village but found it destroyed.

During the war, having no combat skills and little use as a historian, Harold almost starved. The aftermath was no better, as he found no employment during the reconstruction. Then, an old academy friend offered him the possibility to use his uncommon specialization in the ancient Kepesh language and become a scribe for the recently formed Theocracy of Kepesh. His dedication to this work earned him a Kepesh name, Hare'Kupec, and he later became a priest of Ba-Ka. He now travels the continent as a diplomat, seeking Kepesh artifacts to revive their ancient culture.

Personality and Objectives. Hare'Kupec is a simple and kind man. Despite his scholarly background, he uses common language and offers genuine goodwill to all unless they dishonor his people or Ba-Ka.

He often preaches about Ba-Ka's promise of an eternal afterlife to anyone willing to listen. He accepts any refusal to convert but dislikes criticisms or allegations against his deity and may become vengeful if Ba-Ka is severely offended. As he lacks combat skills, he is likely to employ mercenaries and support them with divine magic to seek revenge.

He yearns to learn more about old Kepesh culture, art, and techniques. He believes that all forms of magic should be taught to everyone and not restricted to the elite.

Role in the Party. Hare'Kupec, desiring ancient Kepesh artwork, has decided to convince Zalir to lend him books and scrolls detailing Kepesh culture. He aims to befriend him to get copies of ancient texts. While he recognizes Zalir's reluctance to share magical texts, Hare'Kupec will be satisfied even by simple cultural and historical works. Thus, he remains optimistic about succeeding despite the tension between the Republic and the Kepesh.

Important information he knows:

- ***Kepesh Poison.*** If shown evidence of Vang's poisoning, Hare'Kupec will deduce that it is desert najas' poison. He will deny any Kepesh involvement, insisting assassins have copied their methods. He knows this poison was created to inhibit wizards from casting spells, causing pain and disrupting concentration.
- ***The Magic Item Heists.*** He believes his Pharaoh is only generously rewarding those that provide them mystical components for their religious rituals, and any Kepesh citizen involvement is unauthorized, and lawbreakers should answer to the Pharaoh. He blames bandits, not his people, arguing that they merely offer legitimate compensations for specific goods like any other country.
- ***The Celestianist Manipulation.*** He suspects that the Celestianist Church has engineered the situation to frame his people. He accuses them of inciting countries to withhold the mystical components necessary for their sacred rituals, subsequently blaming the Kepesh for thefts when they merely offer payment for goods others refuse to sell.

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If asked where he was at time of the murder. Hare'Kupec will claim to have been searching for Zalir in the mansion, hoping for a private discussion about ancient Kepesh art. It is true, as he spent most of his time wandering near Zalir's office, searching for an opportunity to talk.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. Hare'Kupec cannot be one of Tenebrizon's puppets. To avoid directly conflicting with Ba-Ka, Tenebrizon refrains from possessing one of his clerics, which might alert the deity of his plans. He considers Hare'Kupec more valuable as a decoy to deflect suspicion from the Kepesh.

Lady Kyzoko, Yama Diplomat

Key Concept. A spring elf of indomitable will and diplomatic acumen from Yama, both perfectly polite yet fiercely critical of others' improper actions and manners.

Description. Lady Kyzoko (LG spring elf **mage**, with Wisdom and Charisma 16 and Insight +9 and Persuasion +9) is a skillful diplomat of Yama, courtier, and sorcerer hailing from a unique draconic bloodline (tameranium dragon).

She adorns herself in a blend of traditional Yama attire and elvish style. Always at hand is her crimson fan—a seemingly simple accessory that conceals magic-dispelling powers.

Born into an elven family who migrated to Yama, her lineage was honored with nobility for their service to Tenshikin. Being raised in Yama nobility, Kyzoko flourished in the fine arts, diplomacy, history, and politics, rising ranks through dedication.

During the Kemet invasion, Lady Kyzoko mediated between the Heroes of Wharfugee and Yama. Her arguments were crucial in Yama siding with Sedura despite the tempting Kemet offers to Yama. After the war, she married Samurai Kyomoru and assumed the mantle of consul in Fisherman's Wharf. She was one of the minds behind the creation of the Allied Forces.

Personality and Objectives. Lady Kyzoko wholeheartedly commits to her duties and Yama. She praises honor and character, disdaining cowardice and deceit. Her communication is straightforward, but she tempers directness with a pleasant demeanor and impeccable manners. However, she often makes sharp, critical remarks when she sees a lack of manners.

She loves her husband, Samurai Kyomoru, for his honorable character. But her strong will leads her to ignore him when he exhibits jealousy or attempts to control her. She often ignores him in public when he exhibits jealousy or tries to control her, to avoid confrontations.

Lady Kyzoko harbors a desire for motherhood, but her position's pressing responsibilities have delayed it. She is working to create common laws for the Allied Forces, expanding their economic unity.

Role in the Party. The Kepesh heist caused a furor in Yama, as certain historical artifacts have been looted by mercenaries allegedly working for the Kepesh. Consequently, Yama has expelled all Kepesh. Kyzoko is under pressure to persuade the Republic to do the same, but their principles of freedom are making it hard to convince the parliament's majority. Kyzoko seeks to rally influential individuals from the Republic to Yama's cause as it could gain Yama's willingness to accept the Allied Force's new laws and policies. She wants to convince Zalir, who has significant influence in the Republic, and also talk with other faction diplomats, reiterating Yama's resentments against the Kepesh for stealing sacred Yama artifacts and their heinous practices of human sacrifices.

If asked where she was at time of the murder. Kyzoko will assert that she was at the auction, a fact witnessed by everyone present.

If Vang's hairpin is shown to Kyzoko. She can recognize it, as similar magic items are not rare in Yama. Ninjas and nobles use them to conceal secrets and valuables. She will discern how to activate it if she can examine the item.

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If Possessed by Tenebrizon. He will manipulate Kyzoko to publicly accuse the Kepesh, escalating tensions at the party. She will question the Republic's acceptance of Kepesh on their territory and insinuate that Zalir is hiding something. If Gary struggles to isolate Vang, Tenebrizon will exploit Kyzoko's influence to cause a diversion and facilitate Gary's task.

Tenebrizon will make Kyzoko flirt with other men to incite Kyomoru's jealousy. She will declare that her work surpasses her marital duties and that she is destined to outlive him by several centuries, so someone like Admöerio would fit her better. Tenebrizon aims to provoke Kyomoru sufficiently to cause a lasting rift in their marriage, purely for the sadistic pleasure of watching her suffer. As a bonus, he will make her look vain and power-hungry to weaken the Yama claims against the Kepesh in front of all.

Magic item:
Lady Kyzoko's Fan of the Sun Wyrm
Wondrous item, very rare *(requires attunement)*

Up to three times per day, the user can swing this fan to cast *dispel magic*, using its Charisma as its spellcasting ability plus its proficiency bonus. It has advantage on any roll to end spells from the 4th level or above when using it this way.

This fan can also act as a spell focus for wizards and sorcerers.

Tony, the Errand Boy
(Outside the Mansion)

Key Concept. A young orphan cared for by the city's cleric, who waders the city looking for small jobs to earn coins and satiate his fondness for sweets.

Description. Tony (LG human **commoner**) is a young, smart boy often seen wandering Heroes Rise streets. Wearing simple clothes, he carries a bag over his shoulder filled with fruits, sweets, toys, a copy of the Celestianist scriptures, and the copper coins he could muster at the time. The characters may find Tony wandering outside the mansion, playing alone, or eating something.

History. Born shortly after the invasion, Tony was abandoned by his parents and then taken care of at the Heroes Rise temple. Despite this, Tony is a cheerful boy, owing much of his positivity to his father figure, Razun, a cleric of Tamera. Razun raised him almost as his child, imparting the Celestianist principles and the basics of reading and writing. Thanks to the relative safety of Heroes Rise, Tony can explore the city freely, which occasionally causes Razun consternation when he returns late. Outside of that, the boy gives the cleric no trouble.

Personality and Objectives. Tony is courageous and simple-minded; his greatest pleasure is getting sweets and toys. Clever, he earns his keep by taking up odd jobs around the city. However, he has a keen sense of danger and will quickly retreat to the temple's safety if he feels threatened.

Role in the Adventure. A mysterious figure, cloaked in purple robes, offered Tony a gold coin to deliver a letter to Gary. Despite the stranger's ominous aura, the allure of a gold piece presented in broad daylight proved too tempting to resist. Having accomplished the task, Tony now waits near the mansion, hoping to offer his services to Gary in exchange for an extra gold coin, as he knows they can buy many sweets.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. As an uninvited guest and a character of no interest to Tenebrizon, Tony cannot be one of the possessed individuals.

Engaging with PCs. If the party questions Tony about what he is doing outside so late, he will say that he is waiting for someone. If explicitly asked about Gary, Tony can be persuaded to reveal that he delivered him a letter. He can tell he succumbed to curiosity and glanced at the letter if given coins or sweets. He does not remember much, but he saw the name "Gary" and something about "meeting in the city" and "guiding you to the house's basement.

If asked about Vang, he vaguely recalls the name in the letter but cannot provide context.

Patrick Kang (Order #42143378)

Flevar, the Thief
(Hidden on the Mansion Roof)

Key Concept. A naive and well-intentioned hero wanna-be who is determined to become a rogue despite his lack of skill. He seeks to join an adventuring party by demonstrating his proficiency by stealing treasures.

Description. Flevar (CG human **spy**, with Strength 14, Wisdom 7, Athletics +4, Insight +0, and Perception +2) dresses according to his perception of what a seasoned rogue adventurer wears. Underneath the clichéd guise, Flevar is a young man of no more than 23, with fair features, blond hair, and honey-hued eyes.

History. Flevar's childhood dream was becoming an adventurer, fueled by the tales of heroic deeds of the Kemet Invasion. His pursuit led him to Avelum's Academy of Magic, the Tamera's Clerical Order, and the Military Outpost, but despite his enthusiasm and determination, his lack of aptitude resulted in him failing the entrance exams for all three. His lack of formal training and distinct skills made it difficult for him to find an adventuring group willing to take him in.

Upon learning of a party needing a stealthy member, Flevar resolved to prove his worth. He trained independently, focusing on improving his stealth and agility. Then, aiming to demonstrate his newly honed skills, he decided to heist Zalir's mansion and steal valuable items to show his abilities.

Personality and Objectives. Flevar is a passionate dreamer who yearns to become a hero. While he's somewhat clumsy and lacks common sense, he has a good heart and is quick to help those in need, even if he risks his safety. Despite his good intentions, he is impulsive and naive, living day by day without a life plan.

When not trying to join an adventuring party, Flevar works at the docks, where he has made numerous friends.

Goal at the Party. Flevar aims to impress the adventuring party he wishes to join by presenting them with items stolen from the great Zalir. His strategy for avoiding imprisonment is simplistic: he intends to return the stolen goods to Zalir after showing them, convinced that the hero will understand his motives and forgive his actions. If Flevar indeed returns the stolen items, Zalir, aware of his good standing among the dock workers, will likely let the matter slide while delivering a stern reprimand.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. Tenebrizon cannot possess Flevar, as the dragon is unaware of his presence.

Engaging with PCs. If the characters manage to capture Flevar or convince him to talk, he reveals his intentions:

- Stealing Zalir's artworks to demonstrate his rogue abilities to join an adventuring party. He insists he intended to return the stolen items.
- If questioned further, Flevar recalls overhearing a conversation between a man and a woman while he was on the roof. He remembers a flirtatious exchange, the woman addressing the man as Gary, and some abruptly muffled sounds. He can confirm Gary's voice if presented to it.

Secondary NPCs

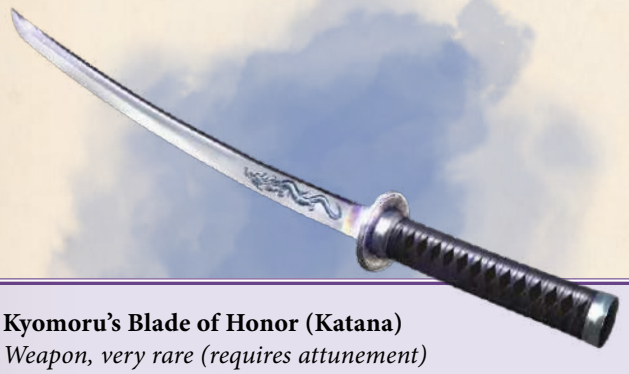
Samurai Kyomoru, Yama Guard

Key Concept. An honorable yet old-fashioned samurai, grappling with his wife's independent spirit while bound by his love, duty, and code of honor.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Description. Kyomoru (LG human **gladiator**) proudly serves as a Chiyori, an elite samurai of Yama. Married to Lady Kyzoko, he deeply loves his wife. Despite his traditional values occasionally clashing with her independent will, he invariably agrees to her decisions. This honor-bound samurai commands respect across his homeland. His one weakness, however, is his deep-seated jealousy of his wife, which occasionally leads him to lose his composure.

Kyomoru always accompanies his wife as a guard on her diplomatic duties. He is always with his treasured katana, a weapon rumored to possess the power to ward against and even reflect spells.



Kyomoru's Blade of Honor (Katana)
Weapon, very rare (requires attunement)

Forged from tameranium, this katana gleams with a subtle magic aura. While wielding it, the blade provides a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls.

Magic Deflection. As a reaction, when targeted by a spell attack, the wielder can attempt to deflect it using this katana by making an attack roll. If the roll equals or exceeds the spell attack roll, the spell has no effect on the wielder. This decision can be made after the spell attack roll. If the attack roll exceeds the spell attack roll by 10 or more, the spell is reflected back at the caster.

Attunement. The katana attunes only to those it considers honorable. The GM has the final say in this judgment, typically influenced by Yama ethics, which values honesty, justice, courage, benevolence, respect, and loyalty.

During the Party. Kyomoru maintains a silent vigil, closely guarding Lady Kyzoko. He reserves his words for when directly addressed or when someone displays ill manners or impoliteness in the presence of his wife, responding with rude, judgmental remarks.

If asked where she was at time of the murder. Kyomoru will point to the fact that he was at the auction and everyone saw him.

If possessed by Tenebrizon. Tenebrizon seeks to sow discord during the party, instigating Lady Kyzoko to accuse the Kepesh publicly. The samurai will provocatively comment about the Kepesh, challenging Zalir's honor for inviting a Kepesh priest. If Gary struggles to isolate Vang, Tenebrizon will create a diversion, potentially initiating a duel or fight to grant Gary an opportunity. He will attempt to manipulate Kyzoko into requesting private discussions with guests, helping Gary.

Tenebrizon, through Kyomoru, will act excessively possessive of Kyzoko throughout the event, aiming to ignite her anger. After the event, he plans to murder Kyzoko and abandon Kyomoru's body to possess another, leaving the samurai devastated by the loss of his wife and honor, as he will be blamed for her death. If the characters become acquaintances with Kyzoko, she may discreetly invite them for tea after the event—an opportunity that could save her life and reveal Kyomoru's possession.

Ket'Atal, Kepesh Guard

Key Concept. A mercenary driven by vengeance against the Kemet, Ket'Atal joined the Kepesh army for stability and the chance to take revenge.

Description. Ket'Atal (NE human **gladiator**) serves as a devout guard, donned in the traditional clothes of the Kepesh soldiers. Accustomed to protecting priests, he adheres strictly to his role, refraining from interfering in religious affairs. He is a man of few words, speaking only when directly addressed. Constantly vigilant, he only strays from Hare'Kupec's side if instructed.

Having once been a mercenary, Ket'Atal pledged his allegiance to the Kepesh, seeking stability after his mercenary company suffered heavy losses in an ambush by Kemet forces. This tragic event, which claimed his brother's life, sparked a burning hatred in him for the Kemet. His desire for vengeance resonated with the Kepesh, leading him to embrace the Ba'Ka faith.

During the Party. Ket'Atal will intervene only if Hare'Kupec's safety is threatened or if he is asked a direct question. Feeling out of place due to his crude manner of speech in what he perceives as an overly wealthy setting, Ket'Atal keeps his responses brief. he will strive to keep his responses brief.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Joya, Maid *(and Sedura's Spy)*

Key Concept. A child prodigy raised by an international criminal syndicate to be a super-spy. Once freed by the heroes of the Republic, she devoted her newfound freedom to serving those who saved her.

Description. Joya (LN human **assassin**) possesses a blend of breathtaking beauty and almost supernatural wits, honed from a tender age as a Third Eye operative. She was apprehended by Sedura and Avelum during her assassination attempt against the Prime Minister. Uncovering her past and the psychological manipulation she had endured since infancy, they took her under their wing.

Avelum focused on nullifying the mental spells imposed on her, while Sedura gave her love and instilled in her the principles of the Republic, teaching Joya to appreciate life's simple pleasures. Previously devoid of a family, she began to regard Sedura as a motherly figure. Her deep loyalty extends to Avelum and the Republic, nursing a hatred for the Third Eye.

In her current disguise, she portrays a shy young girl obsessed with cleanliness. However, her true persona is a headstrong, reserved woman with a secret fondness for girly things she never had, which is always concealed beneath her professional demeanor and top-tier spy training.

During the Party. Joya has been tasked with disguising herself as a maid and searching for the lost Republic documents. Her mission entails eavesdropping on conversations and observing Empire diplomats to locate the documents.

She is carrying a copy of Zalir's Master Key to the Mansion. She will maintain her maid's guise when addressed unless Zalir specifically introduces an ally and discloses her true identity.

If asked where she was at time of the murder. She will assert that she was cleaning the upper chambers for the guests' post-party enjoyment and later reported back to Zalir.

In truth, she was investigating the possessions of the Imperial diplomats for clues related to the documents. After her search, she returned the key to Zalir at his office, where she was until the murder was discovered.

Admöerio Shosshan, Noble Art Dealer

Key Concept. An elf noble who struggles to understand social cues and personal boundaries but excels in interpreting art.

Description. Admöerio (CG summer elf **noble**, who adds twice his proficiency and has advantage on all art-related rolls) is one of the Republic's greatest art experts. Zalir invited

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Admöerio, requesting his expertise to be the event's auctioneer. As an art collector himself, Admöerio is committed to the success of the auction, with several of his own pieces on the auction block.

Admöerio exudes grace and elegance, dressed in opulent noble attire. His bold, confident, and intrusive nature often blinds him to sociability rules and personal space. Yet he has a remarkable understanding of art, identifying artists by their strokes and perceiving even the artists' emotions by looking at their works. Paintings are his true passion, though he appreciates other art forms as well, particularly music.

During the Party. Admöerio's focus is conducting a successful auction. He has little interest in politics and tends to avoid such topics. If engaged in conversation about art, he can talk passionately for hours.

Upon the discovery of the murder, Admöerio can provide a list of attendees who were in the auction room. This list reveals that only Gary Landem, Karrine, Hare'Kupec, Joia, Joirin, Karrine, Hare'Kupec, Vang, and Zalir were absent during the murder.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. Admöerio encourages paranoia in the guests, whispering secretive conspiracy theories concerning stolen Republic documents and implicating Zalir. Although Tenebrizon maintains a polite facade around Zalir, he quietly stirs suspicion against him, encouraging an investigation into Zalir's affairs.

If Gary requires assistance, Admöerio uses his role as auctioneer to call attention or gather a crowd, creating space for Gary.

As the event concludes, Tenebrizon intends to portray Admöerio as having succumbed to insanity and push him to ablaze the artworks and Zalir's mansion while shouting wild conspiracies involving Zalir. Tenebrizon then plans to abandon Admöerio's body for another host. The goal is a grand spectacle of the art-loving elf surrounded by burning masterpieces, with the crowd stunned at this madness. Tenebrizon intends to ruin Admöerio's reputation, destroying what he cherishes most: the artworks.

Master Armur Jasperin, Envoy from Ahimoth

Key Concept. A gnome with the appearance of a dwarf whose good humor conceals his cunning. Not only the successful leader of Ahimot city but also covertly a lord within the criminal organization Third Eye.

Description. Master Armur (LE gnome [Dwarf?] **assassin**) is the Lord Mayor of Ahimoth city. Despite his gnomish heritage, he bears an uncanny resemblance to a dwarf—an amusing quirk he often jests about. However, beneath this pleasant facade, Master Armur is a high-ranking individual within the Third Eye, an organization of spies, assassins, and organized criminals.

Master Armur's gruff, dwarf-like persona brings levity to most situations. He pretends offense when others confuse his ancestry, and his humor often hinges on self-deprecating quips like, *"Oh, I know what I need right now! A good beer! Oh, no, no, no. I forgot I'm a gnome, not a dwarf. Bring me some strawberry juice, please?"* Despite this endearing playacting, Master Armur is a cunning statesman and criminal lord, striving to secure Ahimoth's prosperity at any cost.

During the Party. Master Armur, a Third Eye operative, is sent to this gathering because he knew Zalir from exchanging letters and resources during the Kemet Invasion. He will pose as an art buyer while working on his secret agenda.

The Third Eye is aware of the Republic's missing secret documents and suspects that someone at this party possesses them. Master Armur is tasked with monitoring the situation. If an opportunity presents itself, he must covertly reproduce the documents for the Third Eye using his special magic ring.

Master Armur's Ring of Copying
Ring, uncommon (requires attunement)

This ring can store a copy of up to 500 pages worth of information once per day, which it obtains from any document it touches. Its activation is visually undetectable and subtle, requiring only a mental command from the owner. If it exceeds its limit, older copies are lost. When touched to blank pages, it transfers its stored data, effectively emptying its contents. The only means to access or read the stored information is through this transference process. It does not copy any magical propriety of the original text.

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If Possessed by Tenebrizon. Armur will exploit his relationship with Zalir to create opportunities for Gary. If Zalir or his allies uncover the documents concerning Sedura, Armur will use his connection with Zalir to secretly duplicate these documents using his magic ring. He will deliver the copy to Lik, the Ironhand Major, and attempt to frame Zalir for Vang's murder, using the documents to escalate tensions between the Empire and the Republic.

Tenebrizon also intends to divulge Third Eye's secrets and expose their operatives in the Ahimoth region, consequently demolishing Armur's standing within the organization and undoing his efforts to uplift the city he cherishes.

Bishop Razun, Celestianist Envoy

Key Concept. A meticulously groomed cleric of Tamera, entirely dedicated to the goddess' teachings and committed to the welfare of the inhabitants of Heroes Rise.

Description. Bishop Razun (LG human, see Appendix A) is always impeccably dressed in his clerical robes, donning a hat that signifies his bishop status. Razun always maintains his vestments in a flawless state.

Razun presides over the Celestianist temple in the city of Heroes Rise. His contributions during the Kemet Invasion led to his appointment as the city's bishop. Fully committed to Tamera's teachings, Razun excels in spells related to healing and order. He brings this same discipline to the city's council, where he seeks to instill structure and organization in Heroes Rise. He is also the founder of the city's orphanage and has personally cared for many children, including Tony, whom he regards as his child.

During the Party. Razun aims to mediate the tension between the Empire's diplomatic corps and Zalir's Republic delegation. Razun's utmost priority is preventing a war and halting the Kepesh's activities, which he deems heinous. He is openly antagonistic towards the Kepesh, whom he views as heretical, dangerous, chaotic, and unreliable, but he tactfully avoids confrontation.

After the Murder. Razun assists in the investigation, initially suspecting the Kepesh. However, as a moral man, he is willing to accept the truths that the evidence reveals.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. Razun uses his respected status to sow mistrust among the factions. He fosters paranoia, insinuating that Zalir harbors nefarious intentions for the evening. Later, he will accuse Zalir of orchestrating the murder. After the event, Tenebrizon, while possessing Razun, plans to ignite the orphanage before abandoning the bishop's body, aiming to inflict emotional torment on Razun when he realizes the deaths of innocents due to his weakness. The party may intercept this tragedy if they grow suspicious of Razun or Tony asks for help. Alternatively, one or more PCs might receive a divine vision from a radiant woman instructing them to rescue the orphanage's children (as they are on Tamera's sacred ground).

Marianna Lisprolis, Taisan Fields Noble

Key Concept. An introverted noble elf wizard with a cold demeanor. In truth, she is a shy, kind-hearted individual who struggles with social engagement. She uses her noble obligations as a pretext to help others.

Description. Marianna Lisprolis (LG elf **archmage**, with elven traits) is a leading figure of House Lisprolis, an ancient lineage of autumn elf mages that recently relocated to the Magocracy. House Lisprolis holds significant influence within the Mage Towers Council, and it has appointed Marianna to supervise research in the Taisan Fields, an area rich in magical ruins.

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Marianna carries herself with elegance and pride, often perceived as indifference or cold-heartedness. The enormous pressure and expectations from her family demanded her immersion in studies throughout her youth, hindering the development of her social skills. Beneath her facade of superiority lies a gentle, timid soul, concealing her insecurities behind the veil of her nobility. Marianna's good deeds are frequently masked by her behavior; she often tries to help but acts arrogantly and pridefully on the exterior, attempting to protect herself from rejection and shame.

During the Party. Marianna attends the party to sell ancient art pieces unearthed in the Taisan Fields to someone capable of properly caring for and restoring them. Additionally, she hopes to ally with Karrine, viewing her as valuable in navigating the Mage Tower's Council's politics. Given Karrine's dislike for Vang, Marianna openly displays her distaste for Vang in Karrine's presence, which may sound arrogant.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. Marianna will cast suspicion on Karrine rather than openly confront Vang. False rumors concerning Karrine and her conflict with Vang, including allegations of Karrine stealing Vang's magic ring, will be disseminated. Tenebrizon may use Marianna's magical prowess to aid Gary, maintaining a low profile to avoid suspicion.

After the event, Tenebrizon plans to murder Marianna and implicate Karrine, destroying House Lisprolis and leading Karrine to prison, away from her family. He will instigate heated arguments with Karrine, and then during the night, she will go to Karrine's room to discuss a message from the Mage's Council. Tenebrizon will make Marianna stab herself, then touch Karrine and possess her, taking the body away from the manor and later abandoning it somewhere in the city to be found. The characters may intervene if they provide security for Zalir's mansion or are present during the night. Clues could be provided during the event, or Karrine might confide in the characters about Marianna's odd behavior, requesting their assistance in determining the cause.

Major Lik, Ironhand Emissary

Key Concept. A staunchly loyal officer in the Imperial military, Major Lik believes in the power of hierarchy and strength to stave off societal collapse into chaos and barbarism.

Description. Major Lik (LE human, **gladiator**, has advantage against any charm or mental effect) is a distinguished officer of the Empire. He governs the Turtlepoint Peninsula, commands the Imperial Turtle Ship, and defends the Empire's coast in the Central Seas.

He witnessed the best and worst of the Empire. Lik exhibits little empathy or mercy, valuing hierarchy, efficiency, and diligence above all. Despite receiving aid from the

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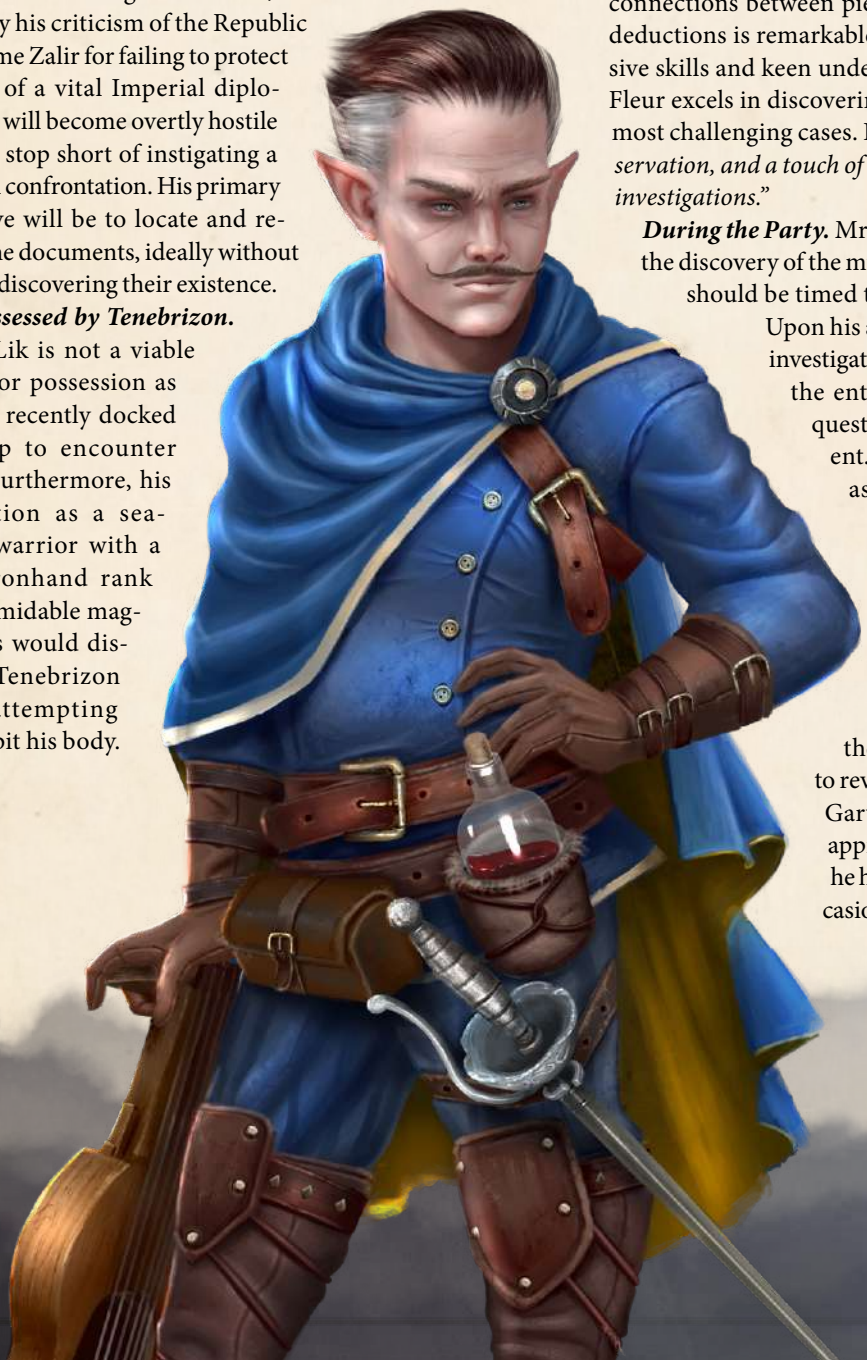
heroes during the Kemet Invasion, he views all who formed the Republic as traitors. He retains a warrior respect for the heroes, especially Sedura, but now doesn't trust any of them, seeing the Republic as dangerous, particularly its Prime Minister Tellatius.

During the Party. Major Lik's singular aim at the party is to ensure the safe extraction of Vang and the documents she carries. While he knows her status as a spy, he remains ignorant of the documents' contents, only knowing that Emperor Baleroth intends to use them against the Republic.

Lik will be cautious around all attendees, particularly those from the Republic, and will urge Vang not to stray from his sight. However, Vang will ignore his instructions because she doesn't fall under his chain of command. He reluctantly allows Vang to leave with Gary but will grow increasingly concerned as she fails to return. He will then undertake a search of the mansion, ultimately discovering Vang's lifeless body in the ballroom.

Upon discovering the murder, Lik will intensify his criticism of the Republic and blame Zalir for failing to protect the life of a vital Imperial diplomat. He will become overtly hostile but will stop short of instigating a physical confrontation. His primary objective will be to locate and retrieve the documents, ideally without anyone discovering their existence.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. Major Lik is not a viable target for possession as he only recently docked his ship to encounter Vang. Furthermore, his reputation as a seasoned warrior with a high Ironhand rank and formidable magic items would dissuade Tenebrizon from attempting to inhabit his body.



Mr. Fleur Vonobloom, Republic Detective
(Not Initially at the Party)

Key Concept. A famed gnome detective, Mr. Fleur is a methodic gentleman with acute attention to detail, talent for coaxing the truth from individuals, and prowess in deductive reasoning, enabling him to unravel even the most intricate cases.

Description. Mr. Fleur (LG gnome **assassin**, with advantage on all Insight, Investigation, and Perception checks) enjoys a reputation as one of Tanares' most respected detectives and maintains personal relationships with Zalir and Avelum. The middle-aged gnome is distinguished by his slick, slightly curled mustache and neatly groomed, slicked-back hair. His attire is refined, favoring shades of blue or black.

Renowned for his impeccable attention to detail, Mr. Fleur is both methodical and a perfectionist. His ability to draw connections between pieces of evidence and make precise deductions is remarkable. Further bolstered by his persuasive skills and keen understanding of human behavior, Mr. Fleur excels in discovering crucial information to solve the most challenging cases. He frequently asserts, *"Method, observation, and a touch of brainwork are essential to successful investigations."*

During the Party. Mr. Fleur will appear at the party after the discovery of the murder. His arrival at Zalir's Mansion should be timed to suit the pacing of the adventure. Upon his arrival, Mr. Fleur will meticulously investigate the crime scene and, subsequently, the entirety of the mansion. He will request private interviews with each present. His line of questioning will begin, asking about each person's identity and reason for attending the event before progressing to a blend of innocuous and important inquiries to establish the truth of what happened.

Ultimately, Mr. Fleur will analyze the evidence collected by the characters, using his deductions to reveal Gary as the murderer. However, Gary will try to escape before he can be apprehended and will likely succeed as he has magic items prepared and the occasional help of Tenebrizon, if necessary.

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Jenny, Zalir's Adopted Daughter *(Not at the Party)*

Key Concept. Jenny is a young mage who, as an orphan of war, was adopted and spoiled by Zalir. Despite her deep affection for him, she fears falling short of the expectations that come with being the daughter of such a prominent figure.

Description. Jenny is not present at the event; Zalir, currently investigating Vang and the lost documents, has deemed the situation too dangerous to involve her. Instead, she is kept in the safe company of Sara at the local tavern. Sara, a trusted friend of Zalir and a revered hero of the Kemet Invasion, serves as a reliable guardian.

Jenny (LG human **mage**, with Dexterity and Charisma 16, Insight +4, and Persuasion +6, with access to only the 4th level spells) harbors a love for roses, animals, and stories of Zalir's past exploits. Adopted by Zalir at a tender age following the conclusion of the Kemet Invasion, she takes her wizardly studies and social standing as Zalir's daughter with seriousness. Zalir, a noble and war hero of the Republic, inspires Jenny to strive to be the model daughter to not tarnish his reputation. Zalir, for his part, encourages her to live a life of happiness above all else. Although he has always spoiled her, Jenny's gratitude for her adoption is tinged with a sense of inadequacy and obligation. She continuously strives to prove herself a worthy daughter, all the while nursing anxiety that she might not be enough, as she lacks the blood ties that would make her Zalir's true child.

Jenny's Spell List: Jenny's magical abilities diverge from those typically found in a mage NPC. Her repertoire is limited to spells up to the 4th level, as follows:

Cantrips (at will): *light, mending, mage hand, prestidigitation*
1st Level (4 slots): *detect magic, mage armor, magic missile, shield*
2nd Level (3 slots): *detect thoughts, mirror image, see invisibility*
3rd Level (3 slots): *counterspell, dispel magic, tongues*
4th Level (2 slots): *fabricate, stoneskin*

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The Murder

Gary will assassinate Vang at the Ballroom *(location 2 of the Mansion)*. You must read that location section to understand better what happened and what the characters will find.

The murder occurs minutes after Admöerio and Zalir gather everyone for the auction in the Dining Room. While Zalir, Admöerio, or Joirin may persuade the characters to attend, their presence at the auction is not mandatory. However, remember that the absence of any character might cast suspicion upon them in the subsequent investigation, which might bring interesting consequences to their choices.

The auction will feature various art pieces, attracting bids of varied amounts from the guests. At this point, Major Lik will excuse himself to seek out Vang, concerned by her prolonged absence. After an extensive search, he discovers Vang's lifeless body in the Ballroom, inciting a panic as he calls for the guards and announces the murder.

Outlined below is a chronological sequence of Gary's actions leading up to the murder:

- Upon his arrival at the party, Gary swaps Joirin's Master Key with a counterfeit, using his skillful pickpocketing.
- He converses with Vang and Joia for a few minutes before excusing himself to fetch wine from the kitchen.
- In the bathroom, he covertly uses his magical disguise item to morph into Vang's likeness before ascending to the second floor, taking care to avoid the real Vang.
- He uses the stolen Master Key to enter Vang's room and retrieve the documents hidden in the magic hairpin.
- Descending to the first floor, he transforms into Joirin in the bathroom and then sneaks into Zalir's office to plant the documents on Zalir's desk.
- Upon leaving, he heads towards the kitchen to fetch wine. However, when he sees Joirin and Zalir approaching, he quickly enters the bathroom to avoid being caught. To his surprise, Zalir and Joirin stop talking in front of the door while Zalir waits to use the bathroom.
- In the bathroom, he reverts to his original form, unsure of who Zalir and Joirin might have encountered on their way. Then, he exits the bathroom and, in his own form, is compelled to go to the kitchen to procure a bottle of wine. He cannot afford much delay, as he needs to get Vang away from the party before the auction begins, and she joins it.
- On his way back to the hall, he discreetly poisons one of the wine glasses with a Kepesh-developed poison that disrupts a spellcaster's concentration.
- Gary rejoins Vang in the Inner Hall, explaining his lengthy absence by claiming he visited the bathroom. Then, he went to the kitchen to find an excellent wine for her.
- He invites Vang to the Ballroom for a private conversation, and they enter the large, empty room.
- He stabs her as the poison takes effect. In response, she grabs and rips his purse of gold.
- Vang's familiar pet, Anu, tries to fetch help, but the door is closed, and Gary kills it with a necrotic redeemer ray.
- Gary grabs the coins and the remains of the bag, opens one of the windows and throws it at the roses in the garden, then he closes the window.
- Assuming Hare'Kupec's form, he exits the room.
- He proceeds to Joirin's bedroom, places the dagger on the chest near the bed, and then enters the guest bathroom once again.
- He waits in the bathroom for the discovery of the murder before leaving to merge with the crowd.

If Gary's plan encounters unforeseen obstacles, he will employ his magic items to adhere as closely as possible to this original course. Should Gary struggle with any part of his scheme, you can use Tenebrizon's possessed guests for assistance.

If Gary is asked where he was, he will say that an upset stomach made him excuse himself to the bathroom, and he left Vang near the stairs where he last saw her.

Following the murder, Gary will remain on the scene, sowing confusion and directing suspicion towards Hare'Kupec, Zalir, or anyone else he can frame. If Gary's culpability seems imminent, he will use his *hat of disguise* to assume another identity, or the *potion of invisibility* or even the *gem of penumbral movement* to elude capture. If all else fails and he is apprehended, the characters can extract valuable information from him (refer to the chapter's ending).

The Investigation

Following Major Lik's declaration of the murder, the auction will cease abruptly as everyone rushes to the scene. The Ballroom quickly fills with people, as accusations and speculations start to fly.

To spark the characters' interest in investigating the murder, you can employ the following hooks:

- ***If Zalir hired the characters as guards.*** he will request their help in the investigation. He hopes to identify the murderer and quell the escalating political tension.
- ***If characters have shown goodwill towards the Empire.*** Major Lik might seek them, sharing details about the lost document and Vang's importance and request their help in recovering it and finding the culprit (he does not know where Vang was safeguarding it).
- ***If the characters clearly align with the Republic.*** Joya may reveal her status as a Sedura agent and ask for their help in solving the murder and locating the documents before the Empire does.
- ***If the characters had positive interaction with Yama diplomats.*** Lady Kyzoko may ask them to investigate. She suspects the Kepesh and believes they are involved somehow.
- Marianna Lisprolis might offer gold to anyone who can determine the murderer or gather significant evidence. Her gesture may draw criticism from those who perceive her as trivializing Vang's death and flaunting her wealth.
- The characters may choose to help for other reasons, such

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as a sense of justice or heroism. You may also devise additional hooks based on their personal motivations.

As the characters embark on their investigation, keep in mind that all NPCs will remain present, with everyone observing each other warily. Even the characters are not exempt from suspicion.

Use the contents of this chapter, including the "The Party", "Gary, the Murderer", and "Guests and Hosts" sections to guide the investigation as the characters explore different rooms of the mansion and interact with various individuals.

Remember, the primary clues that may reveal Gary as the culprit are the blackened gold coin, the thief Flevar's testimony, and the evidence of poisoning. All other clues are circumstantial and may lead to intriguing speculation and interaction with the NPCs. Even uncovering a single primary clue will solidify Gary's guilt, but gathering multiple concrete proofs may earn Mr. Fleur's commendation and possibly an offer to become detectives or agents for the Republic.

Clues Leading to Gary Landen

- ***Blackened Gold Coin.*** A blackened gold coin, darkened due to a redeemer consuming the gold with its powers, is found in Vang's hand. Characters can compile a list of redeemers present at the event who lack alibis for the murder and discover that Gary was the only redeemer not in view when the murder occurred. Gary's thorn gold purse can be found in the garden near the ballroom window, and witnesses can confirm they saw Gary with a similar bag.
- ***Thief's Testimony.*** A thief named Flevar, who was attempting to steal art pieces from the event, was on the roof when the murder occurred. He overheard Gary's conversation with Vang, including her uttering Gary's name. If captured and convinced to talk, Flevar can provide this information. He can only be sure the voice is from Gary if he hears his voice again for confirmation, but he is sure the assailed woman (Vang) said his name in her conversation.
- ***The Poisoning.*** Traces of poison are found on Vang's body. She was poisoned before being stabbed, which disrupted her concentration for spell casting. Two glasses and a rose on the ground at the scene imply that the murderer seduced Vang into drinking the poisoned wine. Interviews with witnesses and staff reveal that Gary, known for his charm, was flirting with Vang at the party and retrieved two glasses of wine from the kitchen around the time of the murder.

Clues Leading to Other NPCs or Secondary Clues

- ***Ancient Kepesh Poison.*** The characters may discover that the poison used on Vang was a type utilized by the Kepesh in ancient times and only recently re-emerged with the rise of the new Kepesh Kingdom. This may initially lead them to suspect Hare'Kupec. In reality, Gary purposely used this poison to direct suspicion towards the innocent Kepesh diplomat to stir greater chaos and bid time for himself.
- ***Strength and Position of the Stabs.*** An examination of Vang's body reveals she was stabbed multiple times by a tall but not particularly strong individual. This evidence could potentially reduce suspicion towards Karrine, who is shorter than Vang and not skilled with weapons.
- ***Vang's Bird Familiar Pet.*** Vang's familiar pet, a bird found dead behind one of the doors, attempted to flee and seek help but was killed by Gary's necrotic energy ray. This suggests the killer possessed magical powers or items, further implicating Hare'Kupec, known for necromancy. However, all redeemers, including Gary, can cast necrotic energy rays.
- ***Vang's Missing Ring.*** Vang's stolen magical ring is discovered missing if the characters converse with Major Lik, the Empire's Envoy. The ring, desired by Karrine and the center of a past conflict, is actually a *ring of spell turning* - a fact known only to Vang and Karrine. The ring is hidden in Zalir's office along with the stolen Republic documents, planted by Gary to frame the noble. Until found, the ring's absence can be used against Karrine.
- ***Republic Stolen Documents.*** Vang had documents to deliver to Emperor Baleroth that were concealed in her room. Gary stole a master key from Joirin, the butler, to access the room and steal the documents, later planting them in Zalir's office to frame him. Joirin's missing key may still incriminate Zalir.
- ***Absentees During the Murder.*** To find out who was absent at the time of the murder, characters need to acquire a guest list from Admöerio or inquire with different NPCs about who they saw at the party just minutes before the murder. The following people were not present:
  - **Zalir:** The host and noble.
  - **Vang:** The victim and a spy in the Empire's diplomatic corps.
  - **Karrine:** The Magocracy envoy and long ex-adventuring partner of Vang.
  - **Hare'Kupec:** The Kepesh Diplomat.
  - **Joirin:** Zalir's Butler.
  - **Gary Landen:** The flashy nobleman, who is actually Vang's murderer.
  - **Joya:** Zalir's maid and secretly a spy for Sedura.

Zalir

Vang

Karrine

Hare'Kupec

Joirin

Gary Landen

Joya

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Any other guest that is asked where he was during the murder time will say that it was in the auction room with everyone else and point to others sitting close to them as proof of its alibi.

Other Important Information the Characters May Acquire

- ***Gary's Mysterious Contractor.*** The characters might learn from a witness that Gary was handed a letter at the onset of the event. Investigating further, they could locate the errand boy who was paid a gold piece by a man clad in strange purple robes to deliver the letter to Gary. This could suggest to the characters that there's a puppeteer pulling the strings behind the murder.
- ***Gary's Hideout in Heroes Rise.*** After committing the murder, Gary retreated to a hideout in the city, where he planned to lay low before making his escape to the Empire. There are three potential ways for the characters to discover the existence of this hideout, but none will provide its exact location:
  - **The Errand Boy:** The boy couldn't resist a peek at the letter he was delivering to Gary. He can't recall all the specifics, but remembers that it instructed Gary to retreat to a "house's basement" once the job was completed. He doesn't know which house, but remembers the letter mentioning the name Vang.
  - **Joya:** This Republic Spy initiated a covert operation to close all city gates in tandem with a request for aid from the city guards. After receiving confirmation that no one has left the city, she is confident that Gary remains hidden somewhere within Heroes Rise.
  - **Tracking Gary:** In the wake of Gary's departure from the mansion, the characters can discover his boot size from a footprint in the garden. They can attempt to follow these tracks, leading them towards the residential area of the city, which suggests Gary's probable hideout. However, the footprints are inconsistent, preventing them from pinpointing the exact house.
- ***A Guest's Unusual Behavior.*** Tenebrizon is controlling one of the guests at the party. The adventurers may notice this person's strange conduct. At this stage, they lack the necessary evidence to identify Tenebrizon, but they could surmise a possession or someone impersonating the possessed guest. Tenebrizon will strive to avoid arousing suspicion that he's controlling his current host on the material plane.
- ***Sedura's Assassination Plot Against Emperor Baleroth.*** The stolen documents from the Republic detail a sophisticated assassination plan against the Empire's leader, crafted by Sedura herself. Zalir is aware that Sedura was hesitant to resort to such drastic measures. However, it was a contingency in case the Emperor made a power play that threatened to ignite a war. Should this plan—bearing Sedura's handwriting on several pages—be revealed, it could be exploited as potent propaganda against the Republic.

Gary's Escape

Upon discovering that the players are closing in on proof of his guilt, or if Mr. Fleur uncovers his treachery, Gary will initiate his escape plan, employing one of three methods to ensure his flight from justice.

- ***Potion of Invisibility.*** Concealed amongst his possessions, Gary carries a *potion of invisibility*. He can consume it surreptitiously when unobserved, and then make a stealthy exit from the mansion. To ensure his escape remains untraceable, he will don the *hat of disguise* as a secondary precaution. This represents his primary escape strategy.
- ***Hat of Disguise.*** By assuming the form of another, Gary can attempt to slip out of the mansion unnoticed amidst the chaos. Given the strict prohibition against guests leaving the premises, this is his least favored escape method.
- ***Gem of Penumbral Movement.*** In the event of extreme jeopardy, Gary can shatter the gem gifted to him by the cultist of Shadow Wing, enabling him to teleport up to 1,000 feet to a known location. While he's reluctant to expend such a valuable asset, he won't hesitate to do so should his personal safety be compromised. His target destination will be a spot in the port, from where he will hastily retreat to a meeting point with the Cultist, from where he can be guided to a basement hideout.

Penumbral Assault

In an effort to create a diversion and facilitate Gary's escape, Tenebrizon has ordered his cultist followers to ready squads of penumbral creatures for an assault on Zalir's Mansion.

The decision to launch this assault is entirely at your discretion, depending on how the story progresses and whether you want to infuse the climax of the chapter with some combative tension.

Should the assault occur, it will start only after Mr. Fleur's investigation is nearing its conclusion, catching all the guests by surprise. Numerous creatures will swarm the mansion from outside, scaling the walls and entering through windows and doors to attack any guests they encounter.

Each assault squad comprises one of the following:

1d4 Roll	Creatures
1	1 Penumbral Grudge
2	3 Penumbral Envies
3	5 Penumbral Miseries
4	2 Penumbral Pains *(Hardest encounter)*

You might subject the players to one or more such encounters as they try to escape the mansion or defend its inhabitants. As the assault ensues, the remaining guests will either engage in combat or attempt to flee. Feel free to manipulate these NPCs as the situation demands, even increasing the number of attacking creatures if necessary.

Should the players be allied with any powerful guests, you may deploy more formidable penumbral creatures, like

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penumbral gluttonies. However, tread carefully in doing so, as adding more powerful beings may pose a lethal threat to the characters.

Chapter Ending

As the evidence against Gary comes to light and his escape is discovered, the various factions within the mansion begin to level accusations against each other, each suspecting the other is Gary's secret benefactor. If the penumbral creature's assault unfolds, the scene would descend into even further pandemonium as attendees search for the injured, tally their losses, and cast blame for the uproar.

Amid the chaos, Mr. Fleur emerges as a voice of reason, redirecting the focus toward identifying the true perpetrator. His discussions with Tony have revealed the presence of a co-conspirator within the city, who is allied with the now-fugitive Gary.

If Gary has evaded capture, Mr. Fleur concentrates on a citywide search for Gary and his unknown associate, adamant in discovering the truth.

Conversely, if Gary has been apprehended, a persuasive approach could compel him to divulge his connection with the Shadow Wing. He might even provide the location of a meeting point he shares with a cult member, from where they would guide him to an unknown hidden lair within the city. However, the cultist in question will only meet with Gary if unaccompanied. Regardless, proving Gary's allegations will require either the capture of these cultists or tangible evidence of their involvement; failing leads to the factions persisting in their mutual incriminations.

In either scenario, Mr. Fleur will appeal to those who have aided in the investigation, soliciting their assistance in apprehending Gary or locating the Shadow Wing's hideout. He will mandate a lockdown on the city of Heroes Rise for the sake of international politics. Entry or exit through portals or city gates will be prohibited until the perpetrators are apprehended.

Those who contribute to the investigation may find themselves on the receiving end of a generous monetary offer from Mr. Fleur. Alternatively, their involvement could be provoked by various NPCs or factions they have befriended, as the majority wishes to identify the true culprit.

The Empire, convinced of Sedura's involvement, hopes to leverage the eventual apprehension of the perpetrator against the Republic. Major Lik, a staunch believer in justice and self-action, is ready to financially back those aligned with the Empire in their efforts to reveal the true culprits, given his inability to intervene directly on the Republic's soil.

Meanwhile, the Republic is eager to clear itself, attributing the crime to an external entity. Both Zalir and Mr. Fleur are predisposed to assist those who demonstrate reliability and commitment to the investigation. It's common for the Republic to commission adventurers, especially in critical circumstances.

Yama yearns for a swift resolution to return focus to the ongoing Kepesh magic item thefts, suspecting a connection due to the timing and convenience. Gaining Yama's respect is challenging, yet with the goodwill of Kyzoko or Kyomoru, the characters can secure fair compensation for their assistance in resolving the case.

The Celestianist Church aims to expose the individual or group behind the incident to prevent a conflict between the Empire and the Republic, as it fears the outbreak of war and the Malrokian Curse. Though Bishop Razun lacks substantial funds, he can offer the church's gratitude and an honorary title that grants free healing at any Celestianist temple in return for assistance.

If the assault of the penumbral creatures has occurred, Mr. Fleur, Zalir, and Joya will be eager to identify the culprits. The discovery of other such creatures roaming the city will provoke them to seek all available help to eradicate these threats and discover their origins.

If there's a financial reward pending from Admöerio or Zalir as a result of the quest, they will expedite the sale of one of their artworks to Marianna Lisprolis at a reduced price. This will ensure that the characters receive their due compensation, even in the absence of an auction.

Having engaged the characters in the pursuit of Gary or the Shadow Wing's hideout, you may transition into Chapter 2.

Consider awarding 1,500 XP to each PC for completing this chapter. The recommended level for ending this chapter is 4th. If your group is above or below, consider adjusting future encounters and side quests to speed up or slow down their progression.

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Chapter 2
The Murderer's Whereabouts

Following the heinous crime committed at Zalir's Mansion, the city of Heroes Rise is in a heightened state of vigilance. Unknown criminals remain hidden within its walls, and yet unknown to most, menacing penumbral creatures have begun to roam the streets at night. Spawned from an as-yet-uncovered planar rift connected to the Penumbral Plane, these creatures bring terror and danger. In this chapter, the player characters will have the chance to track down the hideout of the Cult of Shadow Wing, all the while confronting the penumbral threats haunting the city.

Exploring the City

Revered as the beating heart of the Republic, Heroes Rise symbolizes the spirit of heroism and freedom. Established during the Kemet Invasion, this historic city served as a sanctuary for refugees and a rallying point for valiant heroes striving to repel the invaders. This city, where iconic constructions raised by wartime heroes still stand and serve their original functions, is considered the birthplace of the Republic. Examples include the Alchemy Lab, a creation of Huradrin, which now operates as an Alchemy and Magic Item Shop. Similarly, the seer heroine Sara continues to manage her iconic tavern and inn.

Many hopeful adventurers flock to Heroes Rise, drawn by inspiration from its heroic heritage. The city hosts a prominent office of the Adventurer's Guild, operated by renowned retired heroes. While the common folk here often bear the scars of tragic pasts linked to the war, they live with a sense of camaraderie and unity. Acts of mutual assistance are common, and conflicts are rare.

As the characters traverse the city and interact with its denizens, they'll learn more about Heroes Rise. Uncovering the Shadow Wing hideout could take anywhere from a few hours to several days, contingent on the characters' approach. There is no immediate pressure to resolve the situation; you can adjust the pacing between exploration, combat, and other quests to tailor the best experience for your group.

Running This Chapter

This chapter primarily involves the characters' search for Gary, the murderer. If Gary has already been apprehended, their search shifts to the Shadow Wing Hideout (Gary isn't aware of the hideout's exact location, only a meeting point with the local cultist leader, who is unlikely to appear unless Gary is alone). While the characters' motivations may differ, this chapter assumes their interest in tracking down either Gary or the hideout.

Potential motivations for undertaking this quest include:

- Aligning with a faction such as the Republic, the Empire, Yama, or the Celestianist Church and responding to their call for aid.
- Assisting Zalir out of friendship, or obligation if they are employed by him.
- Helping Mr. Fleur Vonobloom, the esteemed Republic detective, following a successful investigation.
- Acting out of heroism, a common instinct among the adventurers of Heroes Rise, to prove their worth.
- Responding to reports of penumbral creatures wreaking havoc in the city and seeking the source *(the penumbral rift within the Shadow Wing hideout)*.
- Assisting an NPC they've befriended who is personally affected by the Shadow Wing situation - a missing family member or a stolen object possibly linked to a Shadow Wing cultist, for example. This NPC may seek the characters' assistance, offering whatever compensation they can manage.

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Select the hook that best aligns with your group and the storyline's progression thus far. Prioritize the involvement of befriended NPCs, while minimizing the role of those the characters have not interacted with.

> **GM Advice:** Befriended NPCs or factions should be given increased importance in the narrative. Adjust the storyline to enhance their prominence in this chapter and the subsequent ones, optimizing the adventure to your group's unique dynamic.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter allows the characters freedom to explore the city, following leads to uncover Gary's whereabouts or the location of the Shadow Wing Hideout. Depending on the previous chapter's outcomes, the characters will either be in pursuit of Gary, having slipped into hiding within the city limits, or gathering information about the Shadow Wing's Hideout, if Gary was captured (since he does not know its location). The Republic's forces have sealed the city, leaving no breaches in the walls and no portal without extra security, all to prevent an escape; however, they fear the assassin may find a way to flee by use of magic if not captured soon. Among many potential leads, three main sources of information stand out: **Master Armur Jasperin**, **Sara the Seer**, and **Hoffbünn, the Necromancer** *(see why further ahead)*.

Gary's Status

If Gary eluded capture in Chapter 1, the characters will seek him out within the city. Despite the city's lockdown and vigilant magic detection efforts, Gary has managed to breach the blockade by utilizing a planar rift to the Penumbral Plane, hiding inside the Shadow Wing hideout. His final destination is the Empire's capital city. The characters, however, will only unveil this fact if they locate the rift nestled within the Shadow Wing hideout's basement in chapter 3.

If Gary was apprehended in Chapter 1, the characters will extract information about his rendezvous point with the Shadow Wing Leader and their dealings. Although Gary is aware of the existence of a planar rift inside the Hideout, he remains oblivious to its exact location, a secret only hidden cultists know. As such, the city remains closed, pending further investigation by the authorities.

Three main ways to find the information

There are three main ways in which the characters can uncover the location of the hideout:

Master Armur Jasperin

Armur, the governor of Ahimoth city and secretly member of the Third Eye, can use his information network to find the hideout location. However, he seeks the party's help to swing an important arena match in his friend's favor.

Location - The Arena. Here, the adventurers might cross paths with Master Armur, who could propose a job representing his friend Jerremy in the arena. If questioned about the hideout or Gary's whereabouts, Master Armur could offer to provide this information in exchange for their victory.

Sara, the Seer

Known for her premonitions, Sara can pinpoint the hideout's location, but requires assistance to close the dangerous planar rift. With a list of specific items in hand—Eyes of a penumbral creature, shards of tameranium, and an orb infused with elemental fire—Sara can put her abilities to use, revealing the hideout's location.

Location - Tavern. A bustling venue owned by Sara, a war heroine and potent seer, the tavern is a local point for adventurers. Sara is seeking assistance in tackling the sudden appearance of penumbral creatures in the city. Moreover, the adventurers might overhear information about the local Third Eye cell and Master Armur Jasperin's request for assistance at the arena.

Hoffbünn, the Necromancer

Though dismissed as a reclusive old man, Hoffbünn is a vigilant necromancer who has unearthed the Shadow Wing's plans. If the characters earn his trust, he may divulge the hideout's location.

Location - Hoffbünn's House (Docks). The party will probably be initially rebuffed upon their arrival, but if they persuade Hoffbünn of their intentions, the reclusive man might invite them in for tea and divulge the location of the hideout.

Three ways to find more Information

Through the exploration of the city, the adventurers will have many opportunities to find one of the three major ways to uncover the location of the Shadow Wing Hideout. While the characters can directly find Master Amur, Sara, or Hoffbünn, there are three additional locations that could aid them in uncovering the whereabouts of these NPCs.

- ***Avelum's Tower.*** Upon visiting this tower, the adventurers have the chance to learn about the troubles plaguing the students in the city. Their interaction with both the students and teachers may yield information about Sara, the seer who presides over the Tavern, and how her abilities could facilitate the uncovering of the knowledge they seek.
- ***Sara's Tavern.*** Here, not only can the adventurers converse directly with Sara, but they may overhear whispers about a certain underworld boss seeking champions for a duel in the arena, with promises of gold and favor as reward. These whispers speak of Jerremy, a confidant of Master Armur.
- ***Republic's Military Outpost.*** If the PCs visit this outpost, they may hear from the guards that a dwarf by the name of Hoffbünn, who dwells at the docks, had issued several unheeded warnings about an imminent penumbral creatures attack. These guards can direct the party to Hoffbünn's hut.

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The True Location of the Shadow Wing Hideout

Hidden in the basement of an unassuming house on the docks, the Shadow Wing Hideout blends seamlessly with the surrounding architecture, ensuring discretion. The cultists are exceedingly cautious to ensure no unwanted attention is drawn to their base of operations.

These cultists maintain an open rift in the basement, protected against most forms of mystical detection (including the Madwalker ability to sense rifts), enabling the arrival of penumbral creatures who are released strictly under the cloak of night, with utmost care taken to prevent any prying eyes from witnessing these creatures' emergence.

Knowledge of this hideout is limited to the following individuals:

Shadow Wing Cultists. Extracting information from them may prove challenging due to their zealous disregard for personal suffering or death. Even if captured they will not disclose information, unless forced by magic (they have advantage on saving throws against all effects that cause them to betray the cult, as per GM's discretion).

Penumbral Creatures. Most of these creatures hold no interest in the city's geographical layout, thus recalling the basement they emerged from might be very challenging, but not impossible. They are mostly beings of insanity and nightmares, so while some of them are very intelligent, negotiating with them is still complex and may require helping them in some way, as some may prefer being eliminated to aiding mortals for free.

Hoffbünn. Due to his paranoid nature, this man would only disclose his knowledge of the hideout to those he deems trustworthy, and earning his trust is not easy.

The Third Eye. These criminals, experts in espionage, hold a near-omniscient grasp over the city's underbelly. They are vaguely aware of the Shadow Wing Cult's presence but could easily procure precise information, given sufficient motivation.

Sara. The seer does not currently possess knowledge about the Shadow Wing's presence, but she could uncover the hideout's location through her powers. However, she avoids utilizing her abilities unnecessarily, as they inflict physical and mental strain.

Other Important Information the Characters May Acquire

Heroes' Absence. The Shadow Wing's attack was meticulously timed to coincide with the departure of the city's prominent heroes – Avelum, Garion, and Sir Erick – for a significant conference at the Republic's Parliament. This left the city vulnerable, with only Zalir and Sara of the greatest heroes remaining to defend it.

The Shadow Wing's Mysterious Behavior. If interrogated, Shadow Wing cultists' ignorance about the larger plans they serve may become apparent. The only thing they know is that one of the big shots of the cult is overseeing their actions, and he is undercover in the city. They know nothing else about this person *(it is Tenebrizon, but they are unaware of his name or any detail about him, except of his presence and high position in the hierarchy)*.

Tenebrizon's Reveal. At some point, Tenebrizon may reveal himself to the adventurers, claiming responsibility for the death of Vang and the ensuing chaos. He might dare the party to kill him, only for them to later discover they killed an innocent he possessed. Tenebrizon will taunt the adventurers and possibly provide hints should they falter, though not without causing further mayhem and blaming them for their inability to stem the tide of penumbral creatures.

He will claim to be immortal and will dare the characters to kill his current body, wanting them to later learn that they killed an innocent he was possessing.

- If the characters get stuck during this chapter's search, Tenebrizon may appear to taunt and give them hints, but not without a cost. He will try to use penumbral creatures to kill innocents and cause as much suffering as possible, and blame the characters for not having found where the creatures are coming from. He wants them to succeed, but become touched by despair and insanity in the process.

GM Note: This chapter heralds a significant turn of events, unveiling the malevolent Tenebrizon. To create a memorable and atmospheric narrative, ensure Tenebrizon is depicted as a figure of unhinged malevolence and madness, tinged with sadistic glee.

Tenebrizon should not shy away from taunting the characters. Encourage the party to engage with him in combat, but twist the blade of victory with the revelation that they have, in fact, struck down an innocent, as Tenebrizon mockingly taunts them to find him.

This is a crucial turning point to make the adventure personal to the characters, setting the tone for the rest of the campaign. Play it for all it's worth.

Tenebrizon's Possession

At the outset of this chapter, you have the opportunity to designate a random NPC who will be attending the event to be the one possessed by Tenebrizon.

In this chapter, Tenebrizon will possess an NPC with the goal of causing as much destruction in the city of Heroes Rise as possible. This time, he aims to wreak significant havoc and force the characters to kill his possessed target—all of whom are upstanding citizens of the city—ensuring that the characters will only realize after the fact that they killed an innocent being manipulated by Tenebrizon.

Once more, each NPC profile will include a specific segment outlining the potential actions Tenebrizon might take while in possession of that character. However, you are encouraged to devise your own strategies for Tenebrizon, based on the objectives established thus far in the narrative.

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For the selection of the possessed NPC, you may choose one from the provided list, create a new NPC, or roll a die according to the table below:

D10 Roll	NPC
1-4	**Major Tokrar** *(Location 6 - Republic Military Outpost)*
5-7	**Halla Ingidottir** *(Location 14 - Adventurer's Guild)*
8-10	**Jocasta Armud** *(Location 2 - Sara's Tavern)*

The City of Heroes Rise

In the throes of the Kemet Invasion, a league of heroes founded a city in an unexpected location - one challenging to access by land. Wharfugee was its first name, later renamed after war as Heroes Rise, it prospered chiefly through maritime trade routes across the Central Seas, or the more magical avenue of portal networks.

The city's remote locale, hidden by being encircled by higher land, presented a tactical advantage during the Kemet invasion. However, as the Republic was forged, the capital shifted to Fisherman's Wharf, a sprawling and accessible metropolis better equipped for economic prosperity. Consequently, Heroes Rise transformed into a historical city, a place of remembrance and a monument to the heroic spirit that birthed the Republic, more than a thriving city of business or political power.

The city's architecture bears traces of the bygone Empire aesthetic - practical and militaristic. Statues of tigers that once decorated the city were replaced by figures of heroes, symbolic reminders of the valor exhibited during the war. Old Imperial banners gave way to the blue flags of the Republic. Newer structures diverge from the imperial style, favoring softer, elegant lines over the stone-solid, robust, and opulent aesthetic of Imperial buildings.

Heroes Rise Summary
Population: Approximately 18,600.
Leadership: Sir Erick, a legendary human paladin of Tamera, serves as the city's leader. Known for his valor during the Kemet Invasion and his crusade against corruption within the Church, Sir Erick embodies all that Heroes Rise represents. Currently, he is away, attending a conference about the demands on Yama in relation to the Kepesh heists in the capital of Fisherman's Wharf.
Military Strength: About 370 guards and 45 seasoned war veterans actively serve in the city's defense, bolstered by 15 members of the Adventurers' Guild.

Significant Locations

Sara's Tavern. A renowned establishment throughout the Republic, Sara's Tavern offers safety, quality fare, and comfortable accommodations.

Avelum's Tower. The Republic's most esteemed magic school. Many aspiring wizards dream of studying under the legendary wizard Avelum or one of his direct disciples.

Zalir's Weapon Shop. This armory, famed for fair prices on magic weapons and armor, is a staple for adventurers. Purchasing your first weapon here is considered a good luck charm for an adventurer's career.

The Heroes Guild. A training ground for budding adventurers, it also serves as a hub for the brave willing to undertake dangerous quests in exchange for gold.

The Druidarium - Magic and Alchemy Shop. Formerly Huradrin's alchemy lab, this shop now offers potions, scrolls, and spell components necessary for adventurers and students of Avelum's Tower.

Random Encounters in the City

While exploring the city, many penumbral creatures lurk in the shadows during the night, summoned by Shadow Wing cultists. All such encounters should occur at night.

For daytime encounters, use **Shadow Wing initiates**, **thugs**, and **spies**, who are part of the Cult and roam the city seeking to cause harm (they should not be aware of the Cult's hideout, as they are being used as a diversion).

GM Note: Penumbral creatures burn in the sunlight due to Tamera's Light (see Sourcebook page 35). These creatures remain hidden during the day. They can be found in basements, sewers, or other sunless locations where they take refuge.

D10 Roll	Night Encounter
1	Pain Attack
2	Lust Date
3	Disgusting Relocation
4	Sloth Snare
5	Envy Strike
6	Arachne Lurking
7	The Penumbral Hunter
8	Villagers' Unrest
9	Shadow Wing Terror
10	Lost Child's Plea

1 - Pain Attack

The characters come across a horrifying sight: three penumbral pains are tormenting a group of 5 villagers (NG human **commoners**), taking perverse pleasure in their suffering as they prepare to kill them.

Running the Encounter. At the start of the encounter, place the pains anywhere within 30 feet of the villagers, establishing a sense of chaos and imminent danger. The **pains** prioritize attacking the villagers unless they are harmed, at which point they redirect their attention to the last creature that injured them. The villagers are paralyzed by fear, unable to act during the first turn of the encounter, adding a layer of urgency to the PCs' actions. Reward the PCs with an extra 100 XP for each saved villager (divided among the characters). Should

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they succeed in saving all the villagers, grant them a bonus of 250 extra XP, for a total of 750 extra XP.

2 - Lust Date

A group of villagers is utterly enamored with a well-dressed young woman of enchanting beauty. The truth is that the woman is a **lesser penumbral lust** (page 61), disguised and charming the villagers to lure and prey on them. She sets her sights on one of the PCs, attempting to charm them with her magical allure.

Running the Encounter. Initially, the **lesser lust** won't exhibit any hostile behaviors, instead using her abilities to charm one of the PCs. If the party recognizes the threat and engages in combat, they'll find the situation further complicated by the entranced villagers. Four villagers (NG human **commoners**) are under the **lesser lust**'s charms, impulsively putting themselves in harm to protect her. They use their move actions to place themselves between the PCs and the **lust** and will attack to defend her. Furthermore, attacks against the lust undertaken by a PC who is adjacent to a villager must be done with disadvantage (to avoid harming the villagers). If an attack misses the **lust**, it may inadvertently hit a villager trying to protect her. Defeating the **lust** breaks her magical influence, freeing the villagers from her spell.

3 - Disgusting Relocation

In a narrow, filthy alleyway, the PCs stumble upon a grotesque scene. A **penumbral disgust** is in the process of relocating, seemingly covered in numerous rats crawling over it. However, two of these rats are actually **penumbral miseries**. These repulsive beings are seeking a new lair and have a dreadful purpose in mind — they intend to kill humanoids and use their corpses to decorate their new home.

Running the Encounter. Initially, the **miseries** disguise themselves as ordinary rats, blending in with others swarming over the **disgust**. As the **disgust** tries to divert the characters' attention, it allows the **miseries** to creep closer, aiming to catch the PCs off guard when hostilities break out. If the PCs manage to make one or more of the entities flee, or if they track them back to their hideout, they will find a sewer entrance leading to a nauseating nest constructed from the corpses of numerous victims. Those brave enough to search the lair might find 30 gp, a silver ring valued at 12 gp, and a bag holding two *potions of healing* (though one is actually a *potion of poison*, a detail discoverable only upon inspection or use), and a *potion of climbing*.

4 - Arachne Lurking

As darkness envelops the streets, the characters find themselves drawn into a sinister plot orchestrated by an **arachne ambusher,** furthering Bellara's nefarious schemes. This creature hunts for an innocent victim, intending to murder them and assume their identity to infiltrate and undermine the Republic. A sudden scream pierces the night, leading the PCs to a frightening scene of an individual under attack by the **arachne**. The individual could be connected to significant local entities, such as those from the Mayor's Castle or Avelum's Magic Tower. The **arachne** aims to drag the victim to its lair to complete its transformation.

Running the Encounter. Once alerted by the scream, the PCs face the choice to intervene and save the victim. The **arachne** is risk-averse, ready to flee at the first sign of substantial opposition, utilizing its ability to climb walls in a swift escape over the city's buildings. If the characters capture it, the **arachne** offers valuable intelligence in a bid for freedom. It reveals Hoffbünn's stance against the Cult of Shadow Wing, the whereabouts of his hidden hut, and the cultists' murder plot under the directive of the Ungod Krynnethoth. Despite its deceitful nature, the **arachne** honors any agreement forged during the negotiation but it will create exploitable ambiguities to its advantage without inciting the wrath of its captors.

5 - The Penumbral Hunter

The unsettling sounds of a struggle echo from a nearby alley, pulling the characters towards a scene where a peculiar figure stands — a man with the lower body of a scorpion and the torso of a human. The PCs witness him defeating a grotesque rat with bizarre tentacles, a **penumbral misery**.

The man is a gloomfolk hero named Eryndros (CG **gloomfolk hero**), who is secretly affiliated with the Awakened and has a reputation for hunting down penumbral creatures. Eryndros, spotting the PCs, smirks, saying, *"If you thought this was a monster, you should have seen the other one that ran away."* But before he could sheath his blade, an aging home's wooden door bursts open as two **penumbral grudges** rush to attack the gloomfolk. Eryndros shouts for the PCs to flee, readying his blade.

Running the Encounter. Eryndros encourages the PCs to retreat, preparing himself to face the adversaries alone. However, if the PCs choose to aid him in this battle and survive, they may forge a valuable alliance with the hunter, who is set on hunting down cultists and penumbral creatures swarming the city. Although Eryndros is relatively new in town, having been dispatched by the Awakened to investigate the surge of these creatures in the city, his connections offer a range of benefits. He can have free healing at the Celestianist Temple — a privilege he will extend to his allies. Moreover, if taken to Hoffbünn's hut, Eryndros can help convince him that the PCs are enemies of the cultists.

6 - Sloth Snare

While venturing through the city, the PCs hear strange earth-digging noises from a nearby alleyway. If they investigate without taking precautions, they step into a trap set by a lurking **lesser penumbral sloth** (page 60). This creature lies buried beneath the ground, waiting to ambush its prey upon approach.

Running the Encounter. Detecting the concealed creature is no simple task; a careful approach and a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check are required to detect the disturbed soil, indicating its location. Failure results in a surprise attack by the **sloth**.

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The **sloth** springs into action when a living being comes within 5 feet of its concealed position, fiercely defending its self-declared hunting ground in the alley. This determined opponent fights until its last breath, refusing to surrender its territory or pursue beyond the boundaries of the alley. If its prey escapes its reach, the **sloth** retreats to its burrow, preferring to wait for the next victim rather than pursuing it. The creature's strategy reveals a preference for easy, proximity prey, indicating its inherent slothful nature, which dictates its fighting style and territorial behavior.

7 - Envy Strike

As the PCs cross the city streets, a sudden rush of panicked horses stampedes past them, drawing their attention towards a distressing situation unfolding a short distance away. The carriage of a prominent local noble family lies toppled amidst the chaos, a horrifying scene born from an ambush by a pack of five **penumbral envies**. The besieged family — recognizable figures of the nobility — have sought refuge inside the overturned vehicle, narrowly escaping the clutches of the vicious attackers for the moment.

Running the Encounter. The PCs stumble upon a frantic scene where five members of the noble family — a man, a woman, and three teenage boys (NG **commoners**) — are trapped and at the mercy of the relentless **envies**. These deranged beings are fixated on attacking individuals who exhibit signs of wealth or success, driven by a maddened desire to eradicate those more fortunate. They are relentless, refusing to flee or surrender, although they might shift their focus should a more "grandiose" target present itself.

The carriage doors are a precarious barrier between the family and the **envies**; locked but significantly damaged (AC 12 and 15 hit points, requiring a DC 14 Strength check to break open), they won't hold for long. Success in saving the family rewards the party with a heartfelt gesture of gratitude from them and a generous gift of gems amounting to 500 gp.

8 - Villagers' Unrest

As the PCs traverse the city streets, they witness a volatile situation escalating rapidly: a crowd of frenzied villagers cornering a solitary figure — a Kepesh woman mage named Seshat (LN **mage**). She is accompanied by her undead owl familiar pet, a creature registered and legally allowed to roam Heroes Rise. Yet, misinformation and paranoia fuel the mob's anger, as they wrongfully identify her as the culprit behind recent unsettling events in the city. This tense confrontation is further exacerbated by a group of opportunistic bandits — comprising a **berserker**, two **thugs**, and four **bandits** — who incite the mob into violence, hoping to seize this chance to rob the Kepesh mage amidst the chaos.

Running the Encounter. The PCs arrive at a critical juncture, just as the mob is gearing up to attack Seshat. The group inciting the violence is armed and ready to turn the angry crowd against anyone who dares to intervene. Standing against the inciters will undoubtedly provoke a conflict, as the bandit group has no tolerance for interference and eagerly provokes the mob to attack any perceived mage allies.

If the PCs decide to stand their ground and manage to defeat or subdue the group orchestrating the chaos, the mob's rage will dissipate, and people will run in fear. If they save her, a grateful Seshat will offer a valuable set of scrolls containing a *scroll of energy resistance*, a *scroll of spider climb*, and a *scroll of invisibility* as a token of her appreciation, potentially earning her as an ally. She is in the city to exchange mystical knowledge with a professor at Avelum's Magic Tower.

9 - Shadow Wing Terror

As the PCs navigate the streets of Heroes Rise, they can't shake the sensation of a sinister presence lurking in the city's hidden corners. A group of disguised cultists, composed of a **cult fanatic** and 1d4 + 2 **Shadow Wing initiates**, are searching for a hidden location to establish a secret temple. They envision it as a foreboding sanctuary dedicated to the worship of the Ungods and a breeding ground for summoning penumbral creatures into the heart of the city.

Running the Encounter. The cultists move with calculated discretion, expertly masking their nefarious intentions as they watch their surroundings, a sinister glare evident in their eyes as they assess potential victims and opportunities. PCs possessing keen observation skills may attempt a DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check to recognize the malicious demeanor concealed beneath the group's disguise. If the cultists perceive any hint of suspicion from the PCs, or if they discover their mission against the penumbral creatures, the group will shift their murderous focus onto the PCs.

Engaged in a dark mission, the cultists are determined to find a suitable hideout. If not halted in their tracks, they are set to claim an unsuspecting building, where ominous rituals to summon penumbral creatures would begin. Soon, the signs of their presence would start to manifest — mysterious disappearances, the eerie sounds emanating from the seized building, and a series of other uncanny incidents that might draw the PCs into investigative action.

Unbeknownst to the cultists themselves, they are merely pawns, deliberately positioned by the core Cult faction to divert attention from the hideout where the penumbral rift is concealed. A place they know exists but are not aware of its location.

Upon defeating the cultists, the PCs can loot their remains, finding 20 gp, a dagger, and a bone-crafted unholy symbol representing the Ungods on each.

10 - Lost Child's Plea

On the streets of Heroes Rise, the PCs encounter a young child, seemingly no older than 7, with tears in his wide and fearful eyes. The child explains that he has lost sight of his parents in the marketplace and desperately wishes to find them.

Running the Encounter. The PCs have the opportunity to assist the lost boy in finding his parents. The child provides a frantic description: his mother wears a worn red cloak, and

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his father, distinguishable by his beard and missing right hand, is known for his helpful nature in their neighborhood. Despite the child's vivid description of their parents, he doesn't know his way back home.

To pinpoint the parents' whereabouts, the PCs might engage with the vendors and patrons in the marketplace, where most have seen too many faces to recall the couple distinctly. Succeeding a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check might yield some worthwhile information from people who remember seeing individuals matching the description, pointing the PCs in general directions. Further clues can be gathered through a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check or by encouraging others to join the search with a DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If asked about their parents' profession, the child innocently mentions, *"They work at the market to find food and coins."*

The search eventually directs them to a couple in shabby-looking clothes matching the description and engaged in petty theft, with the woman creating a diversion as the man pilfers coins from a vendor's counter. The PCs are now faced with a moral dilemma: reunite the child with their parents, empathize with their poverty-driven criminal actions, or report them to the authorities to cease their criminal cycle, risking the child being sent to an orphanage.

Choosing the path of reunification leads the PCs to be invited to join the family for dinner in their humble home, situated in the city's impoverished port region—a community forged from displaced ship workers without the means to return home. This visit allows the PCs to witness the couple's reverence as helpers and givers in the community. Here, they meet others living on the fringe, and may gain information that they have seen suspicious people near their homes in the last couple of days. Hoffbünn is friendly with the poor people of the docks, and if he learns that the PCs have aided them, it will greatly improve the odds of him allowing the characters to enter his house to talk.

On the other hand, if the PCs decide to turn the couple to the authorities, they are rewarded with a bounty of 100 gp from the local guards. This choice, however morally upright, bears a heavy emotional toll as they witness the sight of the child being led away to an uncertain future in an orphanage.

Lesser Sloth

Medium aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural)
Hit Points 52 (7d8 + 21)
Speed 20 ft., burrow 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Con +5
Damage Immunities psychic
Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Deep Speech
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Aggressive (recharge 5-6). As a bonus action, the sloth can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature that it can see.

Aura of Laziness (15 ft.). Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the aura must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. If it fails, its speed is halved for the next minute. An affected creature that leaves the aura can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Regeneration. The sloth regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

Actions

Multiattack. The sloth makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (3d6 + 4) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

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Penumbral Lesser Lust

Medium aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural)
Hit Points 71 (11d8 + 22)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Cha +6
Skill Persuasion +6
Damage Immunities psychic
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Deep Speech
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Charm Opportunist. Lust attacks that hit a creature under charm are automatically considered critical.

Shapechanger. The lust can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid, or back into its true form. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Actions

Multiattack. The lust makes three melee attacks.

Creepy Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) psychic damage.

Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and if the target is large or smaller, it is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained and the lust can't attack another target with its tentacle.

Mind Overload. The lust targets one charmed creature it can see within 30 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw, taking 5d10 psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. This attack doesn't end the charmed condition on the target.

Fascinating Presence. Each creature of the lust's choice that is within 60 feet of the lust and aware of it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed for 1 minute or until the lust or its allies makes a harmful action against it. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

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Heroes Rise

The City

1. Zalir's Mansion

The well-worn path leads you back to Zalir's mansion, an imposing structure now bustling with activity in the aftermath of recent events. Armed guards, alert and vigilant, patrol the property's outskirts, their eyes ever watchful for any sign of trouble.

No longer welcoming guests with open gates, the mansion stands fortress-like, its entryway closed off from the world. Yet, as you approach, a familiar face emerges. Joirin, ever the diligent servant, strides towards you, his bearing marked by an unmistakable weariness that he makes a valiant effort to conceal. Despite his fatigue, his butler's attire is immaculate, not a crease out of place.

Within the mansion, the characters will encounter Zalir, along with Joirin, Ginny, and Hedron *(refer to Guests and Kitchen respectively in Chapter 1)*. Here, the mansion offers little else beyond a wealth of knowledge the characters might glean from Zalir.

1 - Zalir's Mansion
2 - Sara's Tavern
3 - Huradrin's Magic and Alchemy Shop
4 - The Weapon Shop
5 - Mayor's Castle
6 - The Republic Military Outpost
7 - Avelum's Tower
8 - Heroes Rise Arena
9 - The Docks
10 - The Turtle Ship
11 - The Temple and the Orphanage
12 - Hoffbünn's House
13 - Shadow Wing Hideout
14 - Adventurer's guild

Renowned for his studies, Zalir is well-versed in penumbral creatures, their origins in the Penumbral Plane, and the methods to manifest penumbral rifts that draw these creatures forth. He is aware that the Cult of Shadow Wing extensively employs these beings. Yet, he points out that numerous other factions have also exploited these creatures in recent years to orchestrate attacks while evading responsibility.

If asked about tameranium *(see Sara's Tavern)*: Zalir will inform the characters that he traded the ore with a merchant for a piece of art showcased at a recent event. This exchange

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may lead to a minor side quest where the characters might locate the merchant and negotiate or assist in reclaiming the ore. Alternatively, at the GM's discretion, Zalir could resolve the matter himself, purchasing back the tameranium ore, asking only for the characters' return after a few hours so he can deliver the ore Sara needs.

Optional Side Quest - The Merchant's Dilemma

Should you opt for the merchant side quest, consider using one of the three following scenarios as potential challenges the characters might face to acquire the ore. Each one was designed to offer you creative freedom while offering ideas that cater to different play styles so you can choose the one that better suits your table.

Another Murder (Investigation). Upon reaching the merchant's abode, the characters stumble upon a scene of chaos – the house ransacked, and a disturbance originating from the basement. Below, they discover the merchant's lifeless body, a terrified woman fending off four **penumbral envies** with a broom, attempting to safeguard two children. The creatures are obviously toying with their prey. If aided, she implicates a rival merchant who, under the guise of a monstrous assault, has stolen their valuables, including a mysterious magical amulet he particularly coveted. The characters may then unravel the clues behind the crime, which may include the method used to lure the penumbral creatures, the motives behind it, and the whereabouts of the stolen items. The recovery of the tameranium Ore and Zalir's confirmation that it is indeed the traded ore should serve as sufficient evidence to identify the perpetrator and make them face justice if necessary.

Taken by Bandits (Combat). Arriving at the merchant's home, the characters meet his wife who informs them about her overdue husband. Investigation reveals his ravaged cart near the city's outskirts. During their search, they encounter 6 **thugs**, which leads them to learn about the merchant's capture and the bandits' hideout. The bandits, lured by rumors of Zalir's extravagant spending on art, have been pillaging valuables and abducting merchants for ransom. Inside the bandit cave, the adventurers will confront numerous **thugs** and their **bandit captain**. The kidnapped merchants are imprisoned in a wooden cell within the cave's deepest recesses.

The Cult of Revival (Eldritch). The merchant, in truth, is part of a peculiar cult that worships the Ungods. Gathering mystical resources, they are conducting a ritual atop a ruined temple outside the city. Composed of citizens driven to madness following their losses during the Kemet Invasion, the cult members believe in resurrecting their deceased loved ones by serving the Ungods. However, they are mere pawns in a powerful aberration's game, and their ritual risks summoning an Aboleth. Defeating the cult allows the characters to reclaim the tameranium ore. Use Cultist stats for the cult members and **Cult Fanatic** for their leaders. Beware of the Aboleth, as it is too formidable an adversary for the characters of this level. If you decide that the summoning is successful, the creature should arrive significantly weakened by the poorly executed ritual, requiring weeks to fully recover *(no regional effect, lair action, or legendary action, and only 80 hit points; consider it a CR 6 enemy)*.

2. Sara's Tavern

As you step through the door of the ornately constructed three-story tavern, you find yourself awash in a delightful sensory experience. The robust scent of aged, dark wood fills the air, blending harmoniously with the tantalizing aroma of hearty meals and the subtle, alluring notes of exotic brews. The tavern's decoration is a testament to adventuring history, decked with a myriad of weapons, shields, and trophies - esteemed memorabilia from various heroic exploits. Each artifact boasts a wooden plaque, etched with names and personal signatures.

The atmosphere is vibrant, alive with the cheerful hum of patrons from all walks of life. Commoners, adventurers, locals, and travelers alike gather around tables, feasting and drinking. A group of men huddle around a card game at one table, their intense concentration contrasting the table close by where an older dwarf boisterously shares his stories with an audience of young, inexperienced adventurers.

At the heart of the activity, a sprightly gnome girl weaves through the crowd, hopping nimbly from table to table as she plays her music, her infectious energy eliciting smiles and applause from the patrons. Nearby, a youthful woman deftly maneuvers amidst the tables, serving and ensuring that the guests are well-supplied with plates of food and refilled drinks.

Commanding the bustling counter is a striking woman, her curly brown hair neatly restrained by a red bandana embroidered intricately with threads of gold and silver. Her welcoming smile, even amid the swirl of activity, makes you feel right at home.

Here anyone can get good food and drinks as well as a room to stay for the night. The prices are fair and the accommodations are comfortable and clean. The place is owned by **Sara** *(see Appendix A)*, and besides her only three other people work there, **Jannet** (NG human **commoner**) the barmaid, **Ellen Brightensmile** (NG gnome **spy**, with Dexterity 16,

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Acrobatics +7, Deception +7, Performance +7, Sleight of Hand +5, and Stealth +5), the bard and entertainer, and **Jocasta Armud** (LN human **noble**, with advantage on all checks to cook) an ex-noble woman who lost everything after the war and was saved by Sara, and now acts like the chef of the tavern.

Each of the NPC (or NPC groups) interactions are described in detail below:

Sara *(see Appendix A)* is the owner of the tavern. She was one of the most important heroes of the Kemet Invasion. She has brown curly hair and wears typical "fortune teller" vests, including a well decorated red bandana. Sara is a cheerful woman in her early forties who treats everyone equally, she is very emotive and often behaves as a cheerful young girl, yet when she is angered she becomes very serious and can be pretty scary.

Sara is a sorcerer who also has a deep connection with the Penumbral Plane. She also has a unique power, she can concentrate to have strange flashes of the future, but using these powers causes her headaches and mental confusion, so she avoids using it unless necessary.

She is always ready to serve the clients and will offer food, drinks and accommodations to the characters. She accepts being paid only when the characters are ready to leave, something that is not common in most inns.

At this moment Sara is very worried about the strange appearance of penumbral creatures in the city. Her connection with the penumbra is causing her to sense that something is not right, she can feel a penumbral rift somewhere in the city, but some eldritch magic is keeping it occulted. She is trying to find a capable group of adventurers to help her check this situation.

Sara believes she can pierce the magical protection and find where the penumbral rift is located if she has the right mystical components. She needs a pair of eyes from a penumbral creature, shards of tameranium ore, and an orb empowered with elemental energy.

If the characters agree to help her find these components, she will agree to use her powers of premonition to find where Gary or the Shadow Wing hideout is.

Each of the components that Sara needs may lead to its own side quest. As the GM, you can choose to have the characters complete one, two, or all three of these quests, depending on how you want the story to flow. This will allow you to control which components Sara obtains for herself.

The three possible side quests are below:

The Eyes of a Penumbral Creature. This one is the easiest for the characters to acquire, they only need to find and kill a penumbral creature that is roaming the city. You can see the random table encounter from this chapter to find a suitable encounter for the characters if they are looking for one of such creatures for Sara.

Shards of tameranium. This rare ore can be obtained with Zalir in his mansion or in Avelum's Tower. Each of those places have unique possible quests for the characters to acquire this ore.

Orb Empowered by the Elements. Sara can give the characters an orb that needs to be empowered by elemental energy. You may choose one of three different side quests for Sara to present to players to empower the orb (she may present only one or multiples and let they choose, at your GM's preference):

If You Decide to Use the Orb Side Quest

You can use one of the following ideas as an inspiration and basis for the quest to empower the orb. These side quests are here to provide creative freedom for you, and freedom of choice and approach to your players.

- ***The Disappeared Elementalist (Investigation).*** Sara is acquainted with an elder elementalist named Iro Teawell, who is versed in the ritual required to empower the orb. She can provide the characters with the location of his enclave in a tower that is an hour's travel from the city. Upon arriving at the site, the characters learn that Iro disappeared two days ago while visiting Heroes Rise to obtain components at Huradrin's Magic and Alchemy Shop.

  The characters have the option to investigate both the city and the shop, where they discover that he was last seen with a young girl. Unbeknownst to the locals, Iro had taken an interest in the child due to her innate connection to the elements and her potential to become an elementalist. Iro tried to persuade the girl's mother to let him train her from a young age, but the mother refused, prompting the girl to run away from home. She was later abducted by a group of penumbral creatures. Iro managed to rescue her in the nick of time, but was gravely injured in the process. Currently, he is recovering at the girl's home, under her mother's care. Unfortunately, he lost his memory because a **lesser penumbral sadness** wielded a rare scroll with the power to erase one's mind, using it on Iro to facilitate its escape. If the characters locate this creature and destroy the scroll, Iro will regain both his memory and powers, enabling him to empower the orb for them.

- ***The Fire Element Lair (Combat).*** Not far from Heroes Rise lies a cavern, once the lair of a red dragon, now infused with energy from the Plane of Fire. Sara is familiar with a secret path into this vibrant but dangerous locale, which, while no longer home to the dragon, houses many creatures from the fiery plane. To empower the orb, the characters must brave this place, defeating fire elementals to reach the innermost chamber of the cavern, a place where the dragon's treasure hoard was previously kept. There, they will find the potent energies necessary to charge the orb. The ritual involves coating the orb with the ashes of the vanquished fire elementals until it begins to glow brightly, signaling its newfound power. Once this task is complete, they are to return the empowered orb to Sara.

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- ***A Corrupted Wyrmling (Eldritch).*** Verzamuz, a red dragon wyrmling (N **red dragon wyrmling**), was once harmless, but has recently begun to attack farms near Heroes Rise, even killing people. Despite the Draconic Council being informed, no action has yet been taken. Sara knows that the heart of such a creature can empower the orb and intends to use this opportunity. What she doesn't know is that the wyrmling's violence is the result of being captured, tortured, and corrupted by dark magic at the hands of the Cult. The wyrmling is fighting to maintain its sanity, occasionally regaining consciousness and seeking help.

  The characters face a moral decision: Kill the wyrmling and bring its heart to Sara, or save it by finding and eliminating a group of Shadow Wing cultists (three **cult fanatics**) hiding in nearby mountains, awaiting orders from the Cult. In the cultists' lair, the characters can discover a ritual that can be performed to save the wyrmling, but it involves finding a method to restrain the creature into the magical circle during the ritual to break the curse corrupting it.

  Saving the wyrmling doesn't directly give Sara what she wants, but it garners the loyalty of the dragon. Grateful for their help, the wyrmling pledges to assist the PCs. Knowledgeable about the Fire Element Lair (see above), the wyrmling can even help empower the orb, as the fire elementals pose no threat to him due to his fire immunity.

If the characters successfully aid Sara. She will use her powers to uncover the exact location of the Shadow Wing Hideout, which is close to the docks, as well as discern that the penumbral rift bringing creatures to the city is in the basement of that building. Using her powers will leave Sara visibly shaken and in need of time to recover. Closing the penumbral rift through a ritual will demand her utmost concentration; therefore, she will ask the characters to confront the cultists while she focuses on the ritual in the designated room at her tavern.

Lesser Sadness

Medium aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural)
Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	9 (-1)

Saving Throws Int +8
Skills Arcana +8
Damage Immunities psychic
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12
Languages Common, Deep Speech
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Dispel Master. As a bonus action, the sadness can cast *dispel magic* targeting an object.

Melancholy Magic. When a creature is targeted by a sadness spell and fails its saving throw, it is imbued with melancholy and has a disadvantage on its saving throws until it takes a short or long rest.

Sad But True. When the sadness dies, it explodes in a burst of psychic energy. Each creature within 15 ft. of it must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw, taking 13 (3d8) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Spellcasting. The sadness is an 11th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). The sadness can cast *detect magic* and *dispel magic* at will and has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *light*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *shocking grasp*
1st level (4 slots): *faerie fire*, *identify*, *magic missile*, *thunderwave*
2nd level (3 slots): *detect thoughts*, *mirror image*, *misty step*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *fireball*, *fly*
4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *fire shield*, *stoneskin*
5th level (2 slots): *cloud kill*, *scrying*, *wall of force*
6th level (1 slot): *globe of invulnerability*

Actions

Multiattack. The sadness makes two Slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) psychic damage.

Planar Shift (2/Day). A sadness can cast *plane shift* twice per day to shift from the Material Plane to the Penumbral Plane, or vice versa.

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Sara is unable to accompany the characters to the hideout. Instead, she instructs them to position the empowered orb near the rift. She will sense when the setup is right and initiate the spell from her ritual room. Sara cautions the group that they will have a one-minute window after the orb is placed to complete the spell and seal the passage. She warns them to refrain from pursuing fleeing cultists through the rift, as this would put them at risk of being trapped on the Penumbral Plane once the rift closes.

Jannet (NG human **commoner**) is a young barmaid who has been working at Sara's tavern for the past two years. She is cheerful and quick to smile, speaking in a soft voice yet with contagious enthusiasm. Jannet excels at serving tables promptly, tactfully encouraging customers to order more without being intrusive. She has a knack for gauging when to approach tables and when to grant patrons privacy, especially adventurers discussing their plans.

Despite her sociable nature, Jannet maintains a certain distance from everyone to protect herself, a habit rooted in her troubled past involving family violence. The only individuals she fully trusts are Sara, Ellen, Jocasta, Jenny *(Zalir's daughter)*, and Avelum.

Recently, Jannet has become concerned about rumors circulating in the city regarding penumbral creatures. She is aware that the military outpost was notified of a potential penumbral invasion a week ago, but the warning went unheeded. While she lacks detailed information about the situation, she is curious to know who made the prediction and whether it was based on foresight akin to Sara's visionary powers or just a stroke of luck.

If inquired, Jannet will share that Sara, albeit modest, possesses potent divination skills and is a respected war hero. Jannet holds Sara in high esteem, regarding her with pride and deep affection.

Ellen Brightensmile *(*NG gnome **spy**, with Dexterity 16, Acrobatics +7, Deception +7, Performance +7, Sleight of Hand +5, and Stealth +5) is renowned in Sara's tavern as the charismatic and humorous bard and entertainer. But beneath her performer facade lies a somber personality molded from a life in the secretive realm of spycraft, guided by her allegiance to the Republic. A trait only known to the highest echelons of the military and the close-knit circle at Sara's tavern, her true calling is that of a spy, expertly gleaning information from the rumors swirling amongst the patrons.

As an entertainer, Ellen dazzles the crowd with her impressive acrobatics, leaping and tumbling between tables with grace. Yet, her true personality is that of a quiet and serious individual, carrying the painful memory of her father's tragic fate at the hands of the Imperial Wizards, who subjected him to the Ironhand mind-warping and conscription. This profound loss fuels her disdain for the Empire, driving her commitment to the Republic and her secret service.

For those demonstrating staunch dedication to the Republic, Ellen can become a fountain of invaluable information, ready to provide assistance in information acquisition in the city. Despite her vivid performances, a keen observer might just suspect that she is too skilled for a simple performer.

Jocasta Armud (LN human **noble**, with advantage on all checks to cook), with a heart seasoned by both the joys and tragedies of life, stands as the heart and soul of the kitchen in Sara's tavern, displaying an undeniable expertise in culinary arts, a skill refined from a young age from her mother's teachings, so she could "grab a man's heart by the stomach".

Jocasta maintains a pristine kitchen, mirroring her impeccable self-presentation, as she elegantly carries the wisdom and grace from her noble upbringing into her culinary creations.

Before finding her place in the warmth of Sara's tavern, Jocasta lived a life of nobility, indulging in the riches and affluence that came with her status. Yet, the war robbed her of everything — her family, her wealth, and her loved children, leaving her in a world devoid of warmth and meaning.

Sara rescued Jocasta from the abyss of despair, offering her a place to rediscover joy and purpose, an opportunity to trade the complexities of noble life for the fulfilling simplicity of being the tavern's chef. Now, her kitchen emanates not only the delightful aroma of her dishes, but also the love and care she pours into each meal, a testament to her resilient spirit and the home she has found in the vibrant community of the tavern.

She is specially caring with children, often taking her time to cook meals for the orphanage. She has a good relationship with priest Razun because of that, and will help in any situation where children are involved.

If Jocasta is possessed by Tenebrizon

Tenebrizon will exploit her to disseminate mystical hallucinogenic toxins into the meals served at Sara's Tavern. These toxins, imbued with penumbral power, have a random onset interval, complicating efforts to identify the food from the tavern as the source. Those affected find their gravest fears blending disturbingly with reality.

This scheme will instigate further chaos in the city, with individuals seemingly losing their sanity as despair engulfs the populace. The longer Tenebrizon manages to perpetuate this without being discovered, the further the city will spiral into decay.

Individuals who consume the contaminated food must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. Failure results in the onset of the toxin's effects after a period of 2d20 hours, causing victims to begin to perceive a horrifying amalgamation of reality and their deepest nightmares. This induces a disadvantage on all attack rolls and ability checks. Every 10 minutes, the affected individual must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or succumb to the effects of the *confusion* spell, with an opportunity to save against the spell each subsequent turn. This cycle of saving throws against confusion persists for a total of 6 hours, after which the hallucinogenic effects finally cease.

If questioned, Jocasta will fervently deny any involvement, even as she continues to create more toxins clandestinely. She uses the brains of **penumbral miseries**, stored covertly in the tavern's basement, for this production. The brains

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are supplied to her by cultists, who operate under the cover of darkness, unknowingly executing Tenebrizon's orders without comprehending the full extent of their actions or the purpose behind them.

Tenebrizon will set the stage for a confrontation with the characters, leading them through a complex investigation, presenting them with puzzling evidence, and toying with them until they manage to identify Jocasta as the culprit. Tenebrizon wants them to kill Jocasta, only for them to later realize that they killed an innocent who was possessed by him.

Men playing cards

Amidst the shouts and laughter arising from the card game at the tavern, the men playing are talking about rumors that are spreading in the city.

Most are baseless rumors such as:

- Someone claims that a wandering minstrel passing through town is actually a fey in disguise, who has been hoarding a secret stash of items pilfered from the locals. The evidence? His unusually pointy ears and a twinkling, golden tooth that he's often seen flashing when he grins.
- There is a talk about the outhouse behind the old Miller's barn in the docks has become haunted. Some folks swear they've heard ghostly groans emanating from it in the dead of night. Others dismiss it as just the wind passing through the cracks in the wood or the Miller's infamous bean stew playing tricks on them.
- At the end of one of the rounds they talk about an ancient willow tree on the outskirts of the town that has begun whispering secrets to those who dare to venture close to it at midnight. What secrets? Oh, just the usual: where old Mrs. Thatchbury hides her secret apple pie recipe, or where the blacksmith's favorite hammer disappeared to.
- Another talk of the tavern is the sudden ability of the local cats to fly. Various patrons are sharing eyewitness accounts of seeing cats flying out of trees, soaring over rooftops, and then gracefully landing on their feet. Others vehemently argue that cats cannot fly, and these sightings are just the results of overactive imaginations or perhaps too much ale.

If the characters linger long enough to overhear more, they will learn about another rumor circulating in the city, concerning an upcoming arena match between the champions of a man named Jerremy and the Peak Family. The conversation revolves around a gambling debt from the Peak family's elder daughter, who wagered her family farm in a bet but now the family is unwilling to honor after her loss. Another patron interjects, mentioning that the elder daughter, Chelsbeth Peak, is a drunkard and gambling addict, so the rumors must be true.

Another chimes in, saying that he knows the Peak family, and he believes Chelsbeth was not even one of the farm owners to be able to make this bet, but he adds that Master Armur Jasperin is a close friend of Jerremy's and is seeking worthy champions to represent his friend's cause in the Arena.

The group engaged in the discussion can't agree on the exact amount being offered as a reward, with guesses ranging wildly; some suggest thousands of gold pieces, while others dismiss such figures as ludicrous. Amid the speculation, one individual speaks up confidently, asserting that he saw Master Armur at the Heroes Rise Arena, personally recruiting capable fighters, which leads him to believe that the rumors hold some truth.

Dwarf and the Young Adventurers

The dwarf, once a warrior of his clan who fought at the battle of Fisherman's Wharf under Huradrin's banner, regales eager new adventurers with tales of war and adventure, aiming to inspire them for their future endeavors.

The characters can choose to stay and listen to the dwarf's stories, although they are primarily old tales; some seem exaggerated, while others appear quite believable. From his stories, they gather that his name is Burduran and that he was a member of the Goat Clan before settling down in Heroes Rise to impart his wisdom to the younger generation of aspiring adventurers. Burduran mentions that he operates a small training ground where he offers lessons in combat techniques for a fee.

If the characters inquire about the penumbral creatures attacking people, Burduran will confess that he is too old to join the fight. However, he knows another dwarf who fought in the Kemet Invasion and remains active. He offers to direct them to Hoffbünn's hut, cautioning that Hoffbünn is known to be very paranoid and not easily approachable. While reluctant, Burduran can be persuaded to accompany them, but only if they demonstrate their ability to battle the penumbral creatures and agree to buy a round of beer for him and the young adventurers – a gesture he sees as a sign of good manners. The cost for this gesture is 1 gp.

Going to Hoffbünn with Burduran can slightly improve the characters' chances of convincing him to engage in a conversation.

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3. Huradrin's Magic and Alchemy Shop

As you apply a gentle force to the seasoned oak door, it opens with a resonant creak, welcoming you into a haven where the mundane sounds of the outside world are replaced by a captivating melody of magical whispers that envelop you softly, invitingly. The ambient glow of luminescent lights guides your path, revealing rows of shelves burdened with mysterious components. Each one emanates a hushed yet potent aura, a testimony to its steeped history and magical properties. Though the legendary druid Huradrin is not physically present, his vibrant essence pervades the atmosphere, echoing a symphony of spells protecting the location. Some acolytes, draped in robes adorned with arcane symbols, move gracefully among the customers, offering guidance. You notice a group of budding mages, identifiable by the distinctive garments of the esteemed local mystical tower, standing huddled to one side. You see their eyes wide, sparkling with dreams and awe as they gingerly explore various components, perhaps envisioning the adventures that await them in their nascent magical careers. Deeper, you see an area dedicated to alchemical endeavors. This space pulsates with mystical wisdom, inviting scholars, adventurers, and wonder-seekers to delve into the secrets guarded so carefully within this renowned shop.

This esteemed establishment, conceived during the Kemet Invasion, stands as a testimony to the skill and expertise of Huradrin, the legendary druid and master alchemist. Renowned throughout Tanares, the emporium has blossomed into a sanctuary for adventurers, scholars, and those with an unyielding curiosity for unique mystical components.

Since Huradrin has ascended to become one of the Kings of Stonelair in the distant north, leading his fellow dwarves, the responsibility of overseeing his Alchemy Shop rests capably on the shoulders of Manager Elives and his diligent team of assistants.

Thanks to a robust network of suppliers, the shop offers affordability without compromising on the variety. It is the go-to place to find nearly all alchemical components of up to rare quality, and an assortment of mystical components, potions, and flasks up to the uncommon rarity. While they refrain from trading in weapons, scrolls, and enchanted items, they specialize in supplying potions, flasks, and components essential for spellcasting or item enchantment.

Moreover, adventurers and students will find that the following gear is available at a 15% discount at this location: acid (vial), alchemist's fire (flask), antitoxin (vial), map or scroll case, component pouch, ink (1-ounce bottle), paper (per sheet), robes, spellbooks, and spellcasting foci — be it arcane, druidic, or elementalist.

Each of the NPC (or NPC groups) interactions are described in detail below:

Elives (NG half-elf mage, with Arcana +9) is a figure of warmth and wisdom within the confines of Huradrin's Magic and Alchemy Shop. Dressed in loose robes and adorned with jewelry studded with glass beads, this middle-aged man has been a steward of the shop for over a decade. His wide smile welcomes all who enter, inviting them to explore the myriad wonders housed within.

The markings visible on parts of his exposed skin suggest a past spent under the harsh sun of Ubel, where he engaged in trade with the enigmatic taii'makus. Enticed by the Republic's promise of equality, he left his familiar surroundings to forge a new life in the city. Under Huradrin's mentorship, Elives rose through the ranks from assistant to manager, a journey he recounts with pride.

Inquiring about the recent happenings in the city will elicit Elives' opinion on the unfortunate demise of Vang, whom he knew as a person with a keen eye for valuable merchandise. He won't hesitate to express his concerns over the increasing appearances of penumbral creatures, suspecting the infamous Cult of Shadow Wing to be orchestrating something sinister in the vicinity — a development that is bad for business.

Should the conversation steer towards locating the cultists, Elives will recommend speaking with Sara, the owner of the local tavern. Sara is reputed far and wide for her foresight abilities, gaining her the informal title of a seer.

Avelum's Tower Students. Anyone who enters the shop can see a group of wizardry students browsing the store's shelves. The group comprises five teenagers (all NG, any humanoid **commoners** with Intelligence or Charisma 14, proficient in the Arcana skill, and able to cast the cantrip *prestidigitation*). They radiate palpable enthusiasm and are dressed in the emblematic attire of Tower apprentices.

Guiding this energetic cluster is **Professor Sunderland** (CG human **mage**), a guiding presence ensuring their safety, given the mandate that no student is allowed to leave the tower alone due to the threat of penumbral creatures currently active in the city. The professor greets anyone who approaches with a gracious nod, allowing the students to interact freely while maintaining a watchful eye to prevent any improper conduct.

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Should the PCs approach the students, they will exhibit curiosity, particularly towards any spellcasters in their midst. Engaging them in conversation reveals their limited knowledge about the city's happenings. However, they share a recent, unsettling event: a child from the local orphanage, slated to begin classes at the tower, was abducted by penumbral creatures. If prompted, Professor Sunderland confirms this distressing news, suggesting that more details might be gleaned from the orphanage directly.

4. The Weapon Shop

As you approach this shop, the symphony of rhythmic hammering and resonating clangs welcomes you. Entering, you feel the air thick with the heat and scent of molten metal and burning coal.

Within, the walls are adorned with weapons, each a masterpiece unto itself, illuminated by the gentle glow of enchanted lanterns. The collection ranges from intricate blades to deadly crossbows, each covered in enchanted runes and displayed harmoniously on the walls and weapon racks.

Behind the anvil, a blonde long-haired blacksmith hammers steel, guiding many apprentices bustling throughout the forge. Some heed the blacksmith's commands, while others attend to clients, ensuring the smooth operation of the busy workshop.

This impeccably clean and well-organized establishment is renowned throughout the region as a premier smithing school. Though it originally belonged to both Zalir and Koraldur, the day-to-day operations have fallen solely to Koraldur while Zalir attends to his commitments with the Republic and the Relic Hunters.

During the Kemet Invasion, Koraldur provided shelter and imparted his trade skills to young refugees. By the time the war ended, these apprentices had blossomed into expert blacksmiths, earning Koraldur a reputation as a distinguished teacher. This reputation attracts a continual influx of eager learners, drawn to the mastery and art of smithing. Today, the shop boasts a full team of apprentices at various stages of their learning journeys. These diligent individuals, ranging in age and expertise, foster a nurturing environment where the more experienced share knowledge with the newcomers, all under Koraldur's watchful eye.

Visitors to the shop will find a wide array of weapons and armor, including exotic and even magic items. These can be specially ordered through Koraldur, who possesses the skill to craft almost any item up to a rare quality, provided he has sufficient time and the necessary materials.

The shop is a bustling hub of activity, frequented by aspiring heroes, predominantly from the Adventurer's Guild, seeking new gear or maintenance for their well-worn equipment. It's not uncommon to find merchants from distant lands in the shop, hoping to acquire masterpieces to sell at a premium to the nobles, adventurers, and mercenaries in their home regions.

The Blacksmith. Koraldur (LN human **veteran**, with +8 and advantage on any smith-related tool check) is a man advanced in years who retains the vigor and enthusiasm of his younger days. A former imperial blacksmith, he grew weary of witnessing the horrors spawned by the lobotomy procedures that created the Ironhand. This led him to join Sedura at the end of the Kemet Invasion, supporting the foundation of the Republic. Having partnered with Zalir since the time of the war, he now fully dedicates himself to running the shop and imparting the art of forging to his apprentices.

If the PCs inquire, Koraldur will respond promptly, albeit requesting that they keep their questions concise due to his workshop duties. His knowledge about the actions of Shadow Wing is limited, but he advises the PCs to head to either the Mayor's Castle or the Republic Military Outpost for assistance, or to the Adventurer's Guild for work opportunities.

Team of Apprentices. The team consists of three seasoned blacksmiths and a number of young apprentices at different stages in their training. Engaging them in conversation will reveal that the group is largely uninformed about the matters concerning the Shadow Wing. However, one of the younger apprentices, a girl named Charlene (NG human **commoner**), recalls overhearing an old dwarf discussing penumbral creatures around a week ago at the Republic Military Outpost. The dwarf was dismissed and ridiculed at the time. Charlene came to know of this while she was there for a delivery.

Customers. Customers vary greatly, ranging from teams of heroes affiliated with the guild to noble merchants from other regions, either shopping or attempting to sell raw materials. They know nothing about the Shadow Wing activity in the city, but are very concerned about the rumors of penumbral creatures attacking the city.

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5. Mayor's Castle

As you step through the grand entrance of the formidable stone castle that stands before you, the vibrant flags of the city and the Republic catch your eye, billowing gracefully, a symbol of the region's unyielding spirit and unity. The castle, an ancient guardian of the land and the beating heart of Heroes Rise, welcomes you with halls of staggering proportions, their stone walls echoing with the fervent discussions of diplomats and officials tirelessly serving the populace amidst a time of unrest and uncertainty.

Hanging in the walls are portraits of the Kemet Invasion Heroes, gazing solemnly down upon the busy goings-on, bearing silent testimony to the city's rich history. The staff, albeit visibly preoccupied with the recent surge in the city's activity due to alarming rumors circulating, maintains a readiness to assist all who come with inquiries, guiding the concerned citizens with a professionalism born of dedication to their roles. The atmosphere is tense, yet the castle's age-old walls offer a kind of steadfast reassurance, a silent vow that the spirit of Heroes Rise, encapsulated in the venerable stone and the determined hustle and bustle within, remains unbroken and ever vigilant.

This ancient structure was built by the druids in a distant past to serve as a fortification. It was later abandoned, and much later taken as a refuge by the Resistance at the start of the Kemet Invasion. They reformed and repurposed it into a castle to serve the Wharfugee Resistance during that war.

Now adorned with flags representing Heroes Rise and the Republic of Freelands, it operates as the Lord Mayor's castle and the City Hall. Its large hall welcomes the public, addressing the demands of the people, while housing employees who work as city agents under the current Lord Mayor, Sir Erick, one of the great war heroes. Although Sir Erick is presently at Fisherman's Wharf on an official trip to the Parliament, **Sir Tittus Blue** (human **knight**) is overseeing the City Hall. The castle buzzes with activity, as rumors circulate about penumbral creatures haunting the city streets, leading to a steady stream of concerned residents seeking information.

Despite being swamped, the city hall employees remain committed to helping the population to the best of their ability. They are unaware of any specific actions by the Shadow Wing or emoguns, but can direct concerned individuals to the Adventurer's Guild or the Military Outpost for those wishing to lend a hand in dealing with the current crisis, while they try to calm and reassure the citizens that the Adventurer's Guild and the army are dealing with the situation.

In a discreet manner, **Civic Steward Janet Tessal** (human **knight**), a close associate of the Lord Mayor, might reach out to those showing a willingness to combat the penumbral creatures. She is privy to information about Master Armur Jasperin's clandestine connections to the Third Eye, although their full extent remains unclear to her. She believes that Master Armur, unwilling to converse openly with government officials, might share vital information with adventurers on possible activities of the Cult of Shadow Wing.

If the characters decide to speak to the soldiers, they will find them fraught with concern over the attacks, albeit poorly informed, as they are not engaged in the investigations. **Sergeant Dellroy** (human **guard**) will suggest they seek more information at the Military Outpost. With visible distress, he shares his fears for the city's orphans and urchins, suspecting that those without guardians become easy prey for the creatures lurking in the night.

6. The Republic Military Outpost

At the entrance of Heroes Rise, visitors are greeted by a mighty stone wall that envelopes the area, a testimony to druidic magic from days of yore. Refortified by Huradrin himself during the trying times of the Kemet Invasion, the wall not only stands as a historic relic, but also a functioning defense system, seamlessly integrating the city's Military Outpost which safeguards its gate. The outpost, boasting high towers that match the battlements in height, is fortified further with two sentinel watchtowers, while a majestic central tower rises defiantly towards the sky.

Within this fortress' stone confines, the primary barracks of the city guard come into view, forming the nucleus of the stronghold. As one ventures closer, the expansive grounds unfurl to reveal training arenas, dormitories to house the guards, a bustling cafeteria, and the formidable offices of the commanding officers. Adorning the area are the proud flags of the Republic, standing tall amidst statues paying homage to the brave heroes and soldiers who died in the war, a constant reminder of their sacrifice for Tanares.

The tension and fatigue are palpable among the people stationed there; the guard has been on high alert, conducting uninterrupted patrols and responding to calls from the civilians. To a discerning observer, it becomes clear that not all of these calls are based on rumors – the presence of soldiers sporting bandages and weary-looking healers indicate that the patrols have had unfriendly encounters.

If inquired about the situation, the soldiers recount harrowing encounters with sinister entities, of which they know little,

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except that they are horrifying aberrations. While they can share details of their personal encounters, their knowledge doesn't extend much beyond that. For more information, they direct the curious to their commander, **Major Tokrar** (LN orc **knight**).

Major Tokrar can enlighten the adventurers about the Cult of Shadow Wing and provide insights into the nature of penumbral creatures and the Penumbral Plane (refer to the Tanares Sourcebook). He shares that these creatures are frequently summoned by cultists to wreak havoc in Tanares. Despite his efforts, the Major has been unsuccessful in locating the cultists' hideout. He is seeking to consult an old dwarf named Hoffbünn, who resides by the docks and might possess additional information. However, Hoffbünn has been unwilling to communicate with the Major or his guards due to a previous incident where they dismissed his warnings about the Cult of Shadow Wing's activities in the city.

Tokrar offers to reward the adventurers with up to 25 gp for each penumbral creature they can prove to have eliminated in the city, highlighting the shortage of staff and the urgent need for assistance in safeguarding the citizens. If the PCs manage to bring such proof, he will honor the promised bounty.

If Tokrar is Possessed by Tenebrizon

Tenebrizon will manipulate Tokrar to acquire detailed information on the city guards' patrol routes, passing this intelligence secretly to the cultists to facilitate ambushes on the guards. He intends to dilute the patrol formations, arguing for the necessity to broaden their coverage in order to safeguard the frightened populace, thereby undermining their capacity to counter the penumbral creatures effectively.

As a result, the tally of fallen guards and soldiers will begin to mount. Tenebrizon further stirs discontent by nitpicking at the evidence presented of vanquished penumbral creatures, using minor discrepancies to withhold due rewards. This fosters resentment among the heroes and adventurers toward the guards, diminishing their willingness to lend assistance.

Tenebrizon aims to sustain this chaos indefinitely. If unchecked, in a few days the ranks of the guards will be infiltrated by his cultist followers, who then permeate every corner of the city. Their objective becomes sinister: to massacre as many civilians as they can while taunting the characters with blood-stained letters urging them to hasten their search for the hideout. The letters warn that any delay will only result in more deaths, a grim testament to their incompetence.

The characters might initiate an inquiry into these deaths, endeavoring to unveil the perpetrator behind the sinister plot. Their investigation may eventually lead them to the Major; however, Tenebrizon is determined to exact a heavy toll in innocent lives before they can thwart his plan. Then he wants to confront the characters and compel them to kill Tokrar, only for them to later learn that they killed an innocent who was possessed by Tenebrizon.

7. Avelum's Magic Tower

Before you stands Avelum's Magic Tower, a breathtaking sight reaching toward the heavens. Its exterior glistens with radiant light stones, and a majestic bluish roof crowns the pinnacle. The air crackles with arcane energy, confirming its mystical essence. Crafted by the enigmatic wizard Avelum, this four-story citadel of knowledge awaits. On the ground floor, a vast hall bathes in ever-shifting, luminous colors, seamlessly connected to essential service areas. Above, a three-story tower unveils realms of arcane marvels. Within these hallowed walls, students and scholars from diverse realms gather to unlock the secrets of magic. Expert teachers impart their wisdom, while invisible servants tirelessly ensure the tower's bustling vitality.

Taking the first step inside the tower clearly reveals that the tower is much larger from the inside than it appears from the outside; the lobby alone is about 3 to 4 times larger than it seems from the outside. Inside the tower, one can find several students, teachers, and *invisible servants* performing a variety of tasks, from sweeping the hall to carrying students' materials.

The reception room leads to a large square hall measuring 100 feet on each side, where there are four large stone statues representing the heroes of Tanares. Each of them is a stone golem and serves as the front line of protection for the tower, obeying the orders of any of the teachers. This area is also the common room for students, where they can rest, study, and practice magic. Looking upward, one can see the tower rising in a spiral staircase with doors that lead to surrounding rooms. Visibly, the tower has much more than three floors, encompassing many more levels that house classrooms, staff rooms, dormitories, and magic laboratories.

Upon entering the lobby, the PCs are greeted by a man in wizard robes. He is **Ramondi Cogma** (LN gnome **mage**), a teacher at the tower responsible for reception and defense since the onset of the attacks. Cogma is courteous, especially if the adventurers indicate they are there to help address the penumbral creatures menacing the city.

If the characters decide to talk to the students, they will find that most are preoccupied with their studies and prefer to converse briefly, or are anxious about the city's situation. A successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check will allow the characters to successfully inquire and find a student knowledgeable about the current situation who is willing to speak. The student reveals that there is a missing peer who was due to arrive from the city's temple and mentions that Sara, the tavern owner, has been seeking assistance to discover the origin of the monsters in the city.

If they approach Cogma for information instead, he will inform them that Avelum is away on official business at the Fisherman's Wharf Parliament. He will then take them to **Bridon Lamworth** (CG human **archmage**), the acting head of the tower. Lamworth offers as much help as he can, but stresses that his priority is maintaining the students' safety protocols, which currently strain the teaching staff.

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What Lamworth Knows

- Lamworth possesses extensive knowledge of penumbral creatures, including details about the abilities and characteristics of **penumbral miseries**, **grudges**, **pains**, and **sloths** (see Tanares Sourcebook).
- He suspects the existence of a penumbral portal somewhere and recommends seeking Sara's assistance at her tavern if the characters express interest in finding it.
- Regarding possession, he admits his understanding is limited, but acknowledges the associated magic is complex and powerful.
- Lamworth can elucidate most spells and leverages his expertise in Arcana and History to provide the characters with information.
- He is aware that Sara knows a rare ritual to close a penumbral portal. Although Avelum, his master, could also perform a similar feat, Lamworth lacks the requisite skill.

For additional assistance, Lamworth is regrettably unable to offer much. However, if the characters assist with certain tasks, he might be able to redirect some of his staff to aid them.

The Tasks. Lamworth offers the following tasks to the characters:

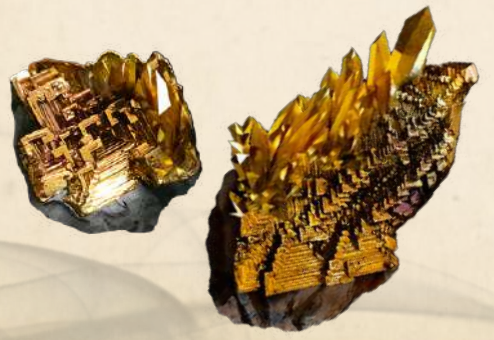
- Help protect students who need to collect food in the market and spell components necessary for their classes in the alchemy shop.
- Go to the temple and find out what happened to a young orphan who was supposed to begin studying at the tower last week.
- Acquire the eyes of an arachne.

For each task completed, the characters will be able to receive one of the following rewards of their choice *(they can choose the same reward multiple times)*:

- One scroll of any wizard spell from 1st to 3rd level of their choice.
- 250 gp.
- Two *potions of greater healing*.

If all three tasks are completed, Lamworth will, in addition to the rewards, ask Professor Cogma to assist the characters in any research or mystical investigation for one day. He will not venture into dangerous locations, but can assist the characters to the best of his abilities in other ways.

Tameranium for Sara. If the characters ask for tameranium, citing they need it to help Sara, it will be given to them if they do at least two of the tasks above, as an extra reward.



Heroes Rise Arena

Arriving at this location, you find a medium-sized coliseum nestled in the outskirts of the city. The walls are covered with posters announcing upcoming hero and adventuring group fights, as well as older ones that have not yet been removed. Although the venue can seat at least a thousand spectators, this number seems exaggerated given the size of the city. Fluttering flags representing the Republic, the city, and various rival teams adorn the arena's sturdy facade, evoking a sense of unity and rivalry in equal measure. As you approach, you see a group of people gathered in front of the closed main gates.

In the Republic, the tradition of settling disputes in arenas has been replaced by a judiciary system. However, even in the Freelands, arena battles still occupy a significant place in the culture, serving both as a pathway to fame for aspiring heroes and adventurers and as exhilarating entertainment for the people.

As the characters approach the arena, they recognize a familiar figure, Master Armur Jasperin *(refer to Chapter 1)*, engrossed in conversation with a group of people. Noticing the party, Armur will warmly greet them and inquire about their reasons for visiting the arena. If they mention their investigation into the emogun attacks and their quest to locate the Shadow Wing, Armur suggests that his wide network of contacts in the trading business might allow him to assist them. However, he is presently assisting his friend Jerremy (NE human **spy**), who has found himself involved in a dangerous arena battle against a family refusing to honor their gambling debts.

If the party is interested, Armur introduces them to Jerremy, explaining the latter's agreement to settle a heated dispute with the debt-burdened Peak family through an arena fight. Unfortunately, two of Jerremy's primary fighters are unavailable: one has fallen in the recent penumbral creature attack on the city, and the other has disappeared.

Jeremy's proposal. If the party agrees to represent him in the imminent arena battle, he will assign his last man to help Armur procure the vital information they need, including the location of the Shadow Wing hideout. Additionally, he promises to pay each member 200 gp if they triumph in the match.

The truth behind the situation. The background to this conflict is a familial crisis involving Chelsbeth Peak (NE human **noble**), a descendant of the respected Brasson Peak, known for his role in sustaining the city through agriculture, a job he proudly began during the Kemet Invasion to help feed the resistance soldiers. Brasson's legacy continued through his only child, Nieldun Peak (LN human **noble**), who became the father to three children: Brasson II (CG human **noble**), Madalein (N human **noble**), and the troubled Chelsbeth. Struggling with alcohol and gambling, Chelsbeth was coerced by her family to sell all of her share in the family assets to her older siblings in a private deal, in order to protect the family's fortune. Despite relinquishing control over a portion of the

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assets, she was guaranteed a substantial monthly allowance for a comfortable life, protecting both herself and the family from the repercussions of her addiction.

Things took a turn for the worse when, during a drunken escapade, Chelsbeth lost the family farm in a bet with Jerremy. Unbeknownst to many, Jerremy is a local head of the Third Eye criminal organization. As Jerremy attempted to claim his prize, a dispute erupted with Brasson II and Madalein presenting legal documents demonstrating their ownership of Chelsbeth's share of the farm.

In a deceitful turn of events, the Third Eye fabricated more recent documents suggesting that Chelsbeth had reclaimed ownership before the bet took place and asserting that the farm constituted only a third of the family's total assets (in reality, it represented about 70% of the wealth). Utilizing both bribery and intimidation, they gathered false witnesses to support their claims. Jerremy shrewdly intensified the conflict, avoiding legal routes he knew he would lose due to the fraudulent nature of the documents and unreliable testimonies. Exploiting the Peaks' sense of family honor and Brasson II's temperament, Jerremy fueled the emotional chaos, persuading Brasson II to agree to an arena battle as a resolution.

If Jerremy wins, he will take possession of the farm, leaving the Peak family, along with their numerous workers and aides, without a home and source of income. If the Peak family prevails, they retain ownership of the farm and consider the debt settled.

Taking Sides. Master Armur and Jerremy will urge the characters to support them, concealing Jerremy's scheme and emphasizing that Chelsbeth was the one who initiated the bet, portraying Jerremy merely as an innocent party caught up in the matter (a semi-truth, given that he facilitated the circumstances leading to the wager). Jerremy indeed did not cheat during the game and would have honored his end of the agreement had he lost. Consequently, he is genuinely upset that he is not being paid, as he was unaware at the time that Chelsbeth did not own her share of the family assets. He feels that the family is cheating him. Nonetheless, he was conscious of exploiting the vulnerable Chelsbeth, who was addicted to alcohol and gambling; however, he believes he did so in a "fair and square way." Now he is taking it a step further, aiming to claim the entire farm — not just the third Chelsbeth supposedly owned — yet he feels it's justified, given the family's attempt to deceive him.

If the characters engage with the Peak family, they will hear their perspective. They suspect that Jerremy orchestrated a scheme to seize their lands, asserting that his documents must be forgeries, although they don't know how to substantiate this claim. They are stunned by the support Jerremy has garnered. To assert their innocence, they can present the agreement Chelsbeth signed years ago relinquishing her share, along with the receipts for the monthly payments they have been making to her (250 gp per month). They note that she could have accumulated considerable wealth had she not consistently squandered it through gambling. If the characters find their story credible, they will be asked to assist in uncovering evidence of Jerremy's fraudulent intentions, providing an opportunity to investigate further before making a decision.

If approached, Chelsbeth will acknowledge her role in the bet, but refrain from discussing it in detail, burdened by a profound sense of guilt, shame, and fear for her future. Unbeknownst to her family, she harbors a deep fear of Jerremy, having discovered his affiliation with the Third Eye criminal group. Her fear is so paralyzing that she dares not share this information with her relatives. The characters can persuade her to disclose this secret only through a successful Charisma (Persuasion) or (Intimidation) check against a DC of 17.

Aligning with the Peak Family. Should the characters side with the Peaks, they are tasked with gathering evidence to demonstrate the fraudulent nature of Jerremy's documents and the dishonesty of his witnesses. This mission potentially pits them against the Third Eye criminal network, confronting

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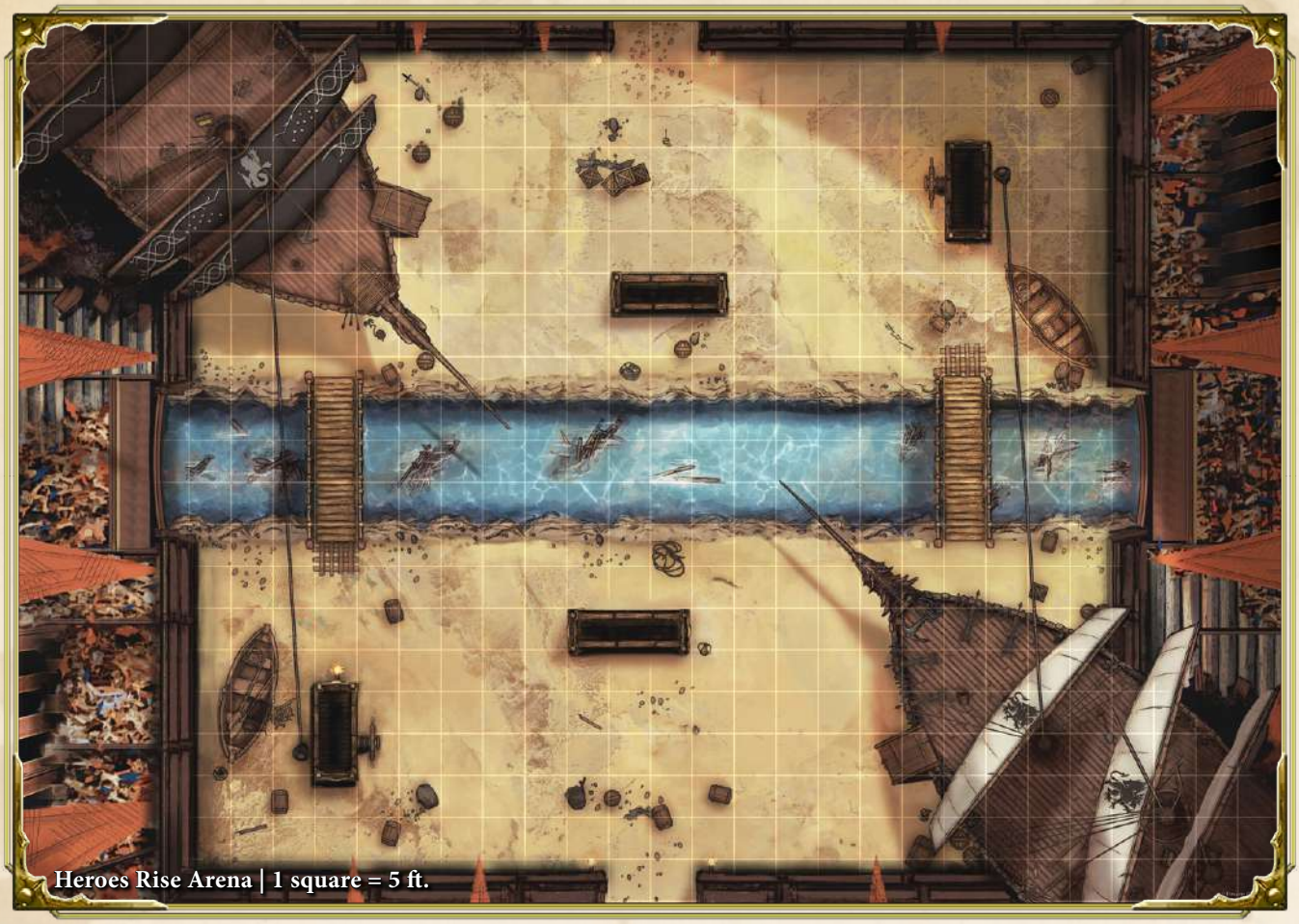

Heroes Rise Arena | 1 square = 5 ft.

their agents, bandits, and spies. Their investigation might guide them to the hidden base of the Third Eye, Jerremy's headquarters, where they can uncover proof against him. This includes evidence of fabricated documents, bribes to false witnesses, and intel that Third Eye has knowledge of the Shadow Wing hideout, leveraging it for their benefit. Discovering this not only aids the Peak family but gives a document with the exact location of Shadow Wing hideout, propelling the characters into Chapter 3. Master Armur Jasperin, although not directly opposing the characters, will withhold any further assistance if they oppose Jerremy.

Supporting Jerremy. If the characters choose to back Jerremy, they commit to fighting in the arena the following day against the Brave Shout Team, who represent Brasson II and Madalein. The formidable team comprises esteemed members of the Adventurer's Guild including the seasoned human warrior, Sir Roland Ironshield; the sharpshooting half-elf archer, Lyria Windwalker; the vibrant halfling bard, Finnegan Songfoot; and the devoted dwarf cleric of Dorsi, Baelin Ironbeard.

The Arena Battle. If they sided with Jeremy, on the next day they would be prompted to fight in the Arena.

Use the NPCs presented here to face the characters. If there are less or more than four players, you can adjust the number of enemies they will face to make the two sides have the same number of combatants.

Features of the Arena

Battlefield; Pit and Bridges. The Arena is split by a 20 ft. wide pit. Each side is connected by two wooden bridges (AC 13, 15 hit points). There is a trapdoor at one end of each bridge, as shown. The pit is 15 feet. deep and littered with debris at the bottom, making it difficult terrain. A creature can climb out of the pit using its walls.

Rudder. Aligned with the trapdoor at the end of each bridge is a 5 ft. wide, 15 ft. long wall. A rudder that controls the nearby trapdoor is attached to it. When the rudder activates the trapdoor, any creature standing on it must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. On a success, the creature moves safely to a space of its choice within 5 feet. On a failure, the creature falls through the trapdoor, which leads directly into the pit at the center of the Arena. It is not possible to climb out of the pit through the trapdoors. By the side of each of these walls are canoes that are treated as difficult terrain.

Caravels. Two prows of caravels are at the northwest and southeast zones of the Arena; their decks can be accessed by ramps on their sides. A 15 feet tall mast with a sail rises to a crow's nest from which a rope connects to the other side of the Arena. A creature who climbs to the crow's nest has half cover and can use 5 feet of its movement to slide to the end of the rope.

Wall. On the ground next to each caravel's bow, there is a wall of heavy boxes that is 15 ft. long, 7 ft. tall, and 5 ft. wide. The wall can provide full cover to creatures.

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Sir Roland Ironshield

Medium humanoid (human), neutral good

Armor Class 18 (chain mail armor, shield)
Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +4
Skills, Athletics +5, Intimidation +3, Perception +3, Survival +3
Senses passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Dwarvish
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. Sir Roland makes two melee or ranged attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Shield Strike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be pushed 10 feet back and knocked prone.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 30/120 ft. one target. Hit. 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Reactions

Parry. Sir Roland adds 2 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, Sir Roland must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon or a shield.

Lyria Windwalker

Medium humanoid (half-elf), chaotic good

Armor Class 16 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +3, Dex +6
Skills Acrobatics +6, Athletics +3, Perception +4, Stealth +6, Survival +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Elvish, Gloomfolkian
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Keen Hearing and Sight. Lyria has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or sight.

Power Shot. If Lyria did not move during her last turn, the first ranged attack she hits with on her current turn deals an additional 9 (2d8) damage.

Hunter's Mark (2/Day). As a bonus action, Lyria can cast *hunter's mark* on a target she can see within range.

Quick Reflexes (2/Day). As a bonus action, Lyria can take the Disengage or Dash action.

Actions

Multiattack. Lyria makes two melee or ranged attacks.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, ranged 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Baelin Ironbeard

Medium humanoid (dwarf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (chain mail armor, shield)
Hit Points 52 (7d8 + 21)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +1
Skills History +4, Insight +5, Medicine +5, Religion +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Dwarvish
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Spellcasting. Baelin is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Baelin has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, guiding bolt, healing word, sanctuary*
2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, spiritual weapon*
3rd level (2 slots): *dispel magic, spirit guardians*

Dorsi's Tenacity (1/Day). The first time Baelin is reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, he instead drops to 1 hit point.

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Finnegan Songfoot

Small humanoid (halfling), neutral good

Armor Class 14 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 33 (6d6 + 12)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Cha +5
Skills, Acrobatics +4, Insight +4, Perception +4, Performance +7, Persuasion +5, Stealth +6
Damage Resistances poison
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Gloomfolkian, Halfling
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Brave. Finnegan has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Spellcasting. Finnegan is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Finnegan knows and can cast the following bard spells:

1st level (4 slots): *faerie fire, healing word, hideous laughter*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person, silence, suggestion*
3rd level (2 slots): *fear, hypnotic pattern*

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Contagious Rhythm (2/Day). As a bonus action, Finnegan can play a contagious rhythm. All allies within 60 ft. who can hear it add 1d6 to their next attack roll. This benefit lasts until the end of Finnegan's next turn.

(In case a fifth member is necessary)

Selina Shadowstep

Small humanoid (gnome), chaotic good

Armor Class 14 (leather armor)
Hit Points 40 (9d6 + 9)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +5, Dex +5
Skills Arcana +5, Investigation +5, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +7
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Gnomish, Thieves' Cant
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Cunning Action. Selina can take a bonus action on each of her turns in combat to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action, to use the Sleight of Hand skill, use thieves' tools to disarm a trap or open a lock, or take the Use an Object action.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Selina can deal an extra 10 (3d6) damage to one creature she hits with an attack if she has advantage on the attack roll. The attack must use a finesse or a ranged weapon.

Spellcasting. Selina is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Selina knows the following wizard spells:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, prestidigitation, ray of frost*
1st level (3 slots): *color spray, hideous laughter, sleep*

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Bonus Actions

Shadow Step (2/Day). As a bonus action, Selina can teleport up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space that she can see that is also in dim light or darkness. She then has advantage on the first melee attack she makes before the end of the turn.

Finnegan *Selina*

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The Combat

Sir Roland Ironshield is a proud adventuring warrior who believes in justice and protecting the weak. While he is aware of the Peak family's wealth, he has taken adventuring jobs from them in the past and regards them as good people. In combat, he strives to shield his allies and draw attention towards himself. Leveraging his experience and the terrain, he will use his Shield Strike ability to push enemies into water or into positions advantageous for his allies.

Lyria Windwalker is a naive ranger with a limited understanding of city life, seeing things in black and white. She trusts Sir Roland and Baelin implicitly in matters of morality and is a fervent defender of animals. She becomes extremely concerned if natural animals or animal companions are brought into the fight. In combat, she prioritizes targeting individuals she perceives to be the easiest to defeat, especially enemy spellcasters. She maintains a safe distance from the fray, using her agility to retreat when necessary and won't hesitate to use her Hunter's Mark at the earliest opportunity.

Baelin Ironbeard, a braggadocious cleric of Dorsi, is steadfast in his belief in honor and justice. Owing a debt to the Peak family for their assistance during the Kemet Invasion's aftermath, he feels a strong obligation to repay this kindness. He persuaded the others to participate in this battle with fervent conviction. In combat, Baelin courageously stands alongside Sir Roland in the front lines, employing his *spirit guardians* aggressively and utilizing *guiding bolt* to attack weaker foes, facilitating Lyria's shots. He only attacks using spells due to an ancient clan vow.

Finnegan Songfoot, the bard, is the heart of the adventuring group, constantly working to uplift those around him. Although he is uneasy about fighting for the wealthy, his loyalty to his friends motivates him to participate. In battle, he prioritizes his safety while casting his spells like *fear* and *hypnotic pattern* to incapacitate foes. Despite his efforts to avoid direct confrontation, he will not abandon his friends.

If a fifth member is needed, **Selina Shadowstep** recently joined the team and quickly became a vital asset. A no-nonsense gnome, she appreciates forthright communication, despising what she calls "bullshit talking." She was eager to join the fight to thwart Jerremy's plans — a figure she despises due to his devious and criminal activities, which are always shielded by his influence and deceit. In battle, she collaborates with Sir Roland and Baelin to execute powerful sneak attacks. If unable to do so, she falls back on her limited array of illusion and enchantment spells to hinder adversaries.

The Result. Regardless of the battle's outcome, Jerremy agrees to honor their arrangement, requesting a bit more time to gather information on the Shadow Wing hideout. The following day, he will provide the details, handing over a document with the location of the Shadow Wing hideout, setting the stage for the characters to move into Chapter 3.

If they lose, he will express disappointment in their lack of prowess but will share the cultists' location, satisfied with the idea that the adventurers are likely heading to their doom.

If they win, he will fulfill his end of the bargain, paying the promised 200 gp to each character who fought in the arena. Moreover, he will hint at a back entrance to the cultists' lair, which leads to a trapdoor concealing their true hideout. Jerremy offers the assistance of one of his men, Frizzon (a human **spy,** with a Dexterity 18 and expertise in thieves' tools, and +8 bonus to lock picking), to accompany them to unlock the trapdoor. However, Frizzon will retreat at the first sign of danger or once the door is opened.

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9. The Docks

As you step onto the seemingly new and sturdy wooden planks of the dock, the brisk sea air greets you, carrying with it the scent of salt, fresh fish, and a hint of seaweed. Commerce and opportunity converge here, as many merchants haggle over prices with the local producers to secure cargo for their ships.

Before you, a sprawling network of docks stretches out, teeming with activity and life. Ships of various sizes and designs dot the area, their masts reaching towards the sky. The sea hosts a canvas of hues — from sleek merchant vessels to sturdy fishing boats, and even the enigmatic marvel of an Imperial ship crafted from a colossal dragon turtle shell.

As you venture deeper, cobbled streets and narrow alleys unfurl before you, flanked by taverns and a mix of improvised and modest homes. It is evident that this is the poorest region of the city. Port workers move purposefully, navigating the labyrinthine warehouse complex, while children play in the streets.

Your attention is drawn to two focal points in the crowd. To one side, a farmer stands, deeply engrossed in negotiations with a man adorned in a long blue coat, the unmistakable attire of a ship captain.

On the other side, a young woman's heated dispute with a city hall official commands attention. The air around them crackles with tension as they argue over steep port fees.

This bustling port area welcomes ships from all corners of the Central Sea, bringing with them a variety of goods and passengers. It even harbors a section designated for battleships. Currently, the massive military vessel known as the **Turtle Ship** from the Empire is stationed in the military sector (see "*The Turtle Ship*"). Meanwhile, in the civilian sector, several other ships are anchored, busy with the loading and unloading of goods.

Two individuals stand out in the crowd when the characters first arrive here. The first is a farmer engaged in intense negotiation over a considerable quantity of grain, surrounded by merchants from the Central Sea, while talking with a man with a captain's hat and a long blue coat. The other is a young woman locked in a heated discussion with what seems to be a city hall official, vehemently protesting the exorbitant port fees.

Farmer and Captain. The farmer, **Eamon Hargrove** (NG human **commoner**), owns a farm near Heroes Rise and is here to trade goods with **Captain Thorne Stormrider** (CN human **veteran**). Though their negotiation might seem fervent, it remains amicable upon closer listening. If approached, Eamon warns against wandering the streets at night due to rumored attacks by penumbral creatures. If asked whether he knows any rumors or have any information, he will tell that the only rumor he knows is about the affluent Peak family seeking help for their daughter, as her penchant for drinking and gambling seem to have created a huge problem for the family. Although Captain Thorne is not a local and knows little of the area, he is open to purchasing exotic items at a reasonable price.

Pirates and Taxes. Arguing vehemently with the bureaucrat is **Rosalind "Ironheart" Theyne** (CG human **bandit captain**), the leader of a pirate crew whose ship is inconspicuously docked as a merchant vessel. Despite the port inspector's demands for the standard docking fees, Rosalind

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resists parting with her money. She insists that she is not importing goods or transporting people, but merely stopping to purchase supplies, which she argues benefits the local economy. Furthermore, she contends that the fee amounts to extortion, given their lack of alternatives — it's either pay the fee, or face starvation.

Should the PCs engage her in conversation, she might offer information if they assist her in persuading the tax collector to see things from her perspective. She knows where Hoffbünn's house is because she has worked with him in the past. Moreover, she is aware that the Cult of Shadow Wing is behind the appearance of penumbral creatures in the city, which is why she wants to secure supplies quickly and depart.

The bureaucrat in question is **Benjamin Joy** (LN human **noble**), a man deeply committed to abiding by the rules and the letter of the law. He is determined to enforce the docking fees, as dictated by existing regulations. PCs well-versed in history might attempt a DC 20 Intelligence (History) check to recall the specifics of the peace agreement between the Empire and the Republic. This agreement potentially allows for a waiver of the fees for civilian ships in emergency situations, provided the stay doesn't exceed 48 hours, no goods are unloaded from the ship, and no individuals embark or disembark, except if only to gather needed assistance, such as necessary supplies. Should this information be brought to light, Benjamin would be flustered by his mistake and, after verifying the agreement in a book in his office, agree to waive the fee.

Another route the characters might take is to cover the 25 gp fee for Rosalind or to try to deceive Benjamin with a false law, requiring a DC 20 Charisma (Deception) check. Benjamin might be more vulnerable to falsehoods outside his area of expertise in law and bureaucracy, as his Insight is only +4.

The Port Workers. Asking around the other workers in the port about the whereabouts of Hoffbünn's dwelling, many individuals will either claim ignorance or choose to remain silent on the matter. Persistent questioning, however, might eventually garner some general hints pointing to the location of his home.

To gather more details and pinpoint Hoffbünn's house, a character can undertake a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check or succeed a DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check to obtain the necessary information from the locals.

10. The Turtle Ship

In the bustling port of Heroes Rise, amid the clamor of ships and sailors, the Imperial Turtle Ship looms large. Crafted from the unbreakable shell of a colossal dragon turtle, this magnificent warship stands as a testament to the Empire's strength and is the jewel of the Empire's Navy. A fearsome tiger's head-shaped bulge adorns its prow, symbolizing power, while a shield of spikes covers its surface when the ship is docked. Mystically, these spikes give way to a deck with three towering masts bearing sails shimmering with arcane energy when it's time to set sail.

Below deck, a mysterious taii'makian engine drives massive oars along its sides and rowing wheels underwater. The Imperial Turtle Ship is more than just a vessel; it's a floating fortress. Enormous magical cannons, crackling with energy, grace its decks, ready to unleash devastation at a moment's notice.

The ship is under the command of **Major Lik**, who is currently residing as a guest at Zalir's mansion. During his absence, the ship is helmed by his first mate, **Lieutenant Darian Hawkcrest** (LN human **knight**).

To board the ship, one must first secure permission from an Empire officer stationed at the docks. This permission may be granted if the individuals have fostered a positive relationship with the Empire or made a favorable impression on Major Lik during the events of Chapter 1.

The ship boasts a substantial crew of Ironhand soldiers, recognizable by their lobotomized state which renders them emotionless and devoid of personal will, ensuring unyielding obedience and discipline.

Major Lik alternates between two locations: the ship and Zalir's mansion. His location at the time of the characters' arrival depends on whether he has extended his stay at the mansion following the recent events.

Although Lik possesses limited information and is unable to lend the support of the soldiers — to prevent inciting a diplomatic incident that could furnish the Freelands Parliament with grounds to reproach the Empire — he is nonetheless prepared to aid adventurers demonstrably aligned with the Empire.

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Should the adventurers have previously exhibited a strong allegiance to the Empire or forged a close friendship with Major Lik, they could be offered a *potion of invisibility (very rare)*, a *potion of supreme healing (very rare)*, and a *bag of holding (uncommon)* per person, to keep going further in their investigation of who is behind Gary Landen.

Alternatively, if the adventurers maintained only a good standing and expressed a willingness to assist the Empire in investigating Vang's death, each individual will receive a *potion of superior healing (rare)*.

Major Lik intends to use these gifts to both display the Empire's might and wealth and to cement the adventurers' alliance with the Empire. In addition to these gifts, he is prepared to offer them a spacious residence in the Empire's capital, along with 1,500 gp, in exchange for concrete evidence implicating the Republic in Vang's murder.

Cultivating a positive relationship with Major Lik could greatly facilitate the characters' entry into the Empire in Chapter 5.

11. The Temple and the Orphanage

GM Note: Reminder - The events of Chapter 1 may have caused changes to the Temple, such as Razun and the Orphanage situation. You may need to adapt and use the following based on the context of your story.

Upon reaching this location, you are greeted by the imposing structure of the Heroes Rise's Celestianist Temple. This pristine white edifice boasts beautifully carved pillars and intricately sculpted walls that narrate the tales of gods and heroes who have shielded Tanares throughout history.

Statues and carvings dedicated to Tamera and Bauron abound, featuring sigils representing the Sun and the Moon. As you approach the temple, a magnificent staircase constructed from oak guides you to towering double doors that stand open, inviting you into the sacred space within. The vast and awe-inspiring interior unfurls before you, with the temple's nave stretching out ahead, showcasing a high ceiling adorned with intricate silver and gold accents that catch and play with the soft, natural light filtering through the ornate stained glass windows.

The space is designed to accommodate hundreds of the faithful, directing their reverence towards the majestic altar situated at the far end. Here, carefully carved statues of Tamera and Bauron preside, their vigilant gazes overseeing all who enter. Visitors can feel the grace and warmth extended by Tamera, while Bauron stands ready to judge one's worth, promising protection to the untainted.

Beyond the main nave, there is a hive of activity in the administrative area, which also houses a modest infirmary and accommodations for the devoted clergy. Further at the back of the temple, there is a very large orphanage.

Entering the Temple, one can easily find the two clerics that take care of the place along with their apprentices. **Bishop Razun**, servant of Tamera, and **Bishop Yggor** servant of Bauron (both humans, see Appendix A), are attended each by one cleric (NG **priest**), and three apprentices (NG **acolyte**).

They can offer basic clerical services, and have a great reputation in the city, knowing most of the citizens by name. If the characters made a good impression on Razun during Zalir's party, he can offer healing and other services for free if the characters got hurt fighting penumbral creatures.

Both bishops are eager to get rid of the penumbral creatures attacking the city, but they can't do much as they need to protect the orphanage and the apprentices. But they will provide as much information they can to help anyone willing to help.

They can direct the characters to the Adventurer's Guild, and tell them that the Military Outpost is offering bounties in gold for each penumbral creature killed with proof of the deed.

The Missing Children. When asking any cleric at the temple, the party will find out that it is common knowledge that Violet (13 years old), Klaus (11 years old), and Sunny (9 years old) had gone missing, vanishing during a troubled night at the orphanage. They can describe the Tinsneck siblings vividly: Violet is the protective and charismatic sister, Klaus is a brave young boy constantly looking out for the other children, and Sunny, exceptionally intelligent for his age, had even caught the attention of the scholars at Avelum's tower with an invitation to study magic there.

In the nights leading up to the disappearance, the children and caregivers alike reported an unsettling series of events; recurring nightmares plagued the sleep of the young ones while mysterious sounds and fleeting shadows stoked fears. Despite investigations, no tangible evidence of intruders was found. The situation escalated to the point where bishops Razun and Yggor sought the expertise of an old acquaintance, investigator Magnus Dalgliesh. The very night of Dalgliesh's arrival marked the peak of the phenomena; the young residents fell ill suddenly, an event later attributed to exposure to a penumbral herb that induced both sickness and nightmarish sleep. Fortunately, no serious harm befell them, but amidst the ensuing chaos, the Tinsneck siblings disappeared.

In the frantic hours that followed, Dalgliesh demonstrated remarkable adeptness, swiftly deducing the involvement of purple witches who had absconded with the children to the Penumbral Plane. Through meticulous investigation, he identified a penumbral rift within the city, a breach facilitating travel between planes. While he garnered substantial clues hinting at the rift's existence, time constrained a thorough investigation. Resolved to pursue the matter personally, he secured permission to use the city's portal — a relic from the former imperial network, facilitating immediate entry into the Penumbral Plane. The race against time spurred Dalgliesh into the unknown, leaving a lingering hope for the safe return of the missing siblings.

GM Note: The children were, in reality, imprisoned in the Cult of Shadow Wing Hideout (Chapter 3).

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The Orphanage

Behind the temple, there stands a large three-story house that serves as the orphanage. It currently houses 17 children; a substantial number, yet lower than during the aftermath of the Kemet Invasion when the bishops established the orphanage. Now, the place has vacant rooms and ample space for the children to enjoy. In addition to the bishops, clerics, and apprentices, two women, **Miss Samantha** (CG human **commoner**) and **Miss Clara** (LG human **commoner**), who were raised in the orphanage, devote their lives to nurturing the children, guiding them to find their places in the world.

Should the characters choose to engage with Miss Clara or Miss Samantha, they would find that Miss Clara is a kind-hearted woman who has always harbored a belief in her potent sixth sense. Despite efforts to become a priest or a mage, she never succeeded. Unknown to anyone, she carries a powerful druidic heritage, but the lack of training prevents her from harnessing her innate abilities. Clara shares a deep bond with the children, often immersing herself in playful activities with them. In contrast, Miss Samantha is a grounded individual, molded by a pragmatic outlook forged through her orphaned childhood. She is strict with the kids, but it stems from true worry for them. She harbors skepticism towards Clara's supposed mystical insights, attributing the latter's often accurate premonitions to mere circumstances, albeit with a deep-seated, reluctant acknowledgment of Clara's knack for being right.

Currently, a rare conflict brews between them. Samantha advocates for accepting Baron Jules' offer to relocate the children to Fisherman's Wharf, safe from the increasing threats of penumbral creatures plaguing the city. She views this as a chance for the children to enjoy safety and foster connections with a noble in the capital of the Freelands. Clara staunchly opposes this, citing an unsettling feeling about Baron Jules, derived from her sixth sense, and maintains a strong distrust of him.

Samantha seeks individuals who can provide proof of Baron Jules' commendable actions, such as assisting the Avelum Tower with acquiring mystical components and helping Zalir with funding the construction of Winterhold city for Winter Elves refugees post-war. Visiting the tower or talking with Zalir could allow the characters to obtain valid proof or testimonies affirming his good deeds. Meanwhile, Clara urges for someone to discreetly follow Baron Jules, determined to unveil his true intentions, as she can't shake her uneasy feeling about him.

Unbeknownst to all, the real Baron Jules has been killed en route from Fisherman's Wharf to Heroes Rise by a Purple Witch named Yvenna (**Purple Witch initiate** with Bellara's Blessing of Essence Absorption - see Tanares Sourcebook for details). Yvenna assumed Baron Jules' form using her powers, and in this disguise, her dark plan unfolds, aiming to either indoctrinate the children into becoming new acolytes of the Ungods or sacrifice them in rituals to open a new penumbral rift, a gateway for more creatures from the plane of horrors to invade Heroes Rise.

12. Hoffbünn's House

As you approach the edge of the docks, you spot a small cabin constructed from reclaimed wood, likely salvaged from old ships. Despite its timeworn appearance, this rustic abode exudes a remarkable sense of resilience. It boasts numerous reinforcements: iron supports, barbed wire in various spots, and strategically placed spikes to deter uninvited guests, clearly illustrating the occupant's readiness to fend off intruders.

As you draw nearer, you notice an array of small animal skulls and even those of strange aberrant creatures, each meticulously polished and engraved with runes. These are displayed prominently on different parts of the cabin's exterior, forming what appears to be a sinister protective ward. It becomes evident that the dwelling is safeguarded not only through physical means, but also through mystical ones, as a strange aura envelops you upon nearing the cottage.

Here resides the dockside legend known as Hoffbünn, a dwarf who is not only a necromancer, but also a master of traps. He has devoted himself to combating the forces of evil since the times predating the Kemet Invasion.

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Hoffbünn (CG dwarf **assassin**, with the spellcasting abilities of a mage) is known for his deep-seated paranoia, drowning in a sea of skepticism and conspiracy theories. He believes that the actions of the Cult of Shadow Wing and the Ungods are pervasive, infiltrating every aspect of life. The unsettling reality for the inhabitants of Tanares is that Hoffbünn is often right, to one extent or another.

A highly reserved individual, Hoffbünn is unwilling to engage in conversation with anyone he isn't well-acquainted with. Unless the characters approach accompanied by a trusted figure, Hoffbünn will not even open his door to parley with them, convinced that they are either Cult members, pawns of the Cult, or there to deride his alleged madness.

A firm believer in the imminent threat posed by the Cult, Hoffbünn refuses to leave his fortified dwelling, where he is busy crafting numerous traps to fend off anticipated attacks. He has already fended off three assassins sent to kill him and expects a larger force to strike next.

Hoffbünn Assassination Attempt. Should the characters ignore Hoffbünn's reticence and shouts for them to go away, instead choosing to linger outside his home overnight, they might find themselves embroiled in an assassination attempt targeting the dwarf.

The Cult intends to dispatch a formidable group consisting of two **shadow mages**, a powerful **penumbral anger**, and two **penumbral pains** to execute Hoffbünn.

If a conflict ensues between the characters and the cultist forces, Hoffbünn might be swayed to exit his home and offer assistance, provided the characters have managed to earn a modicum of his trust. Otherwise, he will remain inside, leaving the characters to fend for themselves, assuming the confrontation to be a ruse orchestrated by the Cult to draw him out into a vulnerable position.

Note: Exercise caution if you choose to follow this narrative pathway, as it can present a substantial threat to adventurers of this level. Facing a **penumbral anger** without Hoffbünn's assistance could prove to be an almost impossible challenge.

If the characters confront these foes and survive, they will earn Hoffbünn's trust. Managing to survive by fleeing will count in their favor but will not fully persuade the skeptical dwarf.

Good Deeds for the Community. If the characters spend daytime hours near Hoffbünn's hut, they may come to realize that beneath his brusque demeanor, the dwarf is a kind-hearted man. Many locals approach his door seeking assistance, and despite never leaving his dwelling, Hoffbünn aids them with advice, magical charms, and occasionally spare coins.

By engaging in conversations with these visitors, the characters can learn about additional problems plaguing the community, which Hoffbünn cannot address due to his fear of leaving his shelter and thereby exposing both himself and others to potential attacks from the cultists.

The characters have the opportunity to perform charitable acts to help the community; in doing so, they will gain Hoffbünn's trust, encouraging him to open his door and speak with them.

Here are some situations where the characters might offer assistance:

- ***Aiding a Sick Elderly Man.*** A senior member of the community is critically ill and needs a rare herb found in a perilous location to recover. The players can secure the herb and thus save the man's life.
- ***Addressing a Pest Infestation.*** Several dwellings are grappling with a significant pest problem, which is undermining living conditions. The players can help by sourcing natural or alchemical solutions to the infestation.
- ***Repairing a Broken Water Well.*** The main water well serving the community has malfunctioned. PCs can either fix it using their expertise or bring in a skilled craftsman from the town to restore the essential water source for the locals.
- ***Recovering Stolen Medical Supplies.*** Essential medical provisions have been taken from a community healer. The players can locate the culprits and retrieve the supplies, ensuring the healer can continue helping the sick and injured.
- ***Reclaiming a Family Heirloom.*** During a chaotic market day, an elderly woman lost a family heirloom — a cherished piece of jewelry. Word has it that a disreputable local merchant now has it. The players can negotiate, trade, or find another method to reclaim the item and return it to its rightful owner.

The number of deeds the characters must do to gain Hoffbum's trust may vary greatly by their manners, their actions and how the community perceives them. It's up to you to decide if they managed to convince the dwarf.

Trust Gained. Once the characters earn Hoffbünn's trust, he will welcome them into his home, his eyes finally showing a spark of acceptance. He will disclose the covert location of the Shadow Wing hideout, a place he discovered just a few days prior, which has subsequently made him a target of the cult. He elucidates that this hideout masquerades as a typical family dwelling, occupied by disguised cultists. Within it is the gateway to an underground lair suspected to harbor the ominous penumbral rift.

Hoffbünn will offer tea and, despite his gruff demeanor, prove to be good company. While his paranoia will be palpable, it will no longer be directed at the characters. Instead, he shares his belief that the cultists are orchestrating a cataclysmic scheme with the potential to thrust Tanares into the Penumbral Plane itself, thereby ruining the world.

He further elaborates that his time secluded in his hut has not been spent idly; he has been laying plans to venture into the Penumbral Plane to unearth the true nature of the unfolding events, confident that a deeper conspiracy is at play.

Hoffbünn urges the characters to either seek assistance to infiltrate the Shadow Wing hideout or take it upon themselves to do so, while he completes his preparatory measures for the journey to the Penumbral Plane. He emphasizes that any alarming discoveries should be communicated posthaste to Archmage Avelum at Fisherman's Wharf via a letter.

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13. Shadow Wing Hideout

Hidden amidst the labyrinthine alleyways of the peripheral residential area in the docks region of Heroes Rise lies a seemingly unremarkable shack. Modest and unassuming, it discreetly blends into the backdrop of its surroundings, shrouded in anonymity. As you draw near, a subtle fragrance of aromatic herbs wafts through the air, standing in stark contrast to the gritty surroundings.

In the shadowy underbelly of Heroes Rise, nestled within the periphery of the docks region, lies a deceptively modest shack. This unassuming structure blends seamlessly with its neighbors, presenting a facade of mundanity in a neighborhood steeped in anonymity. It is here that the trail of clues leads the characters.

Cult members use the fragrance of herbs to mask the smell of blood and decay that emanates from within the dwelling. Many strongly-scented plants have been cultivated around the house, and alchemical essences obtained from a breached underground laboratory augment the effort to conceal the horrors housed within.

Though it can be easily overlooked, this humble abode conceals the cultists' hidden base. The characters should arrive here through their investigations in the city. When they attempt to enter this residence, transition into Chapter 3 to continue the adventure.

14. Adventurer's Guild

As you step through its grand entrance, the vast expanse of the hall reveals itself, bathed in the warm glow of lantern light that beckons adventurers to gather around its welcoming tables, encouraging camaraderie among those brave enough to challenge the unknown. Alongside the hall, two counters stand ready to serve — one hosts a lively tavern where laughter and friendship flourish over glasses of fine ale, and the other, the mission registry, where individuals seize the opportunity to select quests and carve their names into the chronicles of heroism.

Adjacent to the registry counter, a large wooden billboard showcases the latest missions. Each poster details the prerequisites, compensation, patron, and the difficulty assessment devised by the guild's caretakers.

The walls of the hall bear an array of hunting trophies and vibrant banners representing affiliated adventuring teams and parties, bearing witness to countless tales of bravery. At the hall's end, symmetrical staircases ascend to a second floor on either side, ushering guests into a spacious lounge designed for both strategic discussions and well-earned rest.

The Adventurer's Guild of Heroes Rise serves as a focal point where both seasoned and aspiring adventurers and heroes converge to form parties, and where people seeking assistance come to find those who can solve their problems. This guild facilitates the assembly of adventuring teams and acts as an intermediary between these parties and the individuals seeking their services.

Here adventuring groups are categorized into different tiers ranging from Iron to Diamond, a system that aids in aligning quests with the expertise of each group *(for further details, refer to the "Republic of Freelands" section in the Tanares Sourcebook)*.

Manning the counter is **Halla Ingidottir** (CG autumn elf **mage**), a commanding elf woman adorned in a green robe and a helmet sporting two long metal horns. She efficiently attends to adventurers as they approach. She is the current local leader of the Adventurer's Guild of Heroes Rise. Possessing a gentle soul but a manipulative and cunning personality, she has seen many of her people perish when the downfall of the autumn elves happened. She regards naivety and simple goodwill as flaws, believing that in order to protect people and uphold what is right, one must think carefully, understand the situations, and take necessary actions. She contends that the spawns of evil will not hesitate to use any means available to them, and trusting in the mere execution of obvious moral actions can lead to suffering and disgrace, as experienced by her people in the past. Although her perspective may seem dark to many, she is not a gloomy individual. Instead, she often acts as a stern but loving mother to everyone with whom she becomes acquainted.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

If Halla is possessed by Tenebrizon

Using Halla's influence and good standing with the people of Heroes Rise, as well as her high position as the leader of the Adventurer's Guild, Tenebrizon will begin to sow seeds of fearmongering and paranoia among the populace.

To the commoners, he will use her to incite them against the city leaders, emphasizing how Avelum and Sir Erick abandoned them in their time of need and accusing the authorities of inaction while ordinary people die on the streets and the rich remain protected in their castles.

For the adventurers, he plans to direct as many as possible toward supposed quests in regions far removed from Heroes Rise, offering substantial rewards and leveraging the guild's reputation to ensure trust in these endeavors.

To the nobles, Tenebrizon will have her emphasize the perceived greed of the adventurers, accusing them of fleeing the city in its time of need, driven only by the promise of gold.

He intends to embroil vital quests for the city in bureaucracy, doing everything possible to foment division and civic unrest, with the aim of shattering the spirit of the once unified Heroes Rise.

Tenebrizon's goal is to incite conflict, spread rumors, and create divisions. Later on, he plans to use Halla to spearhead an uprising, rallying adventurers loyal to her and mobilizing the common people to take control. Subsequently, he aims to gradually replace the city's key figures with cultists under her influence. His ultimate objective is to obliterate the city before the eyes of the characters, enticing them into a confrontation with the guard and forcing them to kill Halla, setting the stage for the revelation that she had been controlled all along, and they killed an innocent.

Beside Halla, the bard **Haniel** — a tiefling characterized by goat-like feet and horns — plays melodies that resonate throughout the hall, and answers questions from adventurers when the guild leader is busy.

Occupying the tables is the newly promoted silver-tier team known as Brave Shout, who are engrossed in strategizing for an impending decisive battle in the local arena *(refer to location 8, Heroes Rise Arena)*. Nearby, fledgling teams huddle around billboards or await their party members near the counter.

A missions billboard lists various tasks available. Below are some of the current assignments, but feel free to craft your own.

GM note: While undertaking these quests does not directly contribute to the characters locating the Cult of Shadow Wing hideout, you can utilize them to craft engaging side quests. These excursions offer opportunities to develop the characters' personalities and can even introduce them to alternative methods of discovering the cultists' whereabouts.

***Goblin Trouble* (Copper Tier Quest).** North of Heroes Rise, a hobgoblin-led goblin group has been pilfering from goods carts. Local farmers offer 5 gp per proven goblin kill and 25 gp for the leader's defeat.

Ankheg Acid (Bronze Tier Quest). Southeast of Heroes Rise City, a nest of Ankhegs in a cave complex is producing collectible acid. A merchant offers 15 gp per vial collected, noting that 1d4-1 vials can be obtained from a fresh Ankheg carcass.

Penumbral Lurkers (Silver Tier Quest). The city is being plagued by nocturnal attacks from penumbral entities. Major Tokrar of the city guard offers 25 gp per verified kill of a penumbral creature.

Drake Harvest (Silver Tier Quest). Rumors circulate of drake nests, of an unknown kind, in the nearby mountains. A winged-mount breeder offers 200 gp for each drake egg brought to him.

Lost Soldiers (Gold Tier Quest). Sergeant Nobul and his squad went missing during a city patrol. Major Tokrar is offering a reward for information on their whereabouts. *(see chapter 3, Nobul is one of the prisoners in the hideout)*

Zheraza's Hoard (Diamond Tier Quest!). In a corner hangs a poster signaling extreme danger, advertising a mission led by dwarf Ulf and ranger Trevale to recover a portion of dragon Zheraza's hoard. For inquiries, speak with Halla and Haniel.

If the characters ask about the Zheraza Hoard quest, Halla will direct the PCs to Haniel. He will recount a tale weaving together folklore about Zheraza, the discoveries of Ulf and Trevale during their exploration, and information extracted through a *speak with dead* spell cast on an orc corpse found near Frostburg village.

The Tale of Frostburg (as singed by Haniel, the Bard)

The prayer wind drifted through the ethereal plane, washing over the sleeping Zheraza, dragon of the wintry north. Although she was young, she took her responsibilities seriously and served the avatar dragon Kelorth with pride. The petty pleas and grasping desires of the Tanarean mortals soothed her dreams, feeding her slumber. It took the smallest attention to answer those that were worth a reply. Some were grateful, others regretful for having disturbed her. However, it was not her role to answer those prayers. Punishment was her domain.

A troubled breeze flickered across Zheraza's nostrils, making her scaled snout twitch. Something was afoot. Somewhere near her lair, mortals were plotting war. It was not yet enough to rouse her through any of the seven layers of sleep of an avatar dragon. Handling this would fall to her.

There were eleven bands of orcs surrounding the town, none more than eleven strong. Alone, they were no match for the heroes of Frostburg. Together, they could overwhelm them.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

"Zarash, I say again, this plan is risky," muttered Akahda One-ear. "We will surely rouse the ire of Kelorth."

"You made that argument at the moot. The clan chiefs rejected it," Zarash replied. "You agreed to be bound by whatever the moot decided."

"I will honor my word, though I may die this night, but my honor demands I advise caution."

"It would take a war host to draw Kelorth's attention. The danger to us is one of the lesser dragons."

"When we come together to Frostburg, we will number more than a hundred," Akahda said gruffly.

"The shaman threw the bones. The nearest dragon sleeps deeply. We come together, pillage the town, but leave swiftly after no more than a fingerbone's width of sand falls through the hourglass. By the time the dragon wakes, we'll be separate once more and within the strictures of war."

"Eleven is a lucky number," Akahda conceded.

"And we'll get even more loot from Baron Thedores, who is paying us to punish Frostburg."

"They should have paid their taxes instead of whining about going hungry."

"It is time," Zarash said, standing and blowing his horn.

Red violence pulsed like the failing heartbeat of a rabbit in the wolf's jaws. It irritated Zheraza, making her tail shiver, which in turn made snow fall faster and thicker in her territory. More pain and death seeped into her dreams, waking her. Plans for war and conflict had become actions, actions that could not be tolerated. Actions that needed to be punished lest they continue.

Zheraza's lair was well hidden beneath the thick ice of Lake Icever. Elemental servants carved out a labyrinthine hall for her to protect her hoard and her icy eggs, should she be lucky enough to breed. Any mortals foolish enough to try to pillage her lair would be met with deluges of water so cold it would suck the life from them in moments, and blasts of frigid wind that would blow them into spikes of hardened ice. Those that remained would be cut down by elementals of air and water, or the band of trolls she nurtured here.

Above the lair and all the way down into the town of Frostburg, snow began to fall heavily and the wind picked up precipitously. Zheraza eased aside the stone in her flooded sleep chamber and rose through the frigid waters of Lake Icever, finally bursting through the ice to take wing. The cold deepened wherever her shadow fell.

Four of the eleven bands wandered off their paths, lost in the sudden snow squall. She could tell three of them would soon be lost and die from the cold. The fourth would likely stumble into a cave where her trolls would find them.

She fell upon one band, crushing half of them with her landing. Her tail swept three more high into the air. The orc leader thrust a spear at her head, only to be swallowed in two bites. She took to the air, taking two more in her claws, crushing them and dropping their corpses. One lone orc survived. Always leave one to tell the tale.

A second band of orcs fought through the snow, trying to escape with their loot. She breathed icy death upon them, freezing them into icy statues that would not thaw until well into spring.

Two bands of orcs made it to the forests east and south of Frostburg. Zheraza grew the icicles forming on the highest branches. As they moved deeper to get out of the wind, the icy spears fell with unerring aim, skewering the wild-eyed orcs one by one.

A band in the hills fell into a crevasse when the thin ice covering it collapsed. Another group fell prey to a remorhaz hiding in a fresh snow bank.

One band remained, the Bone Breakers, led by Zarash Talon Hand. This group would get special attention. They huddled in the ruins of a farmhouse, attempting to light a fire for warmth. Zheraza let loose her frost breath again, encasing the building in ice. Snow began to fall heavily on the rooftop, adding to the weight there. The orcs pounded on the frozen door in vain until the roof collapsed, killing them all. Zheraza dropped Zarash's corpse in the center of the town before returning to her lair beneath the lake.

A week later, the defending heroes of Frostburg met at the Rat's Tail tavern. The town was mostly recovered from the storm and the raid.

Ulf stroked his thick dwarven beard and turned to his ranger friend Trevale, "You know this means there is a dragon near here."

"And dragons have hoards," Trevale said. "And possibly an egg."

"I've always wanted a drake."

The Impossible Mission. This quest involves recruiting individuals to assist Ulf and Trevale in orchestrating a heist to secure a portion of a treasure and, if possible, an egg from Zheraza, an ancient white dragon.

Engaging directly with the dragon would almost certainly result in death. Therefore, if the characters express interest in this perilous endeavor, Halla will warn them that the mission is practically suicidal. Should the characters remain resolute in their decision, they can coordinate with Ulf and Trevale to initiate their detailed plan to infiltrate the dragon's lair. The objective is to acquire as much treasure as feasible and a dragon egg, then evacuate swiftly before Zheraza discovers them.

Chapter Ending

As the characters pinpoint the location of the cultists' hideout, they can progress to Chapter 3. In this phase, they will have the chance to explore a dungeon steeped in the horrors conjured only by the servants of the Ungods.

The characters have the freedom to explore more of Heroes Rise, allowing you to advance the storyline at a pace that suits you.

Remember to check the expected level at the beginning of each chapter to see if you need to speed up or slow down the characters' progress to keep them adjusted to the adventure, or if you need to adjust the encounters to better suit the characters' level.

> Consider awarding 5,000 XP to each PC for completing this chapter. The recommended level for ending this chapter is 4th. If your group is above or below, consider adjusting future encounters and side quests to speed up or slow down their progression.

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Chapter 3
Gary's Hideout

The Cult of Shadow Wing is biding its time, waiting for Tenebrizon's plan to come to fruition. Their task is to create the greatest destruction possible in Heroes Rise, and they are continuously summoning more horrors from the Penumbral Plane using their secret hideout.

Their plan began secretly months ago when the first cultists discreetly settled in the city and began to use magic to create an underground hideout in the dock region. Their aim was to find a relic from the time of the Kemet Invasion, specifically the remains of U'Tibam's laboratory, in the bowels of Heroes Rise.

This laboratory was built by the most brilliant taii'maku alive and was used to craft inventions to aid the resistance. Although it was sealed and abandoned after the war, when U'Tibam returned south to help his people, the source of mystical energy that powered it was always rumored to be located somewhere in the depths of Heroes Rise. The cultists seized the opportunity to find it after capturing a taii'maku who was close to U'Tibam and knew the true location of the laboratory.

Armed with this information, they accessed the locked-down laboratory to harness the arcane energy stored there, using it to open a penumbral rift. This allowed them to summon the servants of the Ungods to Tanares to serve Tenebrizon's will.

While the characters will likely be surprised to find a highly technological structure in the underground of the cultist hideout, they must tread carefully to avoid the traps. They will face sinister forces as they delve deeper to learn more about the nefarious plot of the Cult of Shadow Wing, picking up where the trail began — with Vang's murder.

Exploring the Hideout

The search for the mastermind behind Vang's assassination leads the characters to a seemingly ordinary house in the harbor, a facade hiding a dark underbelly pulsating with penumbral energies and eldritch secrets. The hideout extends deep underground, housing rooms soaked in horror.

The characters will initiate their investigation by infiltrating the old shed that the cultists use as a front for their operations in the city. This action will lead them to discover underground tunnels and explore the labyrinthine complex below. There, they will have opportunities to free prisoners, find treasures that might prove useful in the future, and uncover the tracks of Gary or his mercenary cronies who were lying in wait in the hideout. The group will unearth the portal the adversaries used to travel to the Penumbral Plane, and learn of their ultimate objective: reaching the capital of the Empire.

Throughout the exploration, many clues will suggest that the Cult of Shadow Wing is orchestrating something far more significant. However, the evidence the party gathers during this expedition may not be substantial enough to decisively end the conflict between the Republic and the Empire.

Faced with this, the characters will have a choice: they can either venture into the Penumbral Plane using the discovered portal, proceeding to Chapter 4, or return to the authorities with their findings, seeking a way to enter the Empire and track down the mercenaries there, going to Chapter 5.

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Running this Chapter

This chapter will focus on the characters' exploration of the Shadow Wing hideout as they attempt to find proof of who is behind the assassination and to capture all those involved.

Seeing as this chapter represents the end goal of Chapter 2, it is likely that the characters have already established a clear objective to locate this place, meaning no additional motivator is necessary.

If the characters choose not to venture inside, you can encourage them to become engaged by introducing friendly NPCs or citizens of Heroes Rise who have had a family member or close friend abducted by the cultists or the penumbral creatures (see room 6. Prison). These loved ones might still be alive inside the hideout, adding urgency to the characters' mission.

While the authorities are committed to stopping the creatures, they are currently stretched thin, exhausted, and understaffed from protecting the city against the widespread penumbral threat. Because of this, they might offer a substantial reward to the characters if they decide to infiltrate the hideout themselves.

Summary of the Chapter

After exploring Heroes Rise and finally pinpointing the location of the hideout, the characters will have the opportunity to brave a secret temple in the heart of the city. There, they will face penumbral creatures, cultists, and the mystical power of the Ungods.

Venturing inside the underground dungeon, they will discover the remains of an ancient taii'maku laboratory. They must explore this perilous locale to ascertain the whereabouts of their targets and to uncover their plans.

Three Main Ways to Find the Information

There are three main avenues through which the characters can discover that the mercenaries used the penumbral portal to escape to the Empire's capital.

- ***The Cultist Leader.*** If the characters manage to subdue and capture the local leader of the cultists without killing her, they might be able to use magical means to extract information from her. Zalir can assist with this if they apprehend the cultist leader and seek his help. Sara can also suggest that Zalir might be able to magically extract the necessary information from the cultist leader's mind. The leader knows that the mercenaries used the penumbral portal to travel to a secret underground fort in the Empire's capital for payment, but she does not know the fort's exact location.

  Location - The Control Room (Room 9): The cultist leader can be found here, preparing the next set of rituals and sacrifices to summon more penumbral creatures through the portal.

- ***Pile of Documents.*** In the Alchemy Room, the characters might find an assortment of scrolls, books, and papers. A thorough search could reveal a set of encrypted letters, which can be translated using a mystical device located in the Control Room (Room 9). This device can copy and translate any text. The translated material will reveal details about the use of the portal to reach the Empire's capital and the existence of a hidden Shadow Wing fort beneath the city.

  Location - The Alchemy Room (Room 13): requires a visit to the Control Room (Room 9).

- ***The Prisoner.*** Spike, a potential rescuee, overheard a conversation between Zahlla and the cultist leader discussing their use of the penumbral portal to travel to a Shadow Wing fort using the penumbra, although he does not know the fort's location.

  Location - The Prison (Room 6): further investigation required in the Portal Room (Room 10).

The characters have three primary methods to obtain clues regarding the aforementioned locations:

- ***The Translator.*** Located in the Control Room (Room 9), this taii'maku translating machine comes with a note hinting at the storage location of some crucial documents in the Alchemy Room.
- ***The Sacrificial Circle.*** In the Portal Room (Room 10), the characters might discover that prisoners are being sacrificed to summon penumbral creatures via the penumbral portal. Signs suggest there may be additional prisoners hidden elsewhere in the hideout.
- ***The Deactivated Forge.*** Found in the Technological Forge (Room 14), this inactive area hints at a control room to the north that can activate the defenses and control various mechanisms within the facility.

In addition, exploring the hideout might yield important clues to pinpoint the mercenaries' location.

Where are the Mercenaries

Zahlla, Tabek, Bagasse, and Gary (if he escaped) were at this hideout but left via the penumbral portal before the characters arrived. Leveraging Zahlla's expertise and the magical enhancements provided by the servants of the Ungods, they intend to traverse the Penumbral Plane and exit through a secret rift in the Empire's capital city.

Upon arrival, they will meet with a group of cultists at a tavern. This group will then guide them to a concealed underground fort where the mercenaries are set to receive payment for their services. A substantial bonus awaits them if Tenebrizon's plan succeeds; thus, they will follow a new job they received and then await the outcome at the hidden Cult of Shadow Wing fort.

Given their head start, familiarity with the terrain, and the magical assistance provided by the Ungods' servants, it will be immensely challenging for the characters to track and locate them before they reach the Shadow Wing fort in the capital. However, their trail in the Penumbral Plane is still fresh, offering the characters a viable chance to find the path they took and arrive at the same point in the capital.

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Other Important Information the Characters May Acquire:

The Grand Plan. The documents found in the Alchemy Room hint at a grandiose scheme involving a pyramid and a soul-sacrificing ritual. The exact purpose remains unclear, but it suggests that the Cult of Shadow Wing is orchestrating something significant.

The Ungods. The unholy symbols present in the hideout convey to the characters that the Ungods are potent, god-like beings capable of bestowing unholy power upon their devotees in exchange for worship, much like other gods they are familiar with. Some texts that can be found here can offer insights into the four Ungods and their respective cultist sects.

Tenebrizon's Hierarchy. A scroll in the possession of the hideout's cultist leader illustrates the hierarchical structure of the Shadow Lords cult, extending up to the leader's own rank. It reveals that there is a being superior to Tenebrizon. This document also opens up the possibility to the characters that Tenebrizon might actually be a penumbral dragon, rather than a person, although this remains speculative since the information is not definitive.

Tenebrizon's Possession

At the beginning of this chapter, you have the option to designate one NPC as being possessed by Tenebrizon in this chapter.

In this chapter, Tenebrizon aims to possess an NPC with one of two goals in mind: to accompany the characters and deliberately place his possessed vessel in harm's way, potentially leading to its death and causing the characters to feel they failed to protect their ally; or to control one of the penumbral dragon wyrmlings, ensuring the characters face a formidable challenge to test their worthiness as targets for ritual sacrifice in the culmination of his grand plan.

If you feel, based on the progress of your story, that Tenebrizon did not have the time to possess another person after the characters dealt with him in Chapter 2, feel free to ignore the possession in this chapter. However, take into consideration that there is a penumbral portal open here, allowing Tenebrizon to summon a cultist for possession and return to the hideout in just a couple of hours.

As always, each NPC profile contains a specific section detailing the potential actions of Tenebrizon while in control of that character. However, you are encouraged to create your own strategies for Tenebrizon, aligning with the goals defined earlier in the narrative.

To choose the possessed NPC, you may select one from the provided list, create a new NPC, or roll a die using the guidance provided in the table below:

D10 Roll	NPC
1-2	**Sargeant Nobul** (6. Prison)
3-4	**Spike** (6. Prison)
5-6	**Sunny** (6. Prison)
7-8	**Grevasht** (11. Machine Room)
9-10	**Adaranthrax** (11. Machine Room)

Warning: Sunny is a child. If the theme becomes too dark for your gaming group, avoid having Tenebrizon possess him!

Invading the Hideout

After uncovering the location, the characters have two methods of infiltration:

- They can enter through the front door and confront the cultists who are acting as the "dwellers" of the house, guarding the premises.
- They might attempt a stealthy entry via the kitchen's back door, aiming to explore the area and potentially locate the trapdoor leading to the underground level without encountering the cultists in the house.

Once inside the hideout, the characters must navigate the dangers alone, as the cultists are reluctant to offer any information. Firm in their devotion to their eldritch deities, they prefer death over betrayal, willing to sacrifice their lives with frantic zeal.

The Shadow Wing Hideout

Features:

Small Shed. Rooms 1 to 4 comprise a small, old house primarily constructed of wood.

The Underground. Rooms 5 and 6, along with the connecting passages, are the result of magical excavations. Though they present no risk of collapsing, both the walls and the floors are irregular. The ceilings are relatively low, with a height of 7 feet.

U'Tibam's Old Laboratory. Rooms 7 to 14 are sections of the old taii'maku laboratory. This area features well-carved stone walls and high ceilings, reaching up to 15 feet in height.

1. Entrance Hall

You step into a seemingly regular living room illuminated by the dull flicker of candles. Four individuals, dressed in ordinary commoner clothes, look at you, startled by your presence, while their shadows flicker in response to the trembling candlelights.

The four individuals are cultists; two are **shadow mage**s and two are **Shadow Wing initiates**. They will try to act like normal commoners to make the party lower their guard before attacking, hoping to gain the element of surprise. Hidden underneath their clothes are daggers that can be spotted with a DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check.

Each of the shadow initiates carries a *scroll of darkness* that they can use. They are not inclined to flee, except to quickly gather more cultists to attack the invaders. One of the **shadow mages** also has a heavy iron key, which unlocks the trapdoor in room 4, the kitchen.

Treasure: 70 gp, 4 daggers, and two *scrolls of darkness*, carried by the **Shadow Wing initiates**.

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Gary's Hideout

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

2. Bedroom 1

As you gently creak open the door, a pitiful sight greets you: a young woman — beautiful yet dressed in rags — lies on an old, bug-infested bed. Her eyes meet yours, gleaming with both fear and hope. Though her hair is disheveled, you notice that she is unbound; moreover, her well-manicured nails seem out of place given her ragged appearance.

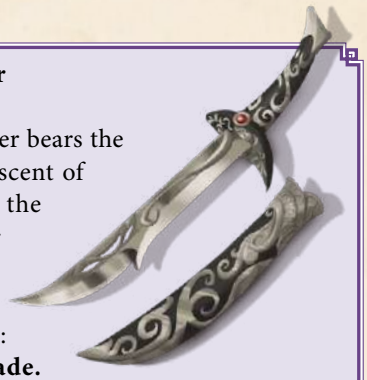
The woman is, in fact, a **lesser penumbral lust**, pretending to be a victim. She had been in the room trying to entice the cultists, enjoying the process of feeding on their emotions, but now she has found much better prey: the characters.

She attempts to pass herself off as a young impoverished woman, mimicking one of the girls who was once imprisoned and later sacrificed by the cultists. However, her disguise is not perfect; this is the creature's first time in the Material Plane, and she is navigating how to blend an alluring form with one that evokes pity.

She will not attack unless provoked, either through a physical assault or aggressive questioning. Her plan is to accompany the characters and find the opportune moment to strike. She will claim to know the whereabouts of the other prisoners, intending to lead the group away from room 6 and towards the potential dangers awaiting in rooms 7, 8, and 9.

Emotion Draining Dagger. Hidden within a crease of the bed's wooden structure lies an unholy magic dagger capable of draining emotions. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the weapon while searching the room.

Emotion Draining Dagger
Weapon (dagger), rare



This elegant silvery dagger bears the fine craftsmanship reminiscent of elven artistry. Created by the Kemets, it has the power to drain the emotions of those it affects. The dagger has the following properties:

Emotion Draining Blade. You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon. Additionally, the dagger inflicts an extra 1d4 damage to emoguns as it extracts a fragment of their essence.

Draining Presence. If a creature carries this dagger for at least 5 continuous hours, it feels the weapon's emotion-draining effects during its next long rest, plagued by eerie nightmares featuring a demanding eye that urges the eradication of penumbral creatures and the followers of Ungods. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or lose 1 Hit Die. This loss endures until the creature remains at least 5 feet away from the dagger for a continuous 48-hour period. Each night the creature retains the blade, it risks experiencing these nightmares again, potentially suffering cumulative effects with each failed saving throw, including the loss of all Hit Dice.

Emotionless Servitude. If a creature's Hit Dice reach 0 due to the Draining Presence effect, the individual becomes an emotionless servant of Augur (refer to the Watchers section in the Tanares Sourcebook). This condition endures until a Dispel Evil and Good spell is cast on the affected creature, releasing it from the dagger's control and restoring its lost Hit Dice.

Calm Emotions. (1/Day) Once per day, the wielder can utter a command word while touching a creature with the blade to invoke effects identical to those of the Calm Emotions spell cast upon that individual. The targeted creature must succeed on a DC 18 saving throw to resist the spell's effects.

The room also has a small cabinet, but it only has simple commoner clothes covered in dust.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Lesser Lust

Medium aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural)
Hit Points 71 (11d8 + 22)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Cha +6
Skills Persuasion +6
Damage Immunities psychic
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Deep Speech
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Charm Opportunist. Lust attacks that hit a creature under charm are automatically considered critical.

Shapechanger. The lust can use its action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid, or back into its true form. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Actions

Multiattack. The lust makes three melee attacks.

Creepy Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) psychic damage.

Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 30 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and if the target is large or smaller it is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained, and the lust can't attack another target with its tentacle.

Mind Overload. The lust targets one charmed creature it can see within 30 feet of it. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw, taking 5d10 psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. This attack doesn't remove a creature from the charmed condition.

Fascinating Presence. Each creature of the lust's choice that is within 60 feet of the lust and aware of it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed for 1 minute or until the lust or its allies makes a harmful action against it. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

3. Bedroom 2

You see a small bedroom, the walls covered in mold. An old bed is in one corner, with a small cabinet beside it.

This room contains the personal belongings of the cultists, including a collection of oddities and potentially valuable items available for looting.

Trapped Cabinet. The cabinet door is rigged with a poison needle mechanism (DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) to locate, DC 13 Dexterity saving throw to avoid), which deals 1d4 poison damage and imposes the poisoned condition for one hour upon a failed save.

Inside the cabinet, explorers can find a small stone statue, dark robes characteristic of the cultists, three unholy iron symbols (worth 3 sp each), and a total of 17 gp, 9 sp, and 23 cp.

Statue of Z'ulvath. Found on top of the cabinet, the small statue represents a dragon enveloped in tentacles and flanked by massive wings. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Religion) check identifies it as a depiction of the Ungod lord, Z'ulvath, the Shadow Wing. Touching the statue with bare hands or destroying it summons two **specters** that attack anyone not recognized as a servant of the Ungods. Destroying the shadows causes the statue to crumble to dust, revealing a hidden crimson ruby worth 200 gp inside.

4. Kitchen

The scent of stale air and rot greets you as you step into this kitchen. The wooden shelves are stocked with jars filled with unidentifiable substances. Cobwebs cloak the ceilings, while small critters scuttle away upon your entrance. In a corner, you notice an old wooden trapdoor.

The cultists use this kitchen to prepare their meals, but it also serves as a testament to the madness and horror pervasive in this place. The jars are filled with pieces of humanoid body parts or organs, all preserved in honey or salted vinegar.

Searching the cabinets and drawers is horror-inducing, as one can find a shocking lack of sanitation mixed with glasses filled with floating eyes and humanoid hearts.

As a GM, you may ask characters who are less accustomed to such horrid sights to roll a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw to avoid becoming incapacitated by nausea for 1 minute when confronted with this gruesome scene.

Three of the rats in this room are actually **penumbral miseries**, hidden among the other critters. They will not initiate an attack on the characters unless provoked. If the characters open the trapdoor (see details below), these entities will head to Room 6 (Prison), drawn by the misery of the individuals there. While they will not attack the prisoners immediately, they may become aggressive if the characters attempt to rescue the captives later on.

Trapdoor. Secured with a sturdy padlock, opening it requires either the key from one of the cultists in the entrance hall or succeeding in a DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. Characters may also try to force the lock open with a DC 20 Strength check. Upon opening, they will find a set of stairs leading to a dark, underground cavernous path.

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5. Crystals Room

Crossing the cavernous path, you find yourself in a spacious underground chamber illuminated by a dim red light emanating from four crystals encrusted in the walls, each marked with a strange sigil. At the center of the room, three aberrant creatures stand guard, protecting the passage.

This room is guarded by two **penumbral grudges** and one **penumbral pain**. They will attack anyone who enters the room, except for cultists and penumbral creatures.

Special Combat Rule

Penumbral Crystals. The crystals on the walls are carved with sigils representing the four Ungods. These were placed here to protect the area from invaders by emanating penumbral energies.

Whenever a humanoid (except for servants of the Ungods) ends its turn being the closest (or tied as closest) creature to a Penumbral Crystal, that humanoid takes 2d6 psychic damage.

Whenever any penumbral creature ends its turn being the closest (or tied as closest) creature to a Penumbral Crystal, it regains 2d6 hit points.

The crystals have AC of 12, 15 hit points, and are resistant to all forms of damage. If destroyed, they release a wave of energy that deals 4d6 psychic damage to all creatures within a 30-foot radius (penumbral creatures instead regain hit points).

Attacking a crystal with the *emotion draining dagger* destroys it instantly upon a hit and prevents the energy wave from being released.

A DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check allows one to understand the mystical patterns carved into the four crystals, enabling them to, as an action, draw a reverse sigil on the crystal, neutralizing it until the drawing is erased.

6. The Prison

The tunnel opens into a cavern that serves as an improvised prison. The air here is thick with the stench of blood and the foul odor of urine. In the center stands a torture table, its surface covered in dried blood. To one side of the room is a cage, while metal bars on the other enclose a cell holding a couple of people. Beside the table stands a fat shirtless cultist, accompanied by what appear to be his two apprentices.

Illuminated by torches on the walls, the place reveals a grotesque scene: a torture table laden with cruel instruments such as blades, drills, and other horrifying implements of agony. Beside the table stands a sturdy iron cage, its floor marred with scrapes and stains from its past occupants, and further beyond, a row of bars forms a makeshift cell, harboring prisoners in various states of despair and torment.

Currently presiding over the prison are three cultists: one **master of pain**, a corpulent shirtless figure covered in sigils and scars, and his two disciples, **Shadow Wing initiates.**

Treasure. The **master of pain** carries 120 gp, a set of iron keys for the prison cells and shackles, two *potions of healing*, and a tarnished silver locket containing a small painting of a loving family (worth 30 gp).

On the table, one can find a set of instruments infused with penumbral energies, granting an advantage on checks to inflict pain and torture individuals. Such a bizarre collection has no market worth, but could potentially be sold to unscrupulous individuals for around 500 gp.

Blood Potions. Beside the instruments, one can also find four bottles of a dark red liquid in glass vials. They are potions crafted from the blood and suffering of the cultists' victims.

Blood Potion
Potion, rare

You receive the effects of a short rest when you drink this potion, including having the ability to spend Hit Dice.

While drinking this potion, you can see flashes of the suffering endured by the individuals who died to facilitate its creation. You must make a Wisdom saving throw with a DC of 16 or become stunned. You can attempt this save again at the end of each of your turns, ending the stunned condition on a success.

After succeeding on the save, you will still be haunted by the visions it brought you, causing you to have disadvantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throws for 24 hours. This disadvantage only applies after you successfully save against the stun.

Prison Cells. Opening the cells requires the **master of pain**'s keys or a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. Among the prisoners, there are individuals with different backgrounds and information:

Layson (LN human **noble**), a young adult, the son of a nobleman, was kidnapped for ransom. He is untrained in combat, but the characters can later collect a 100 gp reward at his father's home in Heroes Rise.

Sergeant Nobul (LG human **knight**), a city guard who was captured during his attempt to protect citizens from the cultists. His fellow guards have already been killed. He is currently too weak to fight (10 hit points, poisoned, incapacitated, and with 3 levels of exhaustion). Nobul is a paladin of Tamera and is saving his Lay on Hands ability to help prisoners in need; he will offer to heal any wounded adventurer and even stay behind to use his remaining healing if the characters plan to venture further into the hideout. He currently has 20 hit points of healing left in his pool (out of a total of 25).

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If Nobul is possessed by Tenebrizon: Tenebrizon will downplay Nobul's current state, asserting that he is well enough to assist the characters. He will insist on tagging along and helping, even showing his badge as a Paladin of Tamera to gain their trust if necessary.

He will try to be on the frontline in battles, using his Lay on Hands ability exclusively to aid the characters. He will endeavor to be pleasant, friendly, and helpful. However, Tenebrizon's ultimate goal is to ensure that before they reach the end of the dungeon, Nobul gets killed, leading the characters to blame themselves, never realizing that it was Tenebrizon manipulating them from the beginning. If this occurs, ensure that in later chapters Tenebrizon reveals his role in Nobul's death, taunting them for their failure to save an innocent.

Sunny (NG human **commoner**), a 9-year-old, is one of the Tinsneck siblings who disappeared from the orphanage. Upon being released from prison, he will cry and ask the characters to save his siblings, Violet and Klaus, who were also taken but were brought to a different location. He does not know where, but speaking with the other prisoners will clarify that they overheard the cultists talking about taking them to the Penumbral Plane.

If the characters save him, they will earn the gratitude of Bishop Razun and Yggor. They will receive free healing and lodging at the temple in Heroes Rise, along with a reward of 2 *potions of greater healing*. Although the child is unharmed, he is extremely scared.

If Sunny is possessed by Tenebrizon:

Tenebrizon will have Sunny cling to the characters' legs, crying and pleading not to be left alone. He will compel Sunny to follow the characters at all costs, striving to lead Sunny, Klaus, and Violet into danger with the intention of seeing them die, deriving pleasure from the characters' anguish over failing to protect the children.

If this occurs, ensure in later chapters that Tenebrizon reveals his deceit, taunting the characters for their failure to save an innocent life.

If the characters manage to bring Sunny outside, Tenebrizon will force him to escape and re-enter the dungeon. Only by rendering Sunny unconscious or imprisoning him can the characters truly prevent Tenebrizon from putting Sunny (and potentially his protective siblings) in harm's way.

Warning: This plot element may be distressingly dark for some groups as it involves putting children in danger. Confirm with your group beforehand to ensure everyone is comfortable exploring this theme.

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Spike (NE gnome **spy**) is a sly and greedy undercover agent working for the Third Eye. He was captured by the cultists while attempting to investigate their activities on behalf of the Third Eye's information network. Currently, he has 10 hit points, is poisoned, and is unwilling to risk his life, planning to take the first opportunity to escape. However, he is vengeful and will encourage the characters to confront the cultists, offering information to assist them in doing so.

What Spike Knows:

- He overheard Zahlla, a gloomfolk mercenary working for the cultists, discussing plans with the cult leader. She mentioned that she and her group intend to use a penumbral portal to travel to the Empire's capital. There, they will find their contacts and head to the Shadow Wing fort in the city to receive payment and await further instructions.
- He has heard the cultists mentioning a being named Tenebrizon, who is orchestrating some grand plan in the Kepesh lands to the south.
- He is aware that the ultimate fate of the prisoners is to be taken to a sacrificial chamber located in the far east of the underground complex. He suspects that the cult leader's headquarters is situated to the north.

If Spike is possessed by Tenebrizon:
Tenebrizon will have Spike offer to help the characters venture further into the dungeon, downplaying his weakened condition. Spike will insist, claiming he desires personal vengeance against the cultists, and will follow the characters even if they refuse his assistance.

The characters will need to either address the Spike situation directly or allow him to tag along. Despite his condition, he will attempt to take the front line in battles, shouting vengeful phrases with each attack he makes against the cultists.

Throughout the exploration, Tenebrizon will seize the opportunity to snatch as much of the found treasure as possible. His ultimate goal is to enter the Machine Room (room 11) and allow Spike to fall to his death amidst the cogwheels, losing all the looted items in the process, as they will be destroyed by the machinery.

If this comes to pass, ensure that Tenebrizon reveals his involvement in a later chapter, taunting the characters about how much they lost, and how much more he can take away from them.

7- Room of Insanity

Your first sight is a magically reinforced stone wall that has been breached by some powerful force, revealing a vastly different location beyond. Here, the walls are neatly crafted from stone, adorned with dozens of well-crafted steel and bronze gears moving in perfect harmony. In contrast, strange symbols etched into the walls cast a glowing crimson hue over the place.

This is the place where the cultists used powerful ritual magic to breach the magically reinforced walls of U'Tibam's laboratory. After succeeding, they adorned the breached room walls with sinister sigils to deter any potential invaders.

The sigils are a potent spell that drives those who gaze upon them to insanity. A DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check can identify their effects and the countermeasure, which is to avoid looking at them altogether. One must traverse the room with closed eyes or use a blindfold to sidestep the sigils' influence, as they cover all the walls in the room.

Catching a brief glimpse of the sigils from outside the room has no adverse effects. However, once inside, all creatures *(with the exception of followers of the Ungods and penumbral beings)* are vulnerable to the protective enchantment woven into the sigils.

Any creature that enters the room or begins its turn there without shielding its eyes must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw; failure results in being affected by the effects of the *confusion* spell for 1 minute.

Aside from this, the room holds no other points of interest. There is a door that can be opened using a lever situated beside it, which leads to the next room.

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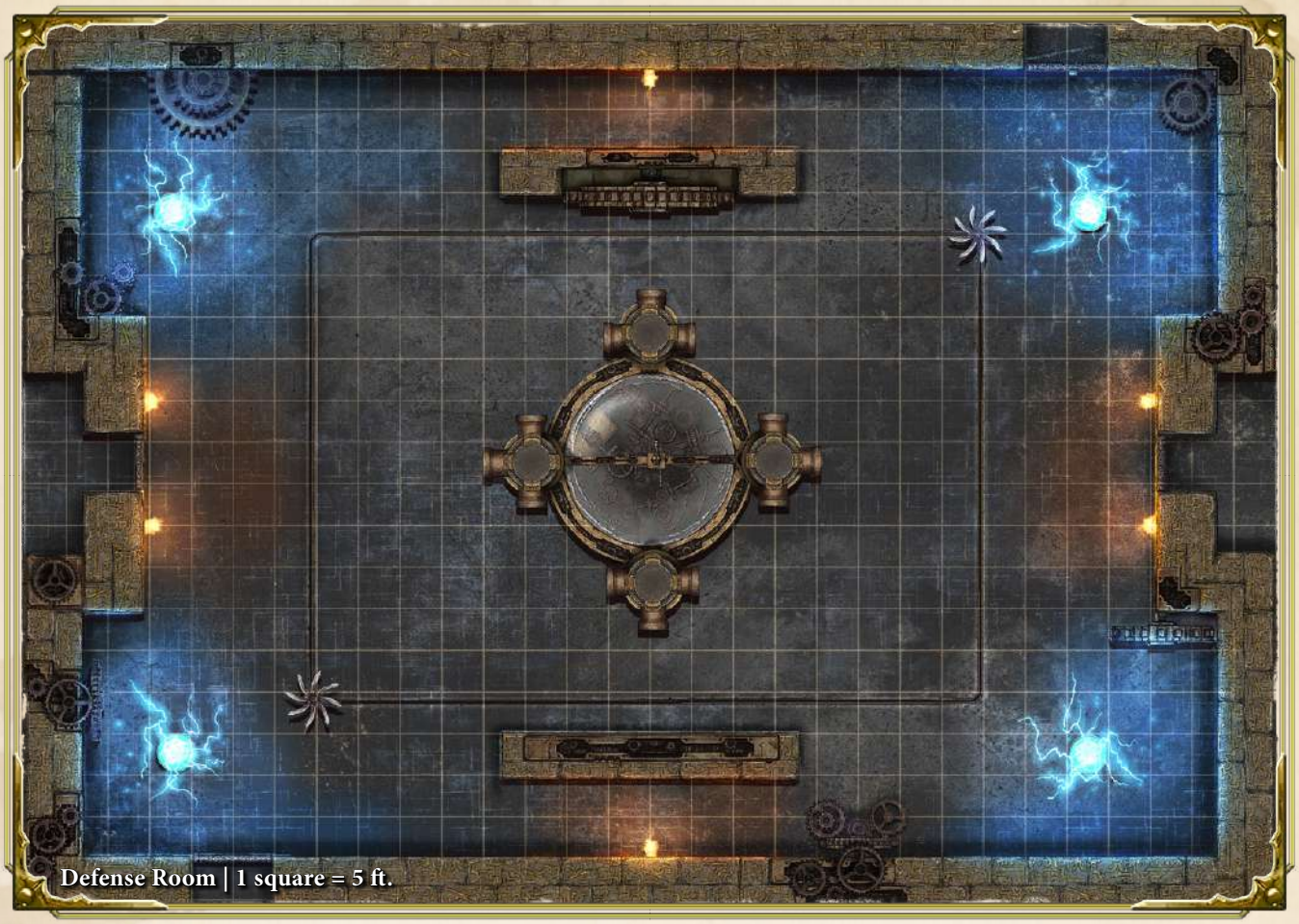

Defense Room | 1 square = 5 ft.

8- Defense Room

Entering this room reveals a vast hall filled with mechanisms of great complexity. In each of the four corners of the room, orbs pulsate with lightning energy, while enormous cogwheels turn on the north and south walls. At the center stands a complex apparatus composed of bronze tubes and thick glass. A metal rail on the ground carries two sets of large spinning wheels fitted with blades. Scattered around the room are eight aberrations that resemble bizarre amalgamations of toads and reptiles, each having a large, slithering eye on the end of its tail, seemingly scanning the room.

This room was once a defensive mechanism utilized by U'Tibam to deal with intruders. Now under the control of the cultists, it stands at the heart of the facility where a group of eight **penumbral envies** are stationed to halt any invader.

The creatures are not highly intelligent, attacking anyone unrecognized as a cultist or a penumbral creature. While they remain ignorant of the room's defensive mechanism functions, they instinctively avoid obvious dangers, but not with great skill *(for instance, they generally evade the bladed wheels' path and refrain from entering areas of lightning, but they do not actively avoid all hazards)*. Preferring to use their ranged attacks from the rear of the room, they have been trained not to venture out of the room unless absolutely necessary, and will not pursue characters who flee the room.

This space is enchanted to send an alert to the Control Room (Room 9) in the event of an intrusion. Although the Cultist Leader will become instantly aware of any invasion, she tends to let other cultists and creatures weaken the intruders before engaging them herself. She has the ability to monitor the actions in the Defense Room through a scrying item located in the Control Room.

Special Combat Rule - Defensive Mechanisms

There are three possible defensive mechanisms in this room that the Cultist Leader in the Control Room can activate as soon as the characters enter the area.

Depending on the level of complexity you wish to introduce to the encounter, you can decide that any number of these mechanisms are no longer operational. Utilizing all three offers the most interesting challenge in this room.

Note: If using all three mechanisms, their order of effect at the end of a round is aways Lightning > Blades > Steam.

Orbs of Lightning. The four orbs located at the room's corners are crackling with lightning. Anyone who comes within two squares of the orbs or starts their turn there takes

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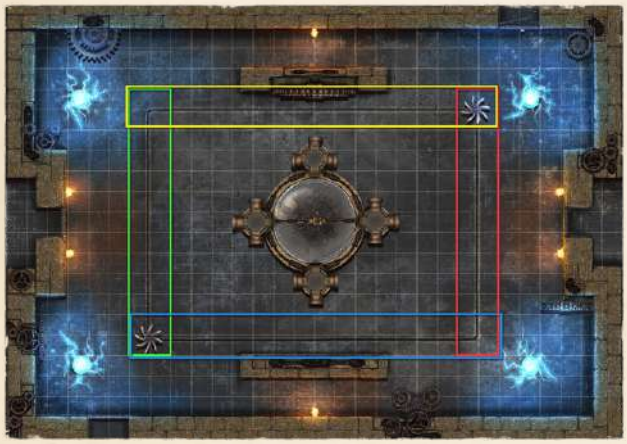
3d6 lightning damage; a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw can halve this damage.

At the beginning of each round, the Cultist Leader can choose two orthogonally aligned orbs to initiate lightning arcs between them. By the round's end, any creature present in the 3 squares line connecting the two lightning areas takes 3d6 lightning damage, which can be halved with a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw.

Above, the four different possible areas that can be chosen are depicted. At the end of each round, one of the areas will be jolted with lightning.

Blade Wheels. Two blade wheels are affixed to a ground rail. Stepping on a square containing the blades subjects a creature to 3d10 slashing damage and forces them 5 feet away from the blade. The damage can be halved through a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, although the pushback still happens anyway.

Each round ends with both blades advancing to the rail's next corner, inflicting 2d10 slashing damage to every creature in their path, and pushing them 5 feet away. Again, a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw reduces the damage by half, but the pushback is inevitable.



The affected areas are illustrated above. At the end of each turn, the blade will traverse two of the areas, inflicting damage and pushing away anything in its path.

Steam Tubes. The central structure houses high-pressure heated steam. At the beginning of each round, the Cultist Leader can decide to release steam through tubes pointed in a specific direction. Due to the tubes' configuration, the steam can only be released in one of four directions: north, south, east, or west. Consequently, all tubes aimed in the selected direction will release steam jets.

Once a direction is chosen, the mechanism builds up pressure, signaling an imminent release through noisy vibrations and faint vapor leaks from the tubes. By the end of the round, the steam jets erupt, inflicting 2d8 fire damage on any creature in their path and throwing them 10 feet back while knocking them prone. A successful DC 14 Strength check allows a creature to resist being pushed back and knocked prone.

After directing steam exclusively towards one direction for two consecutive rounds, the mechanism accumulates sufficient pressure to enable a potent jet that releases steam in all four directions, activating all tubes simultaneously. To utilize this function again, the leader must spend two additional rounds directing steam towards a single direction.

Check the image examples to better understand the four different choices the Cultist Leader can do.

Example of the area covered by the three tubes aimed in all four directions.

All the doors in this room are closed but have a lever adjacent to them to open them. The levers can be deactivated in the Control Room, but only with U'Tibam's master key, which the cultists do not possess.

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9- Control Room

As you cross the threshold into this room, it becomes immediately apparent that the noise of the whirring gears and humming arcane energies is noticeably quieter here. Despite the relative silence, the room houses an impressive array of brass and steel machinery. A portion of the wall showcases an illusory projection of the room you just vacated, a phenomenon generated by a series of lenses and crystal orbs mounted on the ceiling.

Against the back wall stands a control panel of great complexity, an amalgamation of levers, runes, and cogwheels. Next to it, a machine equipped with multiple mechanical arms holds writing feathers, surrounded by scattered scrolls and parchments. Nearby, bags of clothes and bedrolls lie haphazardly.

Dominating the center of the room is a woman draped in an intricate yet revealing mantle. Her long black hair is adorned with delicate golden ornaments shaped like skulls, which complement the beautiful jewels she wears. Beside her lurks a grotesque creature — the horrifying result of the fusion of twin beings with quadruped bodies and slender legs. This abomination sports a dual-headed maw fringed by writhing red tentacles, while its luminous blood-red eyes stare unblinkingly. An additional eye on its tail fixes on you with a menacing gaze.

The woman addresses you, her voice a beguiling mix of seduction and sarcasm that leaves her hostile intentions unmistakably clear. "Hello, why do I have the honor of hosting such esteemed guests? It seems my servants failed to provide accommodations befitting your illustrious presence. But as they say, if you want something done right, you must do it yourself. Allow me to make amends for what my abode lacked."

This is the room where one can control the defensive mechanisms and disable various devices throughout the entire laboratory. Currently, it is under the control of the cultists' leader, Jazannah, a Purple Witch aligned with the Shadow Lords, working diligently to earn the favor of the Penumbral Father for her mistress, Bellara.

Jazannah (NE human **Purple Witch sorcerer**) is a polite and graceful woman, yet her heart is as cold as the most remote regions of the cosmos, lacking even a trace of compassion. Her true goal is to attain the eldritch grace of the Ungods, a desire she would pursue at any cost except compromising her own safety and wellbeing.

Although frequently manipulative and cunning, she does not feign civility when the circumstances are unambiguous. She will engage the characters with polite words but will not hesitate to attempt to swiftly vanquish them in combat after they find her in the Control Room. She is reluctant to leave her stronghold to confront them, barring exceptional situations.

By her side is a **penumbral pain**, a being that has served her for many years and one she holds dear. She communicates with it as one would with a devoted dog, yet she is prepared to sacrifice it in pursuit of her objectives.

The Purple Witch Sisters Background

Yvenna, the Purple Witch who is attempting to abduct the children from the Heroes Rise Orphanage, is Jazannah's younger sister and apprentice. The only person Jazannah is unwilling to sacrifice is Yvenna. While she would never harm her sister, Jazannah's affection for Yvenna manifests in a form of total domination, controlling every aspect of her sister's life. This is all part of an irrational endeavor to protect, educate, and shape her into the spitting image of what she perceives to be the perfect younger sister.

If Yvenna is killed by the characters and Jazannah becomes aware of it (a detail left to the GM's discretion based on the storyline), Jazannah will, if in combat, use a bonus action to sacrifice her "pet" by killing the penumbral pain in order to summon a penumbral grudge. Avenging her sister by subjecting the characters to the most gruesome death imaginable becomes her primary objective.

Conversely, if the characters kill Jazannah and relay this information to Yvenna, it will leave her feeling lost, as she has always solely acted upon her sister's commands. In the absence of her sister, she might succumb to despair, spiral into deeper insanity, or potentially be swayed to a new path by the characters, should they endeavor to guide her. Yvenna's vulnerability stems from a lifetime of manipulation and control exerted by her older sister, who is 15 years her senior and was already secretly a Purple Witch initiate when Yvenna was young.

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The Combat. While not under attack, Jazannah plans to exert control over the battle using spells such as *banishment*, *bestow curse, blindness, charm person*, and *ray of enfeeblement*. Should she become a target, her strategy shifts to a more aggressive stance, utilizing her Energy Arc to focus on the most vulnerable opponents first with the aim to eliminate them.

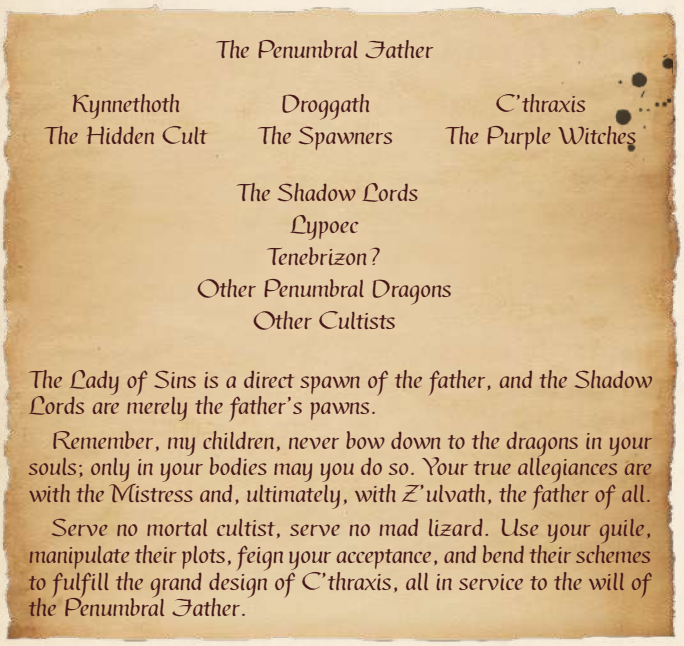
Should her hit points fall to 30 or below, she will employ her Essence Transfer on the enemy she perceives to be least wounded, seeking to recover as many hit points as possible.

If she finds herself overly pressured, she might resort to casting invisibility to escape the combat, harboring intentions to return later and exact revenge on the characters. If they permit her escape, remember this decision, and reintroduce her as an additional adversary in a Chapter 7 or 8 encounter — whichever you prefer — fueled by a thirst for vengeance.

Treasure. A search of the room will uncover a *cloak of protection*, a *+1 longsword*, and a *ring of resistance (psychic - Jade stone)*. These assets are stowed in cabinets beneath the control table, remnants from U'Tibam's time. Jazannah had been saving them with plans to sell them in the future.

Should the characters manage to subdue Jazannah, they will discover she possesses a scroll impossible to read, as it is written in strange sigils and in a language that only the cultists touched by the madness of the Ungods can understand. If the characters bring these scrolls to the translating machine in this room, they may be able to read their contents.

The translated content:



The Penumbral Father

Kynnethoth — The Hidden Cult
Droggath — The Spawners
C'thraxis — The Purple Witches

The Shadow Lords
Lypoec
Tenebrizon?
Other Penumbral Dragons
Other Cultists

The Lady of Sins is a direct spawn of the father, and the Shadow Lords are merely the father's pawns.

Remember, my children, never bow down to the dragons in your souls; only in your bodies may you do so. Your true allegiances are with the Mistress and, ultimately, with Z'ulvath, the father of all.

Serve no mortal cultist, serve no mad lizard. Use your guile, manipulate their plots, feign your acceptance, and bend their schemes to fulfill the grand design of C'thraxis, all in service to the will of the Penumbral Father.

She also has 10 pp and 20 gp. The jewels (head ornaments, necklaces, and rings) she carries are worth 2,000 gp.

If the characters manage to capture Jazannah, she will be unwilling to part with any information, except if magically forced to do so.

What Jazannah knows:

- The mercenaries involved in the assassination of Vang have used the portal in the east room to travel to the Penumbral Plane. They plan to meet other cultists in the capital city of the Tanarean Empire, but she does not know the exact location. They anticipate receiving payment for their work there and obtaining a new assignment.
- A being named Tenebrizon, one of the rulers of the Shadow Lords sect within the Cult of Shadow Wing, is orchestrating the entire scheme. While she doesn't know his ultimate goal, she was aiding his sect, gathering information to aid the cause of Z'ulvath and earn the favor of her ungodly patron, C'thraxis.
- She has been overseeing the abduction of citizens for dark sacrificial rituals, aiming to transform their souls into penumbral creatures that will be unleashed in the city to sow chaos.
- She delegated to her sister Yvenna the task of securing a large number of children, requiring pure souls for a particular ritual.
- She is unaware of Tenebrizon's final plan, but suspects it is a grandiose strategy to curry favor with Z'ulvath and wreak massive destruction on Tanares.

The Translator. A strange machine sits in one corner of this room; it is U'Tibam's mystical translator, a device composed of cogwheels, arcane sigils, and powered by bauronite crystals. Users can place any written document on the flat surface above it and pull its side lever to have the translator produce a copy of the document in any one of four languages: Common Tanarean, Dwarven, Taii'makian, or Draconic. It can even translate complex ciphered documents, provided they are not protected by magic.

This device is one of the many remarkable creations born from the genius of the taii'makus.

The machine, primarily constructed from bronze and steel, weighs 2 tons and is connected to the laboratory's power source.

Nearby it lies a set of scrolls with a note on top instructing, *"bring the documents to alchemy lab to store with the rest"*. The papers under it are a simple report of a group of cultists dispatched to the mountains to corrupt a young red dragon, but the documents offer no additional useful information.

Control Panel. The panel can activate or deactivate the defensive mechanisms of the Defense Room. Its operation is quite simple, as the indications on the panel feature clear symbols for each lever.

There are also controls that govern the power supply to the technological forge and the alchemical lab. The forge is currently turned off, but can be easily activated, while the alchemical lab is currently set to be operational.

The other buttons, the purposes of which remain unknown, are mostly inoperative at the moment since U'Tibam removed many of his more significant creations from the complex when he departed.

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Bedrolls and Sacks. This room is also used by some of the cultists to sleep, as the noise of the machinery is too high in other rooms. The sacks contain small personal items and clothing and 112 gp, 117 sp and 120 cp.

10 - Portal Room

As you step into the chamber, you see a room intricately designed with cogwheels and complex mechanisms. The heart of this arcane structure is a massive shard of bauronite crystal encrusted in the ceiling, pulsating erratically with chaotic energies. It is set within a colossal construct of interlocking steel and bronze cogwheels, all ceaselessly turning and realigning in an almost hypnotic dance of metal.

The arcane conduits are adorned with eldritch runes, clearly not part of the original design. The runes snake along the walls and the floor, all leading to a bloody magic circle painted on the ground. At its center lies a sacrificial dagger, etched with similar runes.

All this contributes to a dark distortion at the end of the room, where a vortex of darkness forms a gate that emanates an aura of dread and insanity, clearly serving as a passageway into the plane of nightmares.

Near the portal stand two cultists, one of whom is holding a bound orc who seems to be being prepared for a sacrifice.

This room serves as the mystical energy reactor for the entire laboratory. Powered by the energy of a colossal bauronite crystal and devised by the brilliant mind of U'Tibam, it was the heart of his laboratory, the source from which all other rooms received mystical power.

The cultists have harnessed and corrupted the stored energy to open a portal to the Penumbral Plane, utilizing the mystical energies in grotesque sacrificial rituals to transform the souls of their victims into penumbral creatures at the behest of the Ungods.

In the room, there are two **shadow mages** prepared to attack any intruder. They are preparing their next sacrifice, **Krunt** (CG orc **druid**).

Krunt is a shaman of the Nature Spirits faith en route to Heroes Rise to deliver a message from Katar, his warlord, to Sara and Zalir. He was apprehended by the cultists and is on the brink of being sacrificed. Currently at 20 hit points, Krunt is poisoned and suffering from three levels of exhaustion, yet retains access to all his spells, which he can use if freed. Although his arms are bound, his legs are unshackled, allowing him to move on his turn unless restrained by a cultist.

The rope that binds Krunt has 4 hit points, AC 10, and requires a DC 19 Strength check to break. It is immune to bludgeoning, resistant to piercing, and vulnerable to slashing damage.

Krunt will caution any intruders to avoid the sacrificial circle. Knowing the cultists have the capability to cast fireballs, he plans to position himself behind them and opposite their foes to avoid being killed by a fireball, as he knows the cultists will not explode one another. Yes, Krunt is wise!

Sacrificial Circle. Dominating the center of the room is a large and grotesque sacrificial circle, outlined with the blood of innumerable victims. Grotesque symbols similar to those observed in the room of insanity encircle its edge, seemingly squirming and shifting as though sentient. This creates a chaotic yet hypnotic pattern, adding a dreadful artistry to the horrific setting. Nearby, an elevated platform supports an intricately carved altar marred by numerous layers of dried blood, a testimony to the countless lives lost here, a number evidently increasing recently.

Should a creature reach 0 hit points while within the area of the sacrificial circle, it dies instantly, summoning a **penumbral pain** at the circle's center. This entity, although surprised from its summon, will rapidly engage in attacking the characters.

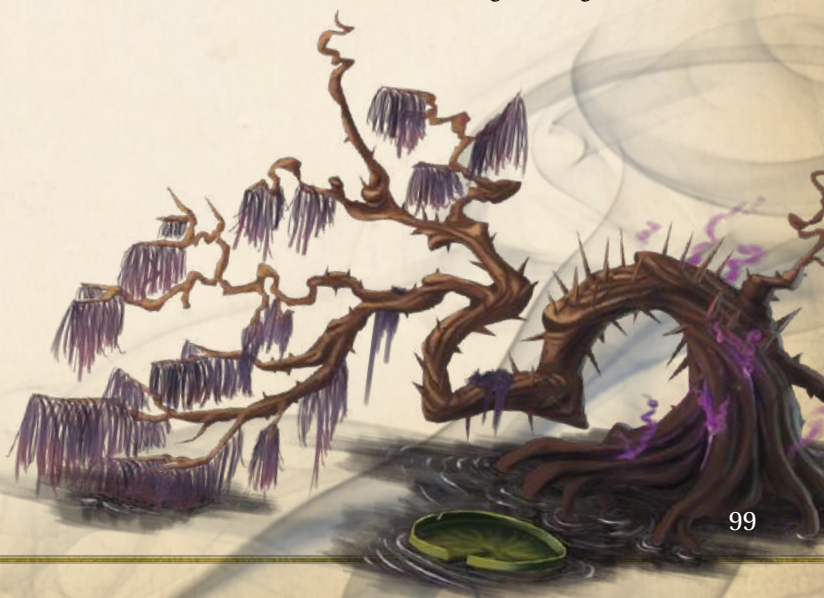
The Combat. The cultists aim to entice the characters into the circle, intending to use a combination of *fireball*, *darkness*, and *magic missile* spells to weaken the less resilient characters to 0 hit points within the circle, thereby generating more allies. Their strategy also includes attempting to kill Krunt within the circle.

Treasure. The cultists carry 40 gp between them. One has a *potion of water breathing*, while the other possesses a *periapt of health*. They also carry a map of part of the Penumbral Plane.

The Valley of Eyes

The Portal. At any moment, the characters can choose to traverse the portal to the Penumbral Plane, initiating Chapter 4 *(see Chapter Ending)*.

If the characters have received an item from Sara to seal the portal, utilizing it will sever the connection permanently. Once the item is deployed, they have a mere four turns to decide whether to pass through the portal before it irrevocably closes. Alternatively, they may opt to return to Heroes Rise for reinforcements or seek alternative means to shut the portal if they didn't acquire the item from Sara. This scenario permits you to introduce a side quest or escalating pressure on the characters through NPC persuasion to pursue Gary before his trail goes cold. Note that most NPCs will refuse to venture into the Penumbral Plane, citing its dangers.



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11- Room of the Machines

Opening the door allows the loud noise of machinery to fill the space, sound that was clearly magically contained by the closed door. Upon entering the expansive room, you notice that the floor is constructed from a steel grid, granting you a view of what lies beneath — a complex assembly of enormous cogwheels and mechanisms, all in motion and generating the deafening sound you are now hearing.

The ceiling towers above and a glance downward reveal the cogwheels to be situated far below, indicating that a fall from this height would be fatal. On the opposite side of the room, you spot two coiled creatures adorned with wings on their backs and writhing tentacles enveloping their bodies, their forms encased in purple scales.

This room was constructed to enable U'Tibam to descend into the massive machinery below the laboratory for repairs, a task he accomplished with the aid of a magical ring that granted him the ability to levitate.

The room features a towering ceiling, reaching a height of 30 feet. The floor contains openings that lead straight down into the perilous machinery below; there are no safety measures in place, so caution is advised.

The Machinery Pit. Falling from the platform results in a 30-foot drop (inflicting 3d6 damage) directly into the gigantic gears beneath. These gears inflict an additional 5d6 bludgeoning damage to anyone who falls onto them or ends their turn there, as the cogwheels relentlessly churn, threatening to crush the entrapped individual. The only means of escape involve flying, managing to jump high enough to grasp the edge of the platform (a 30-foot leap), or being retrieved with a rope or through other inventive solutions devised from above.

The Penumbral Whelplings. Currently, this room serves as a nesting ground for a pair of penumbral dragon wyrmlings, named **Grevasht and Adaranthrax.** These creatures emerged from two green dragon eggs corrupted by the cultists, and they have since claimed this space as their own.

Grevasht is afflicted with schizophrenia, experiencing visions and hearing voices that others cannot perceive. He regards these phenomena as revelations from the Penumbral Father, offering him cryptic guidance and insights. Unfortunately, these voices often deliver conflicting and chaotic messages, rendering Grevasht's actions highly unpredictable.

Grevasht is inclined to proselytize to the characters about the Penumbral Father's directives. The characters can placate him by expressing agreement with his doctrines and praising the wisdom of the Penumbral Father. However, Grevasht grows progressively more irate if they challenge his beliefs.

He interprets the surrounding discord and chaos as a unique form of harmony, conceived by the Penumbral Father to demonstrate that truth resides in the balance of opposites: chaos and order, madness and sanity, darkness and light. Grevasht envisions a unification of all planes with the Penumbra, creating a perfected whole. He perceives the cosmos as a grand orchestration in which every entity has a part to play, contributing to a magnificent symphony of existence where every form of madness has its rationale and every chaos its organization.

Grevasht will urge the characters to find their own roles in this cosmic concert and may even attempt to solicit "visions" from the Penumbral Father to dictate the specific parts they are destined to enact. These roles are highly exaggerated and

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caricatured, such as "the fearless warrior who always speaks by shouting," "the brainy wizard who utters only incomprehensible phrases," "the coward who speaks only when unseen," or "the cunning liar who always says the opposite of the truth." He may become aggressive if the characters refuse or constantly fail to conform to their designated roles.

If Grevasht is possessed by Tenebrizon. Tenebrizon will compel Grevasht to act as though he is hearing the Penumbral Father label the characters as heretics and servants of the enemy.

He will urge Adaranthrax to help eliminate the intruders and will refuse to engage in any discussion with them as soon as they enter the room.

Adaranthrax will be slightly confused at first, being surprised during the first round of combat, but will join her brother as soon as she realizes that he sincerely believes the characters are avowed enemies of the Ungods.

Adaranthrax is obsessed with sound. Having been born in this very room, she regards the constant noise of the machinery as a source of truth, a never-ending orchestra of mechanical sounds that she feels compelled to analyze and catalog. She tirelessly studies the sounds, seeking patterns and messages within the chaos.

She will become aggressive if the characters disturb the machines or cast a silence spell in the room. Otherwise, she will only attack if her brother does, choosing instead to augment his teachings with "truths" she discerns from the sounds she hears.

Adaranthrax is fascinated by noisy objects and will demand any object that produces a sound she finds appealing (if any are present). Refusal may provoke her anger. She is averse to killing, believing that death silences the body, halts the heartbeat, and forever conceals the secrets that these sounds might reveal.

While she may step in to prevent Grevasht from killing the characters if she deems his reasoning insufficient, her intervention will be limited; she does not wish to fully oppose her brother if he feels slighted by the characters.

If Adaranthrax is possessed by Tenebrizon. Tenebrizon will cause Adaranthrax to become obsessed with the heartbeat sounds of one of the characters, demanding that they hand that individual over in exchange for safe passage. Tenebrizon will maintain control over Adaranthrax subtly, ensuring that her brother remains unaware of the manipulation. Consequently, Adaranthrax becomes possessive of the chosen individual, wanting to rest her head on the person's chest to listen to the "secrets contained in their heartbeat sounds."

Tenebrizon will permit the characters to pass only if they leave the chosen individual behind. Adaranthrax will vow not to harm the individual but will insist that they will never be allowed to leave.

If the group consents to her demands and exits the dungeon, Tenebrizon will make Adaranthrax eventually attempt to kill the left-behind character with assistance from her brother. Should the individual die, their body will be displayed in Chapter 8, in Tenebrizon's ritual room, serving as a cruel reminder of the characters' naivety.

Refusing Adaranthrax's demand will provoke her into attacking and urging her brother to join the assault.

Combat. Although there is a reasonable chance the characters can avoid a confrontation with the wyrmlings, if the young dragons become hostile, they will take to the air, making full use of the room's high ceiling.

Preferring to remain beyond the characters' reach, they will employ their psychic breath. If they notice individuals near the edges of the holes in the floor, they might execute a bull rush, flying toward them to knock them into the machinery below.

Treasure. As is typical for penumbral dragons, they do not amass a hoard of objects. One would only find a variety of peculiar items, such as musical boxes, musical instruments, and bells belonging to Adaranthrax, in addition to books containing her odd theories. In Grevasht's possession, there are religious symbols and scrolls filled with the "wisdom" of Z'ulvath. Most of these items are worthless, yet they can potentially be sold for between 30 to 50 gp depending on the buyer.

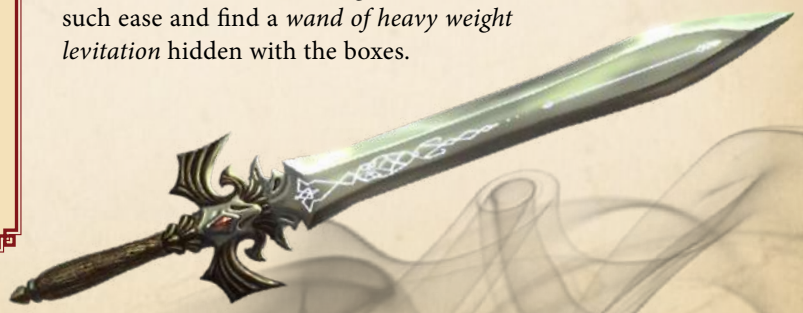
Some of the musical boxes and instruments were taken from children at the orphanage. Returning these cherished items to them would bring joy to the youngsters *(you may decide to award an Inspiration Point to the characters if you are using them in your campaign).*

12- Storage Room

Entering this room, you see piles of boxes and shelves; it clearly was the storage room of the place. It appears ransacked and abandoned.

The most useful objects stored in this room were taken by the cultists long ago and brought to the Penumbral Plane. If the characters conduct a thorough search, they may still find some valuable items amid the many boxes and shelves.

Intelligence (Investigation) DC 14: Investigating the room, one can find evidence that it once contained large quantities of bauronite ore, as well as high-quality bronze and steel. Considering the weight of the boxes, you search for how the Cultists managed to move them with such ease and find a *wand of heavy weight levitation* hidden with the boxes.



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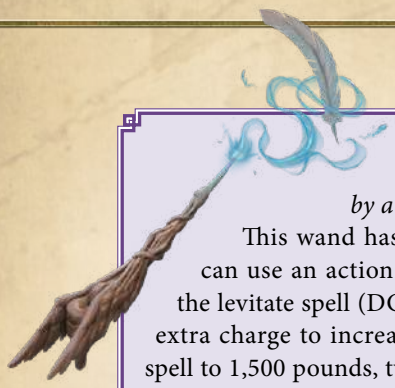

Wand of Heavy Weight Levitation
Wand, very rare (requires attunement by a spellcaster)

This wand has 7 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 of its charges to cast the levitate spell (DC 15 save) from it. You can use one extra charge to increase the weight limit of the levitate spell to 1,500 pounds, two extra charges for 4,500 pounds, or three extra charges for 9,000 pounds to be lifted. Ending the levitation makes the object slowly descend to the ground.

The wand regains 1d6 + 1 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the wand's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the wand crumbles into ashes and is destroyed.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 17: With a successful check, it is possible to spot a hidden compartment made of steel behind one of the shelves. It is locked, and only U'Tibam has the key, but a DC 17 Dexterity check using thieves' tools can open the compartment.

Inside, one can find a precious pure bauronite crystal that is worth 1,000 gp.

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 13: A trained eye can notice that among the piles of rubble and scraps of metal and crystal shards around the room, one small round black sphere is not a common piece of stone, but a *pearl of power (rare)*. This black pearl was enchanted to provide all the benefits of a normal pearl of power, but does not emanate any detectable magical aura. One can only notice its properties by the small carvings that could be mistaken for normal cracks, but to trained eyes are clearly mystical runes that store magic.

13- Forge Room

The heat of the place can be felt as soon as you open the door, thanks to the glowing furnace inside. Upon entering this room, you find a large circular forge outfitted with many highly advanced taii'maku mechanisms. Strangely, while the furnace is kindled, no smoke is produced. The many gears and mechanisms inside all seem inert in this room, not turning and producing continual noise as in most of the other rooms.

This was the place U'Tibam used to craft his mechanical creations. While some of the most unique and rare pieces of equipment were removed when he left, the core structures are still here.

The place is deactivated, with no energy being supplied here; only the forge's heat is being maintained, as per its creator's design.

A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the mechanisms here hold two large pieces of adamantine ingots, ready to be smelted.

Attempting to operate the machines leads to nothing as they are all deactivated. One can break the machines with a DC 20 Strength check or attack them (AC 14, 40 hit points, resistant to all forms of damage, immune to slashing and piercing), allowing one to retrieve the two adamantine ingots, which weigh about 60 lbs each and are worth 1,400 gp each.

An Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Investigation) check against a DC of 15 reveals that specific mechanisms are in place to halt the entire forge, and seem connected to cables that originate from outside the room, indicating that the machines here were turned off by a switch located elsewhere in the laboratory, likely in some sort of control room.

If the characters reactivate the forge using the panel in the Control Room (Room 9), they can operate the mechanisms here with a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check, enabling them to create any two pieces of equipment they desire using the two adamantine ingots (provided they have not removed them by breaking the machine).

The forge has models for all common armor and weapon types made of metal and possesses the mystical ability to inscribe unique magic on its creations.

Any weapon crafted with this equipment will be a *+2 adamantine weapon*, and any armor will be a *+2 adamantine armor*.

This is only possible because the adamantine ingots were already enchanted and prepared by U'Tibam, who left them in the machine when he departed. Introducing other metals into the machine will not allow such quick creation of magic items. However, the forge can still be used to gain an advantage on all checks to forge magical weapons and armors of metal, reducing the cost of creating such items by 20% and the time required by 50%, if operated correctly.

14- Alchemy Room

Opening this door, you are met with a strong smell of acids and alchemical solutions. The room houses many alchemical implements, and you find vials containing dozens of different substances. On a small cabinet, many papers are stacked, while shelves hold numerous vials with human body parts floating in liquids of various colors.

This was U'Tibam's alchemy lab, where he created the requisite compounds to fuel his mechanisms. The cultists repurposed this room to store body parts of their victims in preserving alchemical solutions they found here, and also used the space to store documents and scrolls.

Shelves. Approaching the vials on the shelves will cause the body parts to violently struggle in their jars, causing them to fall to the ground and release the undead parts to attack the characters.

Discerning from afar that the organs are in fact undead creatures requires a Wisdom (Perception) or Wisdom (Insight) check against a DC 20.

There are seven undead parts. Two severed hands, one lone eyeball, one disembodied heart, one detached foot, one rancid lung, and one forsaken liver. They all share the same statistics, but each part has a unique ability and may either have a speed of 20ft. or 5ft.

Combat. If the creatures were not perceived, they will have a surprise round against the characters. These undead creatures act in very simple ways, trying to kill as many living creatures as they can.

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Alchemically Preserved Undead Remnants

Tiny undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 20 (3d6 + 9)
Speed 20 ft. (for hands and foot), 5 ft. (for heart, lung, eye, and liver)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +4
Skills Stealth +6 (+12 to pass as ordinary organs)
Damage Resistances acid
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhausted, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages Understands the languages it knew in life, but can't speak them
Challenge: 1/2 (100 XP)

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the creature drops to 1 hit point instead.

Ambusher. The creature has advantage on attack rolls against any creature it has surprised.

Alchemically Infused. When it is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes in a burst of corrosive liquid in a 5-foot radius. Creatures in that area must make a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw, taking 2d6 acid damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Unique Abilities per Body Part:

The Severed Hand

Strangling Grasp. This variant has an additional ability where it can attempt to grapple a target as a bonus action, using its Dex instead of Str for the roll. Creatures that end their turn grabbed by the severed hand take 2d6 bludgeoning damage.

The Disembodied Heart

This variant cannot use Slam; instead, it uses the action below.

Pulse of Fear. This variant emits a fearful pulse as an action, forcing creatures within 15 ft. to make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or take 1d4 psychic damage and be frightened until the end of their next turn.

The Lone Eyeball

This variant cannot use Slam; instead, it uses the action below.

Horror Stare. This variant can look at a creature as an action. That creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 1d4 psychic damage and be paralyzed until the end of its next turn.

The Detached Foot

Tripping Kick. As a bonus action, this variant can attempt to trip a creature within 5 ft. The target must succeed on a DC 9 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6 damage and be knocked prone.

The Rancid Lung

This variant cannot use Slam; instead, it uses the action below.

Breath of Decay. This variant can exhale a 10-foot cone of decay as an action. Each creature in the area must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) poison damage.

The Forsaken Liver

This variant cannot use Slam; instead, it uses the action below.

Toxic Spew. As an action, this variant can spew a corrosive bile at one creature within 20 ft. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 11 (2d10) acid damage.

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Table. On the table, one can find many different alchemical items. Most were used by the cultists or wasted, but the characters can salvage 10 vials of various liquids that are worth 75 gp in total. They will also find 4 potions of *greater healing*.

Cabinet. Here, they will find many scrolls, parchments, papers, and books kept by the cultists. Most are not relevant, but a set of ciphered letters will quickly catch the attention of anyone exploring this cabinet.

A character can make a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check to notice three magic scrolls disguised as common documents amid the papers. They are scrolls of *acid arrow, blight*, and *black tentacles*.

Ciphered Letters. These letters are impossible to read, as they are written in strange sigils and in a language that only the cultists touched by the madness of the Ungods can understand. If the characters bring these letters to the translating machine in the Control Room, they may be able to read their contents.

The translated content:

My servants, you shall read this letter to Gary or Zahlla once the death of the Empire Diplomat is confirmed.

Mercenaries, your payment, as promised, will be delivered to you in the Empire's capital. Your success was pleasing, so we will require your services once more, for an even greater reward, obviously.

The first 20,000 gold coins will be delivered to you in the Empire. If you assist my cultists there, you will be paid an additional 50,000 gold coins, with a bonus of another 50,000 coins if my plans are successful.

The proceedings at the Kepesh Pyramid are underway, and soon they will be complete, with the soul-sacrificing ritual ready to begin.

Use the penumbral portal to travel to the capital. Find my cultists at the tavern where we first met; they will guide you to your next job. Afterwards, go to their underground fortress and wait. If I succeed, you will receive your extra payment.

Chapter Ending

This chapter will come to its end when the characters finally discover the whereabouts of the mercenaries, who fled to the Empire's Capital using the penumbral portal.

They will have two options: entering the portal themselves to pursue the mercenaries, which will lead to Chapter 4, or finding a different way to reach the Empire without using the Penumbral Plane, which will take them to Chapter 5.

Their actions in this chapter, such as whether they managed to close the portal or whether they allowed the cultists and the penumbral dragons to retain control of the hideout, will have significant repercussions on the city of Heroes Rise.

While these actions may not directly affect the upcoming chapters, since they will be moving far away from this city, they can influence your campaign, the relationships with the NPCs, and the future narratives that unfold after the characters complete this adventure.

Consider awarding 2,500 XP to each PC for completing this chapter. The recommended level for ending this chapter is 6th. If your group is above or below, consider adjusting future encounters and side quests to speed up or slow down their progression.

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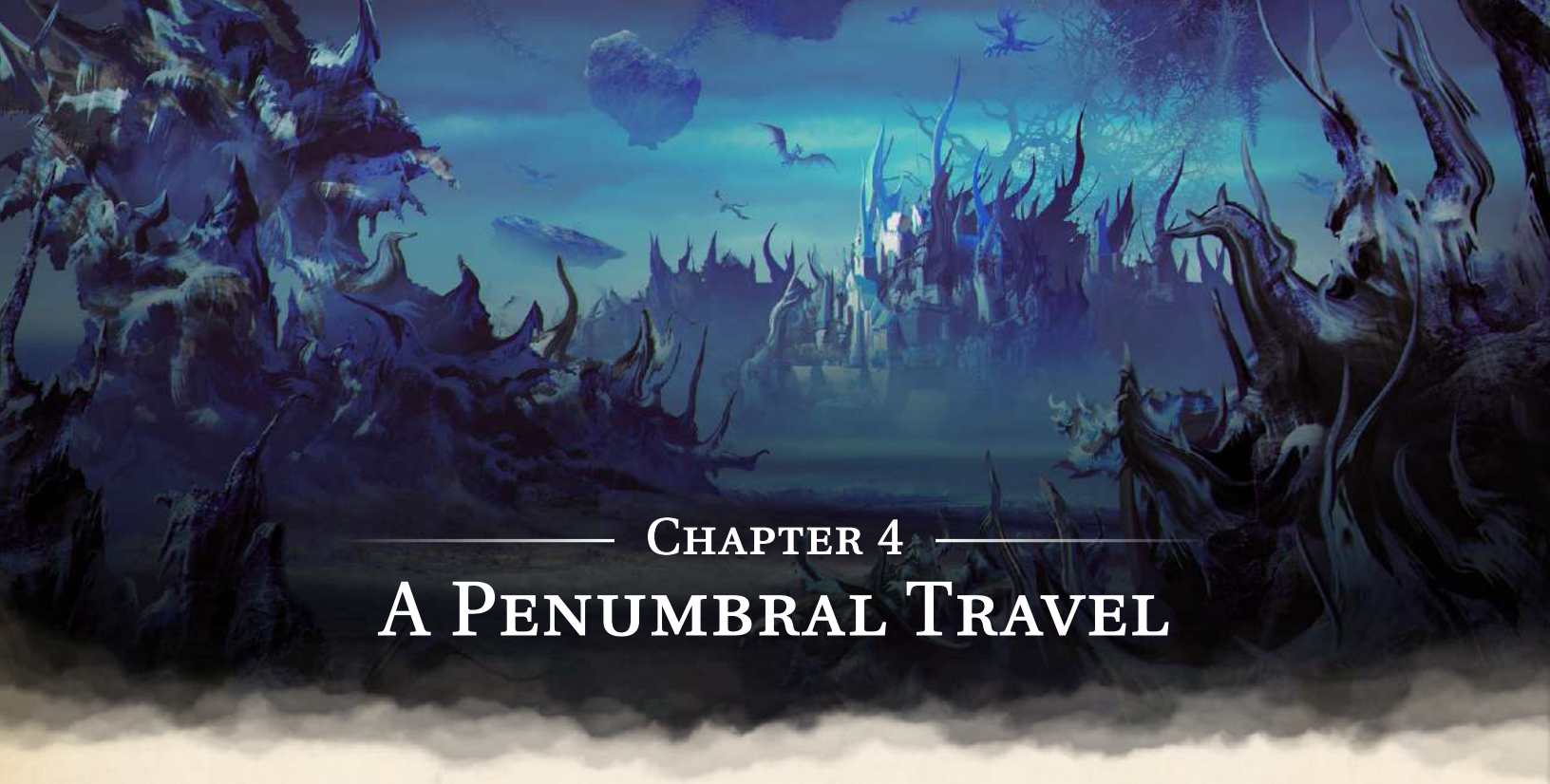

Chapter 4
A Penumbral Travel

After determining the whereabouts of the Shadow Wing mercenaries, the characters conclude that their best chance to track them down is to enter the Penumbral Plane itself. Utilizing this eldritch dimension, they intend to locate the exact point where the mercenaries entered the Imperial capital city. Unaware of the many dangers that lie ahead, they brace themselves to navigate a plane of nightmares — a realm that defies logic and sanity — where they must confront dark horrors to reach the breach used by the mercenaries to exit the plane.

The Penumbral Plane and the Valley of Eyes

In this chapter, the characters venture into the Penumbral Plane *(detailed further in the Tanares Sourcebook)*, plunging them into a narrative of survival against psychedelic horrors. Their perilous journey takes them through the Valley of the Eyes, a region within the Penumbral Plane's surface layer, as they track the mercenaries towards a rift that leads to the Imperial capital. As they forge ahead, they grasp the harsh reality of traversing the Penumbra's surface, a place inhabited by perilous creatures and enveloped by a toxic atmosphere that renders long rests impossible. The journey becomes a true test of endurance and resilience.

Along the way, the characters will cross various landscapes and explore unique locations, discovering treasures and perhaps even rescuing other individuals lost in this nightmarish plane, victims of the Ungods' minions. This chapter of their adventure offers a rich array of side quests and ample opportunities for exploration, all while maintaining the Penumbral Plane's theme of nightmarish horror.

Running this Chapter

This chapter is focused on the characters exploring the Penumbral Plane (especially the Valley of Eyes) and trying to find a passway into the Imperial capital city.

You will be able to find the different locations, quests, NPCs, and encounters that the characters can face during their travel, each organized in an easy to comprehend way.

The Penumbral Plane Features:

Nightmarish Landscapes. Ever-changing and unpredictable terrain with abrupt transitions between different types of landscapes.

- Checks to track, locate something, or orientate oneself are made with disadvantage.

Perpetual Twilight. A state of constant low light that cannot be brightened.

- All areas illumination are either dim light or total darkness.
- Light sources can only create dim light, at most.

Ascent into Insanity. Long rests are not possible.

- Non-native beings must make a Wisdom saving throw every 8 hours (DC 15, increasing by 1 with each subsequent roll) to avoid suffering one level of exhaustion.
- Death due to exhaustion transforms a creature into a **penumbral aberration** *(see Tanares Sourcebook)*.

Refuges. A few specific places, protected by tameranium and bauronite pylons, allow one to rest and recover.

- These rare locations have stable terrains and allow for sleeping.
- In these areas one does not need to make rolls to avoid gaining exhaustion levels by the rule above.

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Effects on Magic. Illumination spells are severely diminished. Divination spells yield distorted, unclear results.

- No light spell can create more than dim light.
- Light-dependent spells (e.g., *sunburst*, *blinding smite*, *sunbeam*) are rendered powerless.
- Divinations generate maddening visions or cryptic nightmares instead of true insights (GM's decision).

Exploring the Plane

The characters will explore various locations to determine a route to follow. Their journey begins in a location known as The Blink City, where they quickly encounter their first dilemma: whether or not to assist another person in this dangerous land.

From that point on, players have the freedom to make choices and traverse different locations. Refer to the Valley of Eyes map to guide their progress as they venture further into the plane.

Each location hosts unique events and situations. During their travels, utilize the Random Encounter Tables found in this chapter to present new and engaging challenges that will enhance their journey.

Although the exploration of the valley is open-ended, every location offers clues that guide the characters towards the Maelstrom of Earth, the point where they can exit the Penumbral Plane.

The History of the Valley of the Eyes

Scholars in Tanares understand that events in the material plane influence the surface of the Penumbral Plane. This is particularly true for events steeped in negative emotions and sins, given the connection between both realities.

The Valley of Eyes assumed its current form during the Kemet Invasion two decades ago when fear and paranoia spread across the continent. The landscape of the Valley of Eyes is punctuated by enigmatic eyes of various unique shapes, sparingly spread both on the ground and on structures.

Some theorize that these Eyes are connected to the Augur, the force behind the Watchers, who seeks to identify all penumbral creatures and dispatch his forces to eradicate them, given their proliferation here during the Kemet Invasion. Others contend that these are the eyes of the Ungods, watching the mortals who venture into these lands, aiming to ensnare them in their eldritch plots.

In reality, these eyes are manifestations of the nightmares and paranoia experienced by those who perished in the war. While the eyes are mostly harmless, they evoke a profound sense of dread and a constant feeling of being watched.

The little-known truth is that the Ungods can indeed use these eyes to peer into the plane. As rulers of the Penumbral Plane, they have this ability, but they rarely use it, as it requires their active attention.

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Quests That Can Be Found in the Valley of Eyes

Scattered across the expansive Valley are a myriad of mysteries and curiosities, ranging from the straightforward to intricate enigmas. As the PCs venture through the diverse locations, they'll stumble upon valuable items, interact with intriguing NPCs, and discover vital clues that can aid them in unraveling the most complex riddles.

These side quests are not mandatory for the progress of the adventure but can offer unique rewards to the characters. They can also propel the characters further into the valley and help them reach their final destination.

The journey through these side quests not only enriches the narrative, but also provides ample opportunities for character development and exploration of the adventurers' capabilities.

Side Quest: The Dragon's Mirror

When his mirror shattered, Maldictus, the Dragon of Sinister Fate, came to believe he was cursed with bad luck. This belief has led him to rarely leave his lair. If the PCs engage with and comprehend the dragon's dilemma, they will understand that this isn't just any mirror—it's a unique and potent artifact worth repairing, and perhaps even keeping for themselves.

To mend the mirror, the characters must locate its five fragments scattered throughout the valley and obtain a special material that can serve as an adhesive to bind them together.

The Five Shard Locations:

- With the Purple Witches in the Vile of Quag.
- Held by the gloomfolk leader during the Hunting Season at the Dragon Tower Ruins.
- Within the Tangle of Eldritch Tendril Mazes.
- Among the whirlwinds on the Tornado Slab.
- Lost in the Watchful Woods.

For the adhesive, three different materials with the requisite magical properties can be used to mend the mirror:

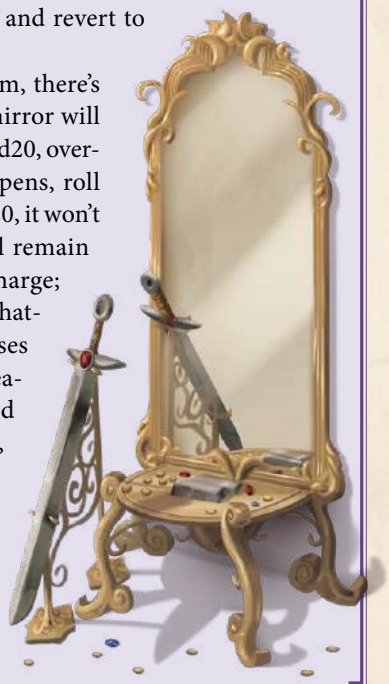
- A Sovereign Glue held by the **collectors**.
- The jelly from the **penumbral wasp queen** in the Forest of Eyes.
- A mystical silver liquid carried by a creature known as sadness.

The mirror itself is a legendary magic item with the power to duplicate existing items. To utilize it, one must reflect both the item they wish to copy and the raw materials required to produce a similar item *(e.g., an ingot of steel and strips of leather to replicate a sword or wood, metal, feathers, and leather to replicate a quiver of arrows)*. For a detailed understanding of its capabilities, refer to the Twinning Mirage description.

Twinning Mirage
Wondrous item, legendary

This elegant silver mirror, adorned with intricate depictions of the gods Tamera in tameranium and Bauron in bauronite on its back, possesses a unique ability to replicate any object it reflects, provided it simultaneously reflects the required raw materials. For instance, to duplicate a sword, the mirror must reflect an amount of metal equivalent to the sword's weight (steel for the blade), leather (for the hilt), and any gems or precious metals for decoration. Without reflecting the exact materials, the duplication process will not occur.

The mirror can copy up to large-sized objects and can also reproduce Magic Items up to Legendary rarity. To duplicate a magic item, the mirror not only needs the base material but also requires an item of the same rarity or higher than the item to be copied. This item will be sacrificed, its magical power serving as one of the raw materials in the copying process. The sacrificed item will then lose its magical properties and revert to an ordinary object.



When duplicating an item, there's a 1 in 20 chance that the mirror will become overcharged (roll a d20, overcharge on a 1). If this happens, roll another d20: on a roll of 2-20, it won't replicate the item and will remain dormant for a year to recharge; if it rolls another 1, it will shatter in an explosion that causes 10d6 force damage to all creatures within 20 feet of it and breaks into 1d6 + 1 shards, which will be scattered at great distances. The mirror will be usable again if the shards are found and the mirror is repaired with sovereign glue or a similar item.

Side Quest: The Temerite Wonder

A Relic Hunter named Willie is in the Valley in search of an old obelisk that was once a part of an old attempt to create a Vandanamalika. She believes that inside it, there are objects that can be of great use to the Relic Hunters.

It is possible for the characters to find Willie on their journey (she is at the obelisk, location 10). If they do so, they can choose to help her open the obelisk and search the altar room inside the place, revealing a statue made of tameranium (value 4,000 gp). Willie will ask for the item in exchange for a *periapt of penumbral*

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shielding (see Obelisk, location 10) that can help shield the party during their journey.

Side Quest: The Gloomfolk Hunt

The characters may encounter a group of the gloomfolk who are hunting to stock their seasonal supply of food. They are members of the Pincer Tribe, and they may become allies with the characters if they receive help in their hunting task.

Each emogun body they get can be turned into "rations" for the gloomfolks. A small creature provides 1d3 rations, a medium 1d6, and a large 2d4, provided the characters are successful on a DC 16 Wisdom (survival) check to correctly gather the parts, or only half of that amount is gathered if they fail (rounded up).

The Pincer Tribe will pay 2 gp per "ration" obtained, and if the characters obtain 20 or more, they will even be declared "hunting friends" of the tribe, being offered shelter and hospitality when needed.

Side Quest: Children Rescue

The children are Violet and Klaus Tinsneck. Violet is a charismatic girl who is very caring towards her two brothers, while Klaus is a courageous young boy who aspires to be an adventuring warrior when he grows up. They were both traded by the Purple Witch and the Cultists who abducted them to a group of hags who live in the valley, in exchange for unique components the Cult needed for their rituals. While the **hags** want to turn Violet into one of them, they discarded Klaus to a group of **envies**, using him to try making Violet accept becoming a hag.

Time is of the essence; it won't be long before Klaus himself becomes food for the envies or Violet is forced into becoming a hag. It's up to the PCs to act quickly to save them.

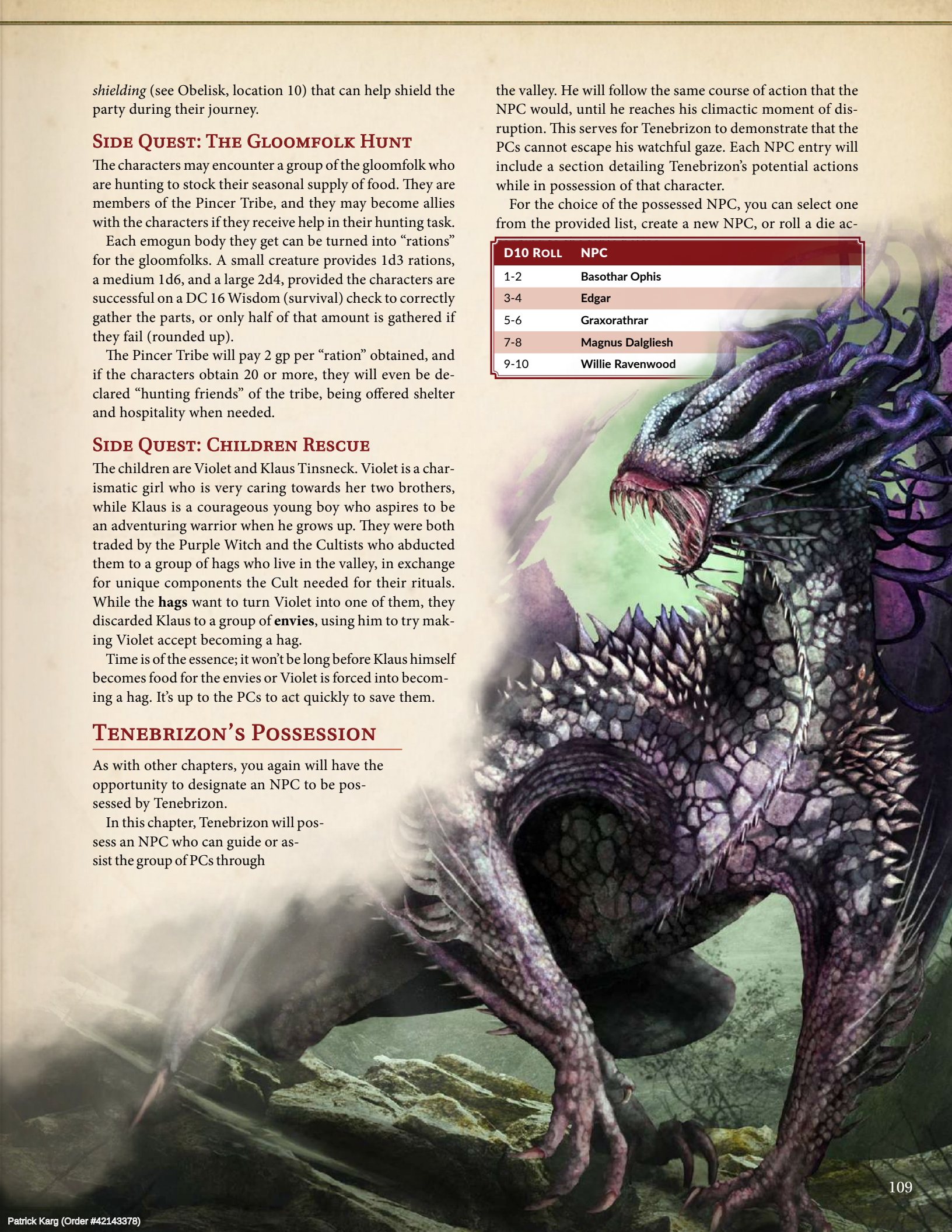
Tenebrizon's Possession

As with other chapters, you again will have the opportunity to designate an NPC to be possessed by Tenebrizon.

In this chapter, Tenebrizon will possess an NPC who can guide or assist the group of PCs through the valley. He will follow the same course of action that the NPC would, until he reaches his climactic moment of disruption. This serves for Tenebrizon to demonstrate that the PCs cannot escape his watchful gaze. Each NPC entry will include a section detailing Tenebrizon's potential actions while in possession of that character.

For the choice of the possessed NPC, you can select one from the provided list, create a new NPC, or roll a die ac-

D10 Roll	NPC
1-2	Basothar Ophis
3-4	Edgar
5-6	Graxorathrar
7-8	Magnus Dalgliesh
9-10	Willie Ravenwood



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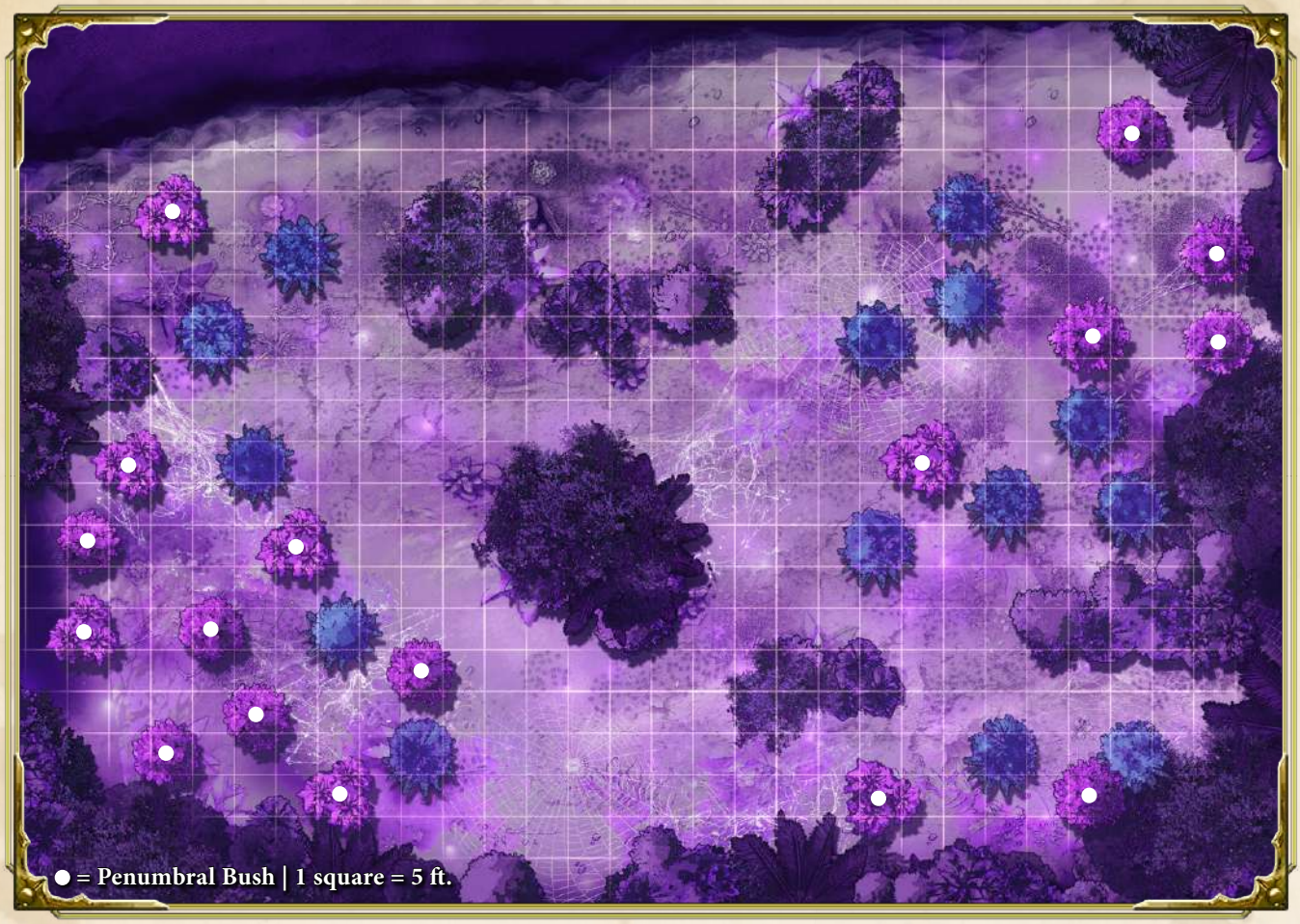

Random Encounters

The Penumbral Plane is a dangerous place, and the Valley of Eyes is no exception. Much of the location is covered by brushland, with plants exhibiting a purple hue and distinct twisted shapes. Many **penumbral bushes** can be found among the vegetation while penumbral creatures roam the land seeking their next victim.

Random Encounters. Every 3 hours in the Penumbra, there is a 50% chance of a random encounter. You can also decide that whenever the PCs walk a path between two of the marked locations, you roll a random encounter.

You can use one of the three maps presented here to run these encounters. The purple bushes are all **penumbral bushes**.

Random Encounter Table:

Roll (1d20)	Encounter	Difficult
1	**Maldictus**	Deadly
2	**Penumbral Sadness Duo**	Hard
3-4	**Gloomfolk Scouts**	Hard
5-7	**Augur Presence**	Varies
8-12	**Emogun Hunt**	Varies
13-15	**Shadow Wing Patrol**	Varies
16- 17	**Sloth Ambush**	Hard
19	**Gluttony Bait**	Hard
20	**Collectors**	Varies

Penumbral Bush

Large plant, unaligned

Armor Class 6
Hit Points 34 (4d12 + 8)
Speed 0

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	1 (-5)	14 (+2)	1 (-5)	3 (-4)	1 (-5)

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, frightened
Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 6
Languages —
Challenge 0 (0 or 10 XP)

Actions

Twine. Any creature that passes within 5 ft. of or through the penumbral bush square must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled (DC 10 to escape). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained and the penumbral bush can't Twine another target. The penumbral bush can only grapple creatures up to its size.

Emotion Drain. Any creature that ends its turn grappled by a penumbral bush must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or take 3 (1d6) psychic damage.

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Collectors

Emerging from worlds devoured by the eldritch power of the Penumbra, the **collectors** are resilient survivors. These enigmatic, diminutive beings appear cloaked in liquid silver, moving nimbly at a brisk pace. The **collectors** traverse the layers of the Penumbra in search of treasures, particularly unique and curious objects from other planes. Most of all, they prize objects of art or magic from Tanares. Moreover, they are intrigued by rare metals like tameranium and bauronite, which are unique to worlds beyond the Penumbral Plane's reach.

Running the Encounter. The **collectors** navigate the labyrinthine expanses of the Penumbra in groups of 1d4 + 2. They often employ invisibility to elude detection and use pass without trace to conceal their movements in perilous territories. A group of **collectors** will grow curious upon noticing the characters' journey into the valley. Being cautious creatures, they will not approach recklessly. They initially follow and observe the characters, assessing their intentions and ensuring they aren't members of the Cult of Shadow Wing. If particularly intrigued by the objects the characters possess, or if they deem the characters to be harmless, a few may reveal themselves from a distance to initiate conversation.

If the PCs are amenable to trading objects or sharing tales, they will captivate the collectors. These beings are especially drawn to art objects and anything crafted from the rare metals bauronite or tameranium.

Possessing an innate talent for bartering, the **collectors** are eager to trade items from their collection for new finds. Each group of **collectors** possesses a cache of treasures, including 1d4 *potions of healing*, two uncommon and two rare magic items (of the GM's choice, especially wondrous items), and two random spell scrolls from 1st to 5th level, along with two scrolls of *remove curse*. These treasures are held by the invisible members of their group, who momentarily become visible to hand over the selected items before vanishing once again.

They are willing to trade their items for half their value but have no interest in gold or gems. They only accept magic items, unique and interesting objects, and art pieces, valuing them at full market price. They don't carry gold, so they solely barter through item exchange, and they will bargain fervently, even requesting unique articles of clothing or any intriguing items they can add to their eclectic collections.

Gloomfolk Scouts

A tribe of the gloomfolk, known as the Pincer Tribe, are using the valley as their hunting grounds. They seize the opportunity to gather penumbral creature parts to supply to the rest of the tribe in Undertanares on the Material Plane.

They entered the valley through a concealed rift that connects the subterranean depths of Tanares to a location in the valley's north. They've established a temporary encampment on the Penumbral Plane within the ancient ruins of a Draconic Tower, a location protected from the Penumbra's malevolent forces. Under the guidance of this hunting season's chosen leader, **Graxorathrar** (CG **gloomfolk hero**), the gloomfolks are spread in groups in the valley to hunt emoguns, converting them into essential sustenance for their young.

Running the Encounter. A gloomfolk scouting party, consisting of a **gloomfolk hero**, a **gloomfolk sorcerer**, and **four gloomfolk hive hunters**, are navigating the perilous terrain, diligently tracking emogun trails. If adventurers encounter this party for the first time, the gloomfolk approach with caution, believing that the PCs are cultists in disguise.

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They transparently state their quest to hunt emoguns and offer to trade with the adventuring party if they have captured any.

> Each emogun corpse the characters possess can be turned into "rations" for the gloomfolk. A small creature yields 1d3 rations, a medium 1d6, and a large 2d4. However, the characters must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom (Survival) check to properly collect the parts, or they gather only half that amount (rounded up) on a failed attempt. The Pincer Tribe compensates 2 gold pieces per "ration" procured. If the characters gather 20 or more, they earn the title of "hunting friends" within the tribe and are offered shelter and hospitality as needed.

However, if previous encounters with the tribe have turned hostile, leading to confrontations between the adventurers and the gloomfolk, the scouts respond aggressively. In combat they will skillfully use the **penumbral bushes** to hinder their foes.

On the other hand, if the adventurers have previously established a friendly rapport, the gloomfolk greet them warmly. If the group presents emogun parts, which can be converted into long-lasting rations, the gloomfolk happily offer their guidance, escorting the adventurers to a safe resting area.

Gloomfolk patrols are aware of the rift in the center of the earth whirlpool to the east, leading to inside the Empire. They also know that their leader, who is most often in their camp, has found a mysterious reflective object that fell from the heavens after a blinding flash; its importance remains undisclosed.

Gloomfolk Sorcerer

Medium humanoid (gloomfolk), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 15 (mage armor)
Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Cha +5
Skills Arcana +2, Survival +3
Damage Resistances poison
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Deep Speech, Gloomfolkian
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Envenom Weapon. As a bonus action, the gloomfolk sorcerer can coat its weapons with its venom. Until the start of its next turn, each time a creature is hit by the weapon, it must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 3 (1d6) poison damage on a failed save. Each time a creature is subjected to a gloomfolk's poison saving throw before taking a short or long rest, the DC for the poison increases by 2.

Pack Caster. When the gloomfolk sorcerer casts a spell that targets a creature adjacent to an ally of the gloomfolk sorcerer that isn't incapacitated, the saving throw against the spell is made with disadvantage.

Penumbral Caster. The DCs of the gloomfolk sorcerer's spells increase by 2 when cast in the Penumbral Plane.

Spellcasting. The gloomfolk sorcerer is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). The gloomfolk sorcerer knows the following sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *poison spray*, *shocking grasp*
1st level (4 slots): *expeditious retreat* , *mage armor (replacing arcane armor)*, *magic missile*
2nd level (3 slots): *darkness*, *invisibility*, *scorching ray*

Actions

Gloomstick (Quarterstaff). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage.

Gloomstick (Blowgun). *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or take an additional 3 (1d6) poison damage.

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Penumbral Sadness Duo

Roaming this valley there is an uncommon duo of **penumbral sadnesses**, named Quilltear and Scrollmourn, wandering the region. These enigmatic beings stand out due to their unique lack of desire to inflict melancholy upon mortals.

These two **penumbral sadnesses** once served as librarians in an expansive library among the sixth layers of the Penumbral Plane. A tragic event, orchestrated by their own kin, led to the burning of their library, obliterating millennia of accumulated knowledge. This catastrophic loss plunged them into deep sorrow, but also ignited an uncommon drive to reclaim what was lost. Now, they cross the plane, aiming to restore their collection. Open to negotiation, they trade with mortals for any fragments of lore, knowledge, or magical texts, making them amenable to peaceful interactions.

Running the Encounter. This duo consists of two **penumbral sadnesses** adorned in wizards' robes crafted from silk, tailored to accommodate their multiple arms, and maintained in impeccable condition. As destiny aligns with the adventurers' journey, the **sadnesses** become deeply interested in the group, believing that any party brave enough to venture into the Penumbra merits their undivided attention. They initially approach without animosity, prepared to defend if threatened, but are swift to respond to overt hostility.

If the PCs exhibit aggressive behavior, the **sadnesses** adopt evasive maneuvers, leveraging their arcane prowess to swiftly neutralize the threat. Conversely, if the group abstains from hostility, one of the **sadnesses** cautiously advances, seeking to ascertain if they hold any snippet of knowledge to impart, regardless of its seeming insignificance. In return for this gesture, the sadnesses reciprocate with invaluable insights.

Offering modest knowledge, such as a folk song, a historical fact, or recent news from Tanares, prompts a heartfelt expression of gratitude from the **sadnesses**. They convey their thanks and affirm their availability in the said locale for the subsequent 48 hours, suggesting potential future exchanges.

For those who proffer more significant tokens—a magic scroll, a wizard's grimoire, or any written material—the sadnesses extend profound appreciation. In gratitude, they present the characters with a vial of shimmering silver liquid, a magical substance eternally suspended in its liquid state.

This item can be employed to mend the *twinning mirage mirror*, or it can be bartered as a mystical component for 500 gp.

Sloth Ambush

Numerous groups of **lesser sloths** have made this Valley their habitat. Clusters of them can be found in hibernation, buried beneath the earth, patiently waiting for unsuspecting prey to wander by.

Running the Encounter. As the adventurers journey through the valley, they risk encountering the hidden danger that lurks below the ground. Roll a 1d4 to determine the number of **lesser sloths** nearby. Each of these creatures stays concealed, buried five feet deep, only revealing themselves when potential prey comes too close. When the first PC comes within 10 feet of a concealed **lesser sloth**, the creature quickly emerges, launching a surprise attack. The other lesser sloths follow suit, targeting the rest of the group. Adventurers can attempt to spot the hiding places of the sloths with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check, uncovering their locations upon succeeding.

Lacking in intelligence and being epitomes of laziness, the **lesser sloths** prefer minimal movement, always attacking the nearest target. If they render a creature unconscious, they will attempt to burrow away, taking the incapacitated being with them for later consumption, effectively withdrawing from the fight.

Lesser Sloth

Large aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural)
Hit Points 68 (8d10 + 24)
Speed 20 ft., burrow 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	7 (-2)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +4
Skills Perception +4, Stealth +6 (only when buried)
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities psychic
Senses: darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages –
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Aura of Laziness. Creatures that start their turn within 10 feet of the sloth have their movement speed halved for that turn. If the creature ends its turn inside the aura, it must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become drowsy (as if affected by the *slow* spell) until the end of its next turn.

Regeneration. The sloth regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

Actions

Multiattack. The sloth makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage. The target must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) poison damage, and can't take reactions until the end of its next turn, with its speed halved until the end of the sloth's next turn on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

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Gluttony Bait

A **penumbral gluttony** roams the valley, seeking an entrance to the material world while it hunts for its next meal. Although this valley typically lacks the presence of stronger emoguns, this **gluttony** arrived here, drawn by a recent group of the gloomfolk in the region. Its goal is to locate and make them its next meal, as it has developed a taste for gloomfolk flesh.

Driven by an insatiable hunger, it will also hunt any mortals who dare enter the Penumbral Plane. Cunning and ruthless, it always assumes the form of its most recent meal, often appearing as some type of humanoid. Recently, it devoured a young red-haired woman draped in tattered rags and shrouded in ash. Brought to the Penumbral Plane by the Cult of Shadow Wing, she managed to escape and wandered the plane, searching for an exit until she fell prey to the **gluttony.**

When the **gluttony** sights its prey, it feigns despair, seemingly overcome by sorrow and fear. This act is meant to lure adventurers closer so that the **gluttony** can strike.

Running the Encounter. In the guise of a distraught woman, the **gluttony** will be found curled up, seemingly crying, perhaps beneath a tree or near **penumbral bushes**. When an adventurer, driven by empathy or curiosity, draws near, the trap springs into action. The **gluttony**, with sudden fierceness, sheds its disguise, revealing its true nature, and launches an aggressive attack on the unprepared adventurer.

The **gluttony**'s hunger knows no bounds, and it will not retreat. It strikes with intense aggression, focusing on a single target until that individual falls unconscious, at which point it attempts to devour them. It continues this pattern until all foes are consumed or it is slain.

Treasure. Due to its voracity, the **gluttony** often swallows its victims whole, along with their equipment. Inside its stomach, adventurers might find 3 pale yellow-brown citrines and 4 pale blue-green zircons worth 50 gp each, two violet garnets valued at 100 gp each, a pair of *boots of striding and springing*, and a *+1 longsword*. If the **gluttony** is defeated and the party doesn't consider checking its stomach, a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check might cause them to remember to do so.

Shadow Wing Patrol

Members of the Cult were tasked by Tenebrizon to patrol this region and eliminate all intruders, providing the mercenaries the time needed to reach the Empire. Since then, several groups of cultists have been scouring the valley for mortals to capture or exterminate. Renowned for their madness and unwavering devotion, the members of the Shadow Wing are prepared to sacrifice everything for their eldritch masters. While they won't hesitate to kill any mortal venturing into the Penumbral Plane, they might be deceived into believing the characters are fellow cultists. However, pulling off such a deception would require a clever ruse.

Running the Encounter. The patrols are on high alert after receiving commands to guarantee the safety of a group of mercenaries that will cross the valley, identified only by a man with gold teeth and a gloomfolk woman in purple armor wielding a bow. They are primed to confront any group of mortals, except these specific mercenaries and other cultists. But if the adventurers can convincingly disguise themselves as agents of the Shadow Wing, the patrol will adopt a neutral stance and engage them in dialogue. They might even divulge valuable information, such as the local resting places of the cultists (the cemetery and the ancient dragon tower) and the whereabouts of a rift leading to the Empire, located at the heart of the earth whirlpool to the east.

Random Patrol Composition table:

D6	Patrol	Difficult
1-2	One **Shadow Mage** plus two **Penumbral Envies**	Medium
3	Two **Arachne Ambushers** plus three **Shadow Wing Initiates**	Hard
4-5	One **Shadow Mage** plus Four **Shadow Wing Initiates**	Medium
6	One **Master of Pain** plus one **Penumbral Disgust** and two **Shadow Wing Initiates**	Hard

Emogun Hunt

In the twilight realm of the Penumbra, hungry emoguns prowl, drawn by the intense emotions emanating from the material world. Within the Valley of the Eyes, these ravenous creatures form small groups to survive the treacherous environment and enhance their effectiveness in hunting. Any humanoid unfortunate enough to cross their path in the Penumbra becomes their prey.

Running the Encounter. The variety of groups you may encounter are outlined in the table below. Each configuration presents its own challenges and dangers, making every battle a unique experience. The emoguns will show no mercy, attacking relentlessly upon detection, and only fleeing if they feel no chance of winning.

D10	Emogun	Difficult
1	Two **Penumbral Disgusts** plus one **Penumbral Pain**	Hard
2	One **Penumbral Pain** plus 1d6 **Penumbral Envies**	Medium
3-4	One **Penumbral Disgust** plus three **Penumbral Miseries**	Easy
5-8	Two **Penumbral Grudges** *(see **The Rancor** below)*	Easy
9	1d4 **Penumbral Pains**	Varies
10	One **Swarm of Miseries**	Hard

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The rancor *(only for penumbral grudges)*. When encountering **grudges**, if one is slain, the others will try to escape. If they succeed, they will persistently shadow the party in search of vengeance. If the adventurers have multiple encounters with these creatures and any grudges manage to escape, those that fled will band together, perpetually hunting the adventurers upon their entry into the Penumbra. Should the number of grudges trailing the heroes *(those they previously encountered and which managed to escape)* become substantial, their collective malice will amplify, compelling them to fuse into a **penumbral rancor** (a fusion requires four grudges).

You can incorporate this creature as an added challenge at the conclusion of this chapter or reserve it for the party's return from the Penumbra. The grudges' quest for revenge will only cease with their demise or that of the PCs. Note that confronting more than two grudges or facing the rancor itself can be lethal, so proceed with caution when setting them against the party this early in the campaign.

Penumbral Rancor

Huge aberration, neutral evil

Armor Class 20 (natural)
Hit Points 175 (17d12 + 68)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)	16 (+3)	7 (-2)

Damage Immunities psychic
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Understands Deep Speech, but can't speak it
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the rancor can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature that it can see.

Grudge. When a creature takes damage from the rancor's Loathsome Bite and fails its Wisdom saving throw (see the attack), it begins to view the rancor as its most hated enemy. All of the creature's attacks against creatures other than the rancor are made with disadvantage. This effect ends if the rancor is killed, the creature is affected by a *calm emotions* spell, or the creature takes a long rest. A creature that successfully saves or for which the effect ends is immune to this Grudge ability for the next 24 hours. If a creature is affected by multiple Grudge effects, only the most recent one applies.

Grudge Mark. The rancor marks the last creature that dealt damage to it. The marked creature is under the effect of a *locate creature* spell without distance limitation as long as it is on the same plane as the rancor. Polymorph effects do not hide the creature from the rancor.

Relentless (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The first time the rancor takes any amount of damage that would reduce it to 0 hit points, it is reduced to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The rancor makes two Loathsome Bite attacks.

Loathsome Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage. The target must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or take an additional 9 (2d8) psychic damage and be affected by the Grudge effect.

Grudging Run (Recharges 5-6). The rancor can move in a straight line up to four times its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

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Swarm of Penumbral Miseries

Large swarm of Tiny Aberrations, unaligned

Armor Class 11
Hit Points 110 (20d10)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	7 (-2)	16 (+3)	7 (-2)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing, psychic
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages —
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Keen Smell. The penumbral misery has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Mind Plague. A creature afflicted with the penumbral misery mind plague has delusions and hallucinations that cloud its senses. The creature has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks and on Wisdom saving throws and cannot maintain concentration. The mind plague is a magical disease and can be removed by a *lesser restoration* spell or similar or more powerful effects.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny rat. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

Multiattack. The swarm makes a Bite and a Latching Tentacles attack against one target in the swarm's space.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 21 (6d6) piercing damage plus 21 (6d6) poison damage, or 10 (3d6) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer. A creature hit must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be afflicted with the Mind Plague. Creatures resistant or immune to psychic or poison damage are immune to the plague.

Latching Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 0 ft. one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* The swarm attaches to the target. While attached, at the end of each of the target creature's turns, the swarm can make a bite attack against it with advantage.

The swarm can only attach to one creature at a time. Any creature that attacks the swarm while it is attached to a creature must choose to roll with disadvantage, or in the case the attack misses, it must roll the same attack against the creature the swarm is attached against.

The swarm never detaches from its target, and can only be removed if killed.

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Maldictus, the Dragon of Sinister Fate

Maldictus is an **adult penumbral dragon** with a unique form of madness. He is obsessed with the concepts of luck and misfortune, often carrying amulets and items he believes to be lucky charms, while avoiding things he considers unlucky. Though his desire for power mirrors that of other penumbral dragons, his delusion makes him believe that true power comes from accumulating greater luck than any other being.

However, Maldictus is currently in turmoil, convinced he is experiencing unprecedented bad luck. This streak of misfortune began after he allied with a cunning purple witch to steal ancient treasures from a soulborn's vault. Their venture was successful, with Maldictus betraying and consuming the witch, thereby claiming all the loot. As her last act, the witch unleashed the dreaded purple curse upon him. Which caused the dragon to become paranoid with a possible stream of unluckiness.

Among the pilfered items was a potent magic mirror with the ability to duplicate objects. In desperation, he decided to use the mirror to replicate one of his most prized lucky charms. Unfortunately, the mirror malfunctioned, broke into five fragments, and released a massive burst of arcane energy, briefly rendering the dragon incapacitated.

Now bearing the curse, a shattered mirror, and the belief he's doomed to seven years of bad luck, Maldictus roams the valley, seeking the mirror fragments, hoping to repair it and reverse his cursed fate.

Running the Encounter. When the PCs encounter Maldictus, they will first find him preoccupied with finding the mirror pieces, largely unaware of their presence, unless they draw his attention or possess one of the mirror's shards. If engaged in conversation, Maldictus will detail his situation and request their help in collecting the fragments, pledging a significant magical reward.

Should the PCs rashly instigate a confrontation, they will face a formidable foe. But Maldictus believes that slaying a 13th humanoid would exacerbate his already poor luck (having killed 12 this week), so he will opt to depart or leave the party incapacitated but alive. However, if they continue to confront the dragon, he can fall to rage and bring about their doom.

Regarding the Mirror Pieces. If the PCs agree to the task, Maldictus shares that before passing out from the explosion, he saw five fragments scatter across the valley. One shard landed near a stone surrounded by tornadoes, another in a dark swamp, the third in a grove with sentient trees, the forth fell into the region of tentacles, and the fifth he believes was near this place he is searching but he is not sure. Maldictus is unaware that the fragment near this location was taken by gloomfolk scouts.

To mend the mirror, the PCs need all five fragments. Three substances in the valley can act as powerful adhesives. The collectors possess an exceptional glue available for trade, while the melancholic sadness entities have a silvery liquid, seeking knowledge in return. Alternatively, the royal jelly from the penumbral queen bee in the Forest of Eyes offers another adhesive choice. Once the mirror is mended using any of these materials, it shines brightly, seamlessly fixing itself and completely absorbing the adhesive, leaving no evidence of its previous damage.

If the PCs successfully restore the mirror and present it to Maldictus, he feels an overwhelming sense of gratitude and relief from his perceived ill luck. In thanks, Maldictus grants each party member a precious gem worth 1,000 gp and a *stone of good luck (Luckstone)*.

Augur Presence

Due to the heightened activity of emoguns and Shadow Wing cultists in the valley, the followers of the Augur are deploying more minions to counteract the chaos in the Penumbra. Aiming to eliminate the servants of the Ungods and weaken their powers, these Golgöggoth's servants roam the valley, targeting emoguns, Shadow Wing cultists, and any entities that directly generate emotions that can feed the emoguns in the Penumbra.

Running the Encounter. Roll a d6 to determine the composition of the group of Augur followers the PCs come across.

While they might not be immediately hostile towards the party, as their primary objective is to target cultists and penumbral creatures, they are wary of mortals in the Penumbral Plane. They often perceive them as cultists of the Ungods until proven otherwise and may decide to eliminate even mortals that are not that because they can become prey for penumbral creatures, which then grow stronger.

The Watchers will adopt a combative stance against the party unless presented with clear evidence that they oppose the cultists and penumbral creatures.

Refraining from drawing weapons, displaying a non-hostile demeanor, and providing evidence of their mission to thwart the Cult may earn the trust of the Watchers, leading them to spare the characters.

There's a possibility that the Watchers might be persuaded to assist the group. Their primary goal is to prevent the Cult from wreaking further havoc in Tanares, and Tenebrizon's scheme has the potential to do just that. However, convincing them will be a challenging endeavor. The Watchers are highly suspicious of the Cultists, aware of their cunning, scheming, and deceit. They might suspect that the characters are either covert agents of the Cult or are unknowingly aiding the Cult's agenda while thinking they are opposing it.

D6	Watcher	Difficult
1-2	One **nightmare lord**	Medium
3	Three **nightmare warriors**	Hard
4-5	1d6 **scouting eye**	Varies
6	One **penumbral guardian** plus two **scouting eyes**	Hard

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Valley of Eyes Locations

1- Blink City

This is the place the penumbral portal will bring the characters, read the text below as soon as they cross it.

As you cross the penumbral portal, the world around you shifts, and you find yourself in a twisted and labyrinthine village. Shadows shroud the entire place, making it hard to see much further ahead. The houses look like forgotten specters of actual buildings, appearing old and decrepit. Nearby, you can see the dead body of what appears, by his garments, to be one of the cultists, with a scroll fallen beside him.

At the walls, you notice strange movements, only to see they are the opening of sinister yellow eyes gazing at you. More eyes can be seen far away on other distant walls and even on the ground, but they appear to do nothing except accompany your movements.

The streets seem to intertwine in a perplexing maze that sometimes appears to shift, defying logic and reason. As you take a few steps forward, you can hear the sound of quick and desperate steps of someone fleeing.

As the PCs cross the rift, they hear sounds coming from a nearby alley. Soon, they see the source: three **penumbral grudges** are chasing a person who is trying to lose them.

The specific person should be the NPC rolled on this chapter's Tenebrizon possession table *(Basothar Ophis, Edgar, Graxorathrar, Magnus Dalgliesh, or Willie Ravenwood).*

Cultist Body with Scroll: If the characters investigate, they will see that it indeed seems like one of the cultists.

The scroll has arcane symbols that can be identified with a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check. A success will let the character know that it is a used *scroll of teleport* that has lost its magic.

A DC 18 Wisdom (Medicine) check will allow one to determine that the cultist died from some form of mental shock, typically caused by psychic effects, with no other physical harm on his body.

This cultist was used by Tenebrizon to quickly possess a new target. The characters will not know this information but may use this hint to distrust the individual they will find here.

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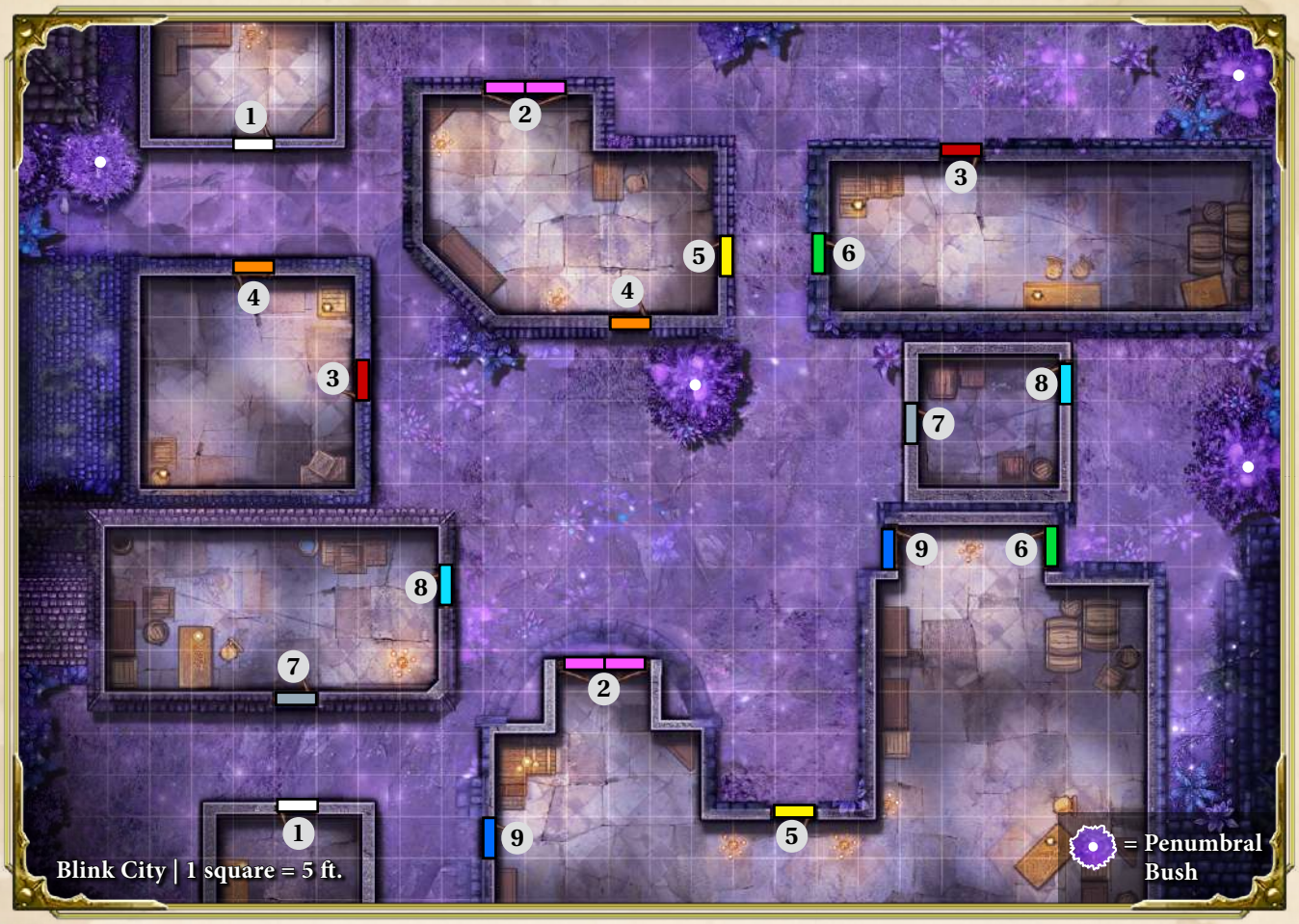

The Combat. Upon noticing the PCs' presence, two of the **grudges** will attack them, while the third remains focused on the NPC.

The houses in the city possess a unique and strange property; their doors are unlocked, but entering them will not truly lead one to the inside of the house. Instead, it will cause the person to exit through one of the other house doors.

The numbers below indicate which door is linked to which other and where the **penumbral bushes** are.

The **grudges** know exactly which door leads to each location and will fully utilize this knowledge to their advantage during combat.

Unstable Terrain. Due to the shifting terrain in the Blink City, creatures that take the Dash action must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone at the end of their movement. This effect does not apply to the **grudges**.

Conversely, while within the Blink City region, the grudges can Disengage as a bonus action, as the terrain seems to shift and twist in ways that only they seem to completely understand.

If the two **grudges** that are attacking the characters are defeated, the third one pursuing the NPC will attempt to flee. If it succeeds, it will begin to stalk the characters, seeking revenge *(see Emogun Hunt and the Rancor entry; this grudge counts as the first to form a penumbral rancor)*.

Penumbral Bush

Large plant, unaligned

Armor Class 6
Hit Points 34 (4d12 + 8)
Speed 0

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (-2)	1 (-5)	14 (+2)	1 (-5)	3 (-4)	1 (-5)

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, frightened
Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 6
Languages —
Challenge 0 (0 or 10 XP)

Actions

Twine. Any creature that passes within 5 ft. of or through the penumbral bush square must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or be grappled (DC 10 to escape). Until this grapple ends, the creature is restrained and the penumbral bush can't Twine another target. The penumbral bush can only grapple creatures up to its size.

Emotion Drain. Any creature that ends its turn grappled by a penumbral bush must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw, taking 3 (1d6) psychic damage on a failed save.

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After the combat, the saved NPC will act grateful. Unknown to the group, this NPC is possessed by Tenebrizon, read the NPCs section at the end of this chapter to see how the NPC will act in relation to the group while under Tenebrizon's control.

Continuing the Adventure. From here on, the characters are free to explore this region of the Penumbral Plane on their own. You can create new locations and encounters or use the references provided here and the map to run the diverse situations they may encounter on their journey.

2 - Tornado Slab

Upon entering this region, you observe a vast expanse of raw stone, slightly rounded by the relentless force of wind erosion, stretching out before you. Dust-laden winds whip through the area, howling and moaning like lost souls. The gusts change direction in an instant, creating mesmerizing whirlwinds that dance across the slab. It is both a spectacle and a horror, as you feel that the winds could treacherously sweep you away with any misstep.

The winds here possess uncanny strength, capable of pushing any creature unfortunate enough to enter their domain. Anyone who observes them will notice a peculiar phenomenon: when the wind encounters an object, it mysteriously begins to circle it, forming a small tornado around it. The object becomes trapped within this vortex of wind and dust, hidden from view by the sand carried along with it.

Unknown to most, this region became infused with possessiveness and relentless winds due to a **penumbral greed**, born from the corrupted form of an air elementalist's desperation for material possessions. The creature was killed long ago, but the area remains infused with its torment, becoming dominated by the winds that seem to try to keep all forms of riches and objects for themselves.

Navigating the Winds. Each round, the wind will blow in one random direction (use a d8 to determine). Every creature that ends its turn within this region must make a Strength saving throw against DC 12 or be pushed 10 feet in the direction of the wind. If the creature fails by 5 or more (a result of 7 or less on the saving throw), it also falls prone.

Any unsecured object will be taken by the winds (you may add it to the table below under some roll to be recovered).

Retrieving Items. To try to retrieve an item from a tornado, one must succeed on a DC 17 Strength check; failure results in being violently flung 15 feet away and taking 2d6 bludgeoning damage. On a success, it is possible to snatch the item inside. Roll a d20 and check the table below to see what the characters found.

If the adventurers know that one of the shards of the Twinning Mirage mirror is lost here, they may try to search for it. The task is daunting as the dust covers all objects lost inside the tornadoes, but a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that one of the tornadoes occasionally reflects some light, a rare sight in the Penumbral Plane. This allows them to go to the specific tornado that carries the shard; if they snatch the item from that tornado, instead of rolling on the table, they acquire the mirror piece.

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Random Snatched Item Table

D20	Object
1-2	A simple piece of rock or wood
3-4	Bones of a dead creature
5-6	A rusted weapon
7-8	An old piece of bright colored clothing
9-10	One coin (roll 1d8: 1-3 copper, 4-6 silver, 7-8 gold)
11	One gem worth 5gp
12	A preserved wooden shield
13	A conserved mundane weapon
14	A *Potion of Healing*
15	A statue or jewel (art object worth 15 gp)
16	A topaz, onyx, or jade worth 10 gp
17	A diamond, ruby, or emerald worth 50 gp
18	A *+1 Shield (if already recovered, re-roll this entry)*
19	A *+1 weapon of GM's choice (up to two can be found, re-roll if both were)*
20	A mirror fragment *(if already recovered, re-roll this entry)*

Combat. While there are no specific enemies residing in this place, you may decide to roll for one of the random encounters in this location, adding the challenge of the blowing wind to the normal situation the characters may encounter.

3 - Cave of Whispers

Upon arriving at this location, you find a cave entrance that resembles a maw, giving you a sense of dread as the air seems heavy here. The corridor inside appears narrow, with its depths shrouded in darkness, seemingly swallowing the feeble light that struggles to pierce its veil. The walls of the cave bear intricate drawings reminiscent of twisted branches, their faint purple glow casting eerie shadows that dance along the passage.

The characters may decide to explore the insides of the caverns, or turn back and keep exploring other locations of the valley.

If the characters decide to explore the cave read the text below to them.

As you enter the cavern, you can hear faint whispers echoing off the walls. They begin almost unnoticeably, but with each step, they grow louder, revealing themselves as desperate pleas for help and eerie warnings. They quickly become an overlapping and intertwined cacophony of voices that grows increasingly disorienting. The chamber is dimly lit by an ethereal purple glow emanating from the walls, revealing a vast expanse that stretches beyond sight.

This cave was formed by the fear of a group of refugees from the Kemet Invasion who were trying to protect a holy relic. They were lured into the Penumbral Plane by a **penumbral fear**, which manipulated and killed them, feeding on their suffering. This caused the cavern to become ingrained with the wailing remnants of their souls.

The cave comprises corridors that are 10 ft. wide and high; they wind up and down without a pattern and often intertwine and intersect, forming a labyrinth. If the PCs decide to explore the cave, they will soon realize that they are in trouble as the whispers intensify, becoming increasingly confusing and difficult to understand. Every creature that spends more than 1 minute inside the cave must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become disoriented (see below). If the creature passes the saving throw, it must make a new saving throw every minute spent within.

- A creature disoriented by the cave has disadvantage on attack rolls, cannot maintain concentration on spells, and its movement is halved. If it uses the Dash action, it must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or fall prone. This lasts for 1 minute.

Combat. Inside this cavern, there are eight Specters, the last remnants of the individuals who died here.

Defeating these specters will not fully destroy them or free the lost souls. After 1d6 hours, they will reappear in the cavern.

The Altar. If the characters continue exploring, they may encounter an altar with eldritch runes and strange purple glowing symbols. At the base of the altar, a skull is carved, its eyes made of two crimson rubies. On top of the altar is a golden chalice with the symbol of Tamera, but chains of a black metal bind it to the altar. Inside the chalice is a tar-like substance that seems to reverberate with the echoes of the souls trapped in the cavern.

On the base of the altar, the inscriptions below can be read:

In shadows cast, unveil the lore,
With light's embrace, reveal the door.
Patterned whispers, dark construe,
In silhouette, the path anew.
The twin cast of the chalice gleam,
Awakens paths to the souls' dream.

Speak the hidden, voice the veiled,
In whispered truths, the way unveiled.
A secret kept, a silence broke,
Arcane bound by dire words bespoke.
In shadows deep, meaningful secrets hide,
Reveal the truth you keep inside.

The crystal yearns for life's touch,
A drop of essence reveals much.
Bind the spirit by sacrifice,
To free the lost from shadowed vice.
In gems encased, the soul's brief plight,
Unleashes spirits into light.

Touching the altar, the chains, or the liquid inside causes 1d8 necrotic damage and 1d8 psychic damage. The chains and the altar can only be destroyed by performing the correct ritual to release the souls bound to the altar.

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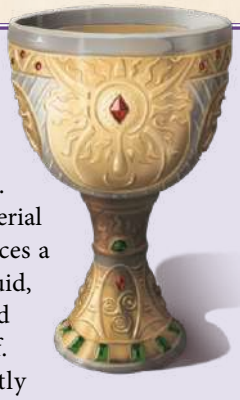
To release the souls, the necessary proceedings must be done in the correct order:

- The characters must create two light sources so that the chalice produces two identical shadows over the altar.
- The character must then reveal a personal secret aloud to the altar, one that they have never shared before. Only a relevant secret that causes real shame or is detrimental to the character will be accepted.
- The character must shed a drop of their blood on both gemstones that form the eyes of the skull carved in the altar.

Performing this ritual will cause the altar to crumble, and the chains of darkness to disappear, freeing the souls that were bound in the cavern. The souls of the refugees are also freed and appear momentarily, thanking the characters before ascending. They will briefly reveal that the chalice is a sacred item of Tamera, the Goddess of the Sun, an item they were protecting while fleeing from the Kemets. They will entrust the characters to make good use of it.



Relic of Tamera - The Sundrop Chalice
Wondrous item, very rare

This ancient chalice is adorned with fine details representing the sun. When exposed to sunlight on the Material Plane for 1 hour, the chalice produces a golden liquid. After drinking this liquid, the creature regains 4d10 hit points and removes all curse effects from itself. The liquid must be drunk directly from the chalice and cannot be stored. If the liquid comes into contact with any lid or material, it loses its mystical properties, making storage for later use impractical. A cleric of Tamera can use this item as a holy symbol. Doing so increases their spell save DC by 1, and their healing spells recover an additional 2 hit points per spell level to each creature affected (applied once per casting for spells that heal the same creature multiple times).

Spiritual Hints. The bound souls, eager for release, may try to aid the characters if they are attempting to destroy the altar. There are three ways they can offer help.

If the characters are unable to understand the first step, the souls may attempt to produce tenuous will-o'-wisp-like lights, trying to make the characters observe the moving shadow of the chalice.

If the characters are unable to understand the second step, the souls may try to whisper to them, creating a sound that is a mix of a gust of wind and a wail, saying, "Speak the hidden, voice a dark secret."

If the characters are unable to understand the third step, the souls might cause the rubies on the skull to glow for a moment.

GM Note: Use the hints only if you feel that they will enhance the experience of your group. The idea of the puzzle is to create an interesting experience; what entertains one group may bore another, so use them to provide the best experience for your group. You may also decide to make the puzzle more complex, or offer additional hints, if you deem that it will be more enjoyable for your group.

4 - Cemetery of the Lost and Fallen

As you draw near this location you see a cemetery. A profound silence enshrouds the surroundings. Before you unfolds an expansive burial ground, a majestic mausoleum dominating its core, flanked by orderly rows of gravestones. A low, meticulously arranged stone wall demarcates this sacred place, creating a subtle boundary between the living and the dead. The aged wooden door of the mausoleum, weathered by time, is half-open.

The characters may explore the cemetery. You may decide to roll a random encounter here if they linger for too long in the open.

If they search the gravestones, they will only find the names are mostly gibberish, excluding a small group. They will also see that the earth from one of the graves has been excavated. A DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check may reveal that whatever did it was inside the earth and burrowed to outside, not the other way around.

Besides that, there is not much to be found in the exterior area of the cemetery.

If the characters decide to enter the Mausoleum read the text below.

Stepping into the mausoleum unveils a lengthy, spiraling staircase delving into the depths below. A colossal stone door looms at the staircase's base, its robust frame engraved with images that seem to display heroic deeds.

To push open the stone door, a DC 16 Strength check is necessary. Opening it reveals an expansive hall bathed in a spectral glow. The chamber, spanning 30 square feet, is embellished with statues of heroes from forgotten epochs, their likenesses eternally preserved in stone.

It quickly becomes evident that the overpowering aura of the Penumbra, characterized by its insidious whispers and bewildering effects, is repelled by this sanctified domain. The hall's sanctuary offers a reprieve from the tribulations of the Penumbral Plane, providing solace and restoration. Within its safeguarding confines, it is possible to take a long rest.

Attention is inevitably drawn to the detailed frescoes adorning the walls. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (History) check uncovers the depiction of venerable heroes from a time preceding the ascendancy of Malrok. Disturbing this consecrated site could invoke divine wrath, disrupting the

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harmonious equilibrium that protects this place from the effects of the Penumbral Plane.

The Arrival of Edgar. If the characters have not yet encountered the NPC Edgar and they linger for an extended period in the cemetery, either by exploring the place or by taking a long rest in it, they will be discovered by him. Edgar, the Undying Gravedigger, will be drawn to the characters out of curiosity, longing to engage with someone after spending so much time alone. More information about Edgar can be found in the NPCs section at the end of this chapter.

5 - Watchful Woods

As you progress ahead, you see a dark and strange forest casting a sense of unease over you. The towering trees stand tall, their trunks adorned with eerie, watchful eyes scattered randomly along their bark, always seeming to stare at you. The air carries a wavy scent of blood and honey, a strange and unsettling combination, while buzzing sounds can be faintly heard reverberating within it.

Venturing inside this forest may cause the characters to encounter **swarms of penumbral wasps**, and they may even find a solitary **penumbral gluttony** wandering here.

For each hour the characters wander in the forest, you may roll on the table below:

The Eyes in the Trees. Any combat in this forest must be conducted carefully. The eyes in the forest are endowed with life. While they will only stare at those walking inside, if any of the eyes take any damage, from an attack or, more likely, from a spell that affects an area, the tree will awaken in furious rage, transforming into an Awakened Tree that seeks vengeance upon those who harmed it.

Woods Encounter Table:

Encounter	Roll (1d20)
Penumbral wasps	1-5
Wandering penumbral gluttony (only once, reroll if already encountered)	6-7
The Wasp Queen Hive (only once, reroll if already encountered)	8-9
Wallace (only once, reroll if already encountered)	10-12
A roll on the Chapter 4 random encounter table	13-14
Nothing	15-20

Penumbral Wasps Encounters. Roll 1d4 to determine how many swarms of **penumbral wasps** are found. The wasps form small clouds that spread across a location to find their food before joining to return to their queen. They are aggressive and will try to kill the characters to feed their hive.

Wandering Penumbral Gluttony Encounter. A solitary **gluttony** roams this forest in search of the wasps' honey. It is currently in its original form. While it desires the honey, it will not refrain from trying to eat any creature it encounters, including the PCs. It may be convinced not to attack if promised help to get the honey *(if the characters have a way to speak Deep Speech)*.

The Wasp Queen. Hidden amidst the shadows and foliage is the nest of the **penumbral wasp queen**, a dire wasp whose transformation in the depths of the Penumbra has left her corrupted and hungry for tree sap and the flesh of penumbral creatures. When found, she will have 1d4 **swarm of penumbral wasps** along with her.

If one is actively searching for the nest it requires a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check. Should the party stumble upon her, they will face a relentless and merciless adversary, defending her territory with ferocious determination.

In the **wasp queen's** lair, there is a very rare kind of honey. It is possible to extract up to 20 lbs of honey (around 7 liters), which can be sold for 50 gp. In addition, there is an extremely sticky special royal jelly that can be used as *sovereign glue* for up to two days after being collected. Removing the jelly requires a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check, yielding two uses of glue on a success and wasting the jelly on a failure.

Wallace, the Twisted Treant. Another unique creature dwelling in this forest is Wallace, a treant resembling a black walnut tree, who tends to all the trees of the forest daily, hoping to one day witness their true awakening as treants. He seeks companionship and understanding from those who can grasp the delicate connection between nature and the Penumbra.

He is very protective of the trees, which he considers his "daughters". If he learns of anyone harming them *(see The Eyes in the Trees)*, he may become dangerously hostile, requiring significant diplomacy and persuasion to be soothed.

If the party manages to engage in conversation with Wallace and gain his trust, they may learn valuable information.

- Wallace knows that the closest exit from the Penumbral Plane is to the east in the Earth Vortex.
- He also knows where a mirror shard fell in the forest. He has no use for it and can guide the characters to the place.
- He saw a group of Tanareans going from west to east (unknown to him they are the mercenaries the characters are looking for, Wallace can describe them correctly).

Wallace is a very powerful being for the characters to face in battle, but he is not evil and will only decide to kill them if they show no remorse for harming the forest or if they become hostile towards him.

The Mirror Shard in the Forest. One of the shards of the *Twinning Mirage Mirror* is lost in this forest. Finding the mirror requires a thorough search. For each hour the characters spend walking in the forest, one character may roll an Intelligence (Investigation) check, another may roll a Wisdom (Perception) check, and a third character may roll a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check.

When the characters have accumulated 6 successes, adding up successes obtained in any of the three checks, they manage to find a shining object that, once recovered, proves to be one of the shards of the mirror.

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Wallace, the Twisted Treant

Huge plant, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural)
Hit Points 175 (14d12 + 84)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	8 (-1)	22 (+6)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, psychic
Damage Immunities necrotic
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Deep Speech, Druidic, Elvish, Sylvan
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

False Appearance. While Wallace remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal tree.

Siege Monster. Wallace deals double damage to objects and structures.

Actions

Multiattack. Wallace makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, range 60/180 ft., one target. *Hit:* 29 (4d10 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Animate Trees (1/Day). Wallace magically animates one or two trees it can see within 60 feet of it. These trees have the same statistics as him, except they have Intelligence and Charisma scores of 1, they can't speak, and they have only the Slam action option. An animated tree acts as an ally of Wallace. The tree remains animate for 1 day or until it dies; until Wallace dies or is more than 120 feet from the tree; or until Wallace takes a bonus action to turn it back into an inanimate tree. The tree then takes root if possible.

Penumbral Wasp Queen

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural)
Hit Points 76 (8d10 + 32)
Speed 20 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	4 (-3)

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities paralyzed, poisoned
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages -
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Swarm of Penumbral Wasps. The wasp queen is accompanied by swarms of wasps, which use the creature's abdomen as their home. The wasp queen has 2 (1d4) wasp swarms inside it, releasing them, in an adjacent free space, as soon as it engages in combat.

Paralyzing Poison. The wasps that inhabit the interior of the wasp queen acquire a paralyzing poison. A creature that suffers a successful attack from a swarm of the wasp queen's wasps must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is poisoned for one minute. A creature poisoned in this way is also in the paralyzed condition. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Actions

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. The poisoned target is paralyzed, and it can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the poisoned effect on a success.

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Swarm of Penumbral Wasps

Medium swarm of tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural)
Hit Points 31 (7d8)
Speed 5 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	1 (-5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses blindsight 10 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages -
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a tiny insect. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 10 (4d4) piercing damage plus 5 (2d4) poison damage, or 5 (2d4) piercing damage plus 2 (1d4) poison damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

6 - Eldritch Tendril Maze

From afar, you can already discern that this region is a place of utter nightmare. The land is covered in purple ichor, while writhing tentacles constantly move, forming a labyrinthine tangle of tendrils.

At this point, the characters may decide either to avoid this location or to cross it. Read if they decide to walk inside:

As you step into the maze of tendrils, a sense of unease grips your very soul. The air is thick and foul-smelling, and the tentacles seem to react to your presence, writhing in the direction of any sound you produce.

The corridors, no wider than 15 feet, offer a precarious path through the writhing mass of tentacles. This place was a result of the imprisoned soul of an Ironhand officer who lost his sanity during the war, becoming terrified of all noises, as they caused him to remember flashes of the Kemet Invasion of Fisherman's Wharf. Searching for a place of absolute silence, he ended up in the Penumbral Plane and died in this place to a powerful **penumbral fear** that was manipulating him for its plans. His soul became part of this place, constantly seeking eternal silence.

While it is mostly safe to travel if no noise is created, any sound will cause the tentacles to try to grab whatever caused it.

To traverse the place, each character must be successful on a DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check. All characters who fail will be grabbed by the tentacles. One can try to free oneself as an action by making a DC 14 Strength or Dexterity check, or another character may also try to free them with an action and a DC 14 Strength check.

All characters who use an action to aid must roll another DC 12 Dexterity (Stealth) check, with disadvantage, or risk also becoming a target.

If a character ends its turn grappled by a tentacle, it will pull that character underground. The tentacle will not hurt the individual but will transport them to a random location in the valley (see the table below), appearing from the ground and releasing the creature.

Attacking the tentacles may free another creature, but will cause you to be targeted by a tentacle. Its AC is 12 and it has 15 hit points.

After the first individual is captured and transported, all other creatures captured by the tentacles in the next 10 minutes will be brought to the same place.

Teleport Table

D8	Local
1	**Tornado Slab**
2	Entrance of the **Cave of Whispers**
3	**Cemetery of the Fallen Lost**
4	**Watchful Woods**
5	Shores of the **Bloodlake of Swirls**
6	**Dragon Tower Ruins**
7	**Vile Quag**
8	Door of the **Ancient Obelisk**

Mirror Shard. One of the shards of Maldictus' magic mirror fell into the maze. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, if they already know the information, or a DC 17, if the PCs don't know anything about the mirror, allows the PCs to notice that something emits a glow amid the tentacles. To retrieve it, one needs an additional Dexterity (Stealth) check to avoid attracting the tentacles.

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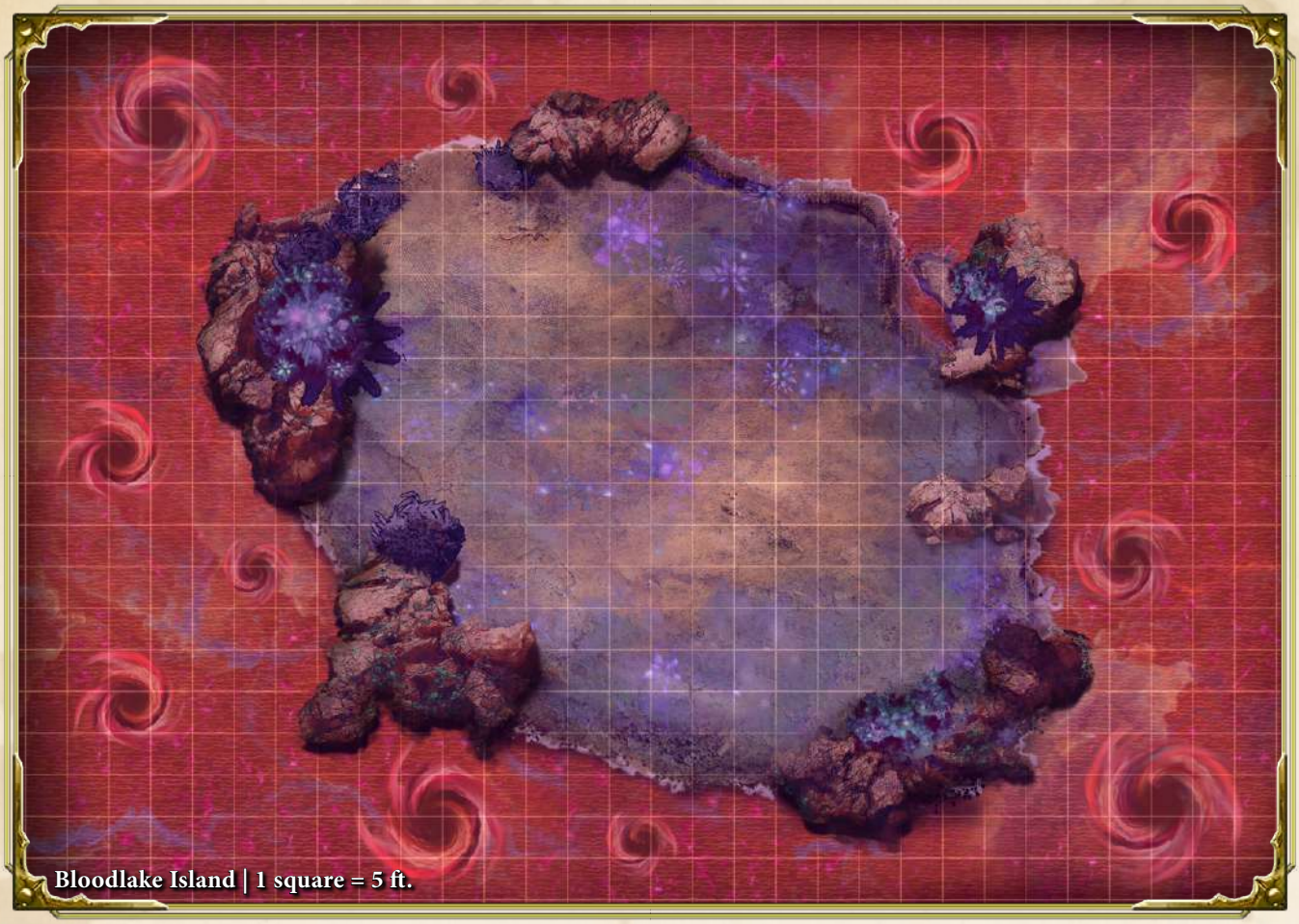

Bloodlake Island | 1 square = 5 ft.

7 - Bloodlake of Swirls

As you approach this location, you see a haunting sight, a crimson bloody surface stretches out as far as the eye can see, its surface swirling with violent whirlpools of blood. Eerily, eyes peer up from the depths of the whirlpools, fixating their sight on you. On an island in the center, you can see a kid in rags, alone and weeping.

This lake is filled with a reddish viscous liquid. Those who try to move around by swimming have to spend two additional feet for every 1 foot of movement *(one more than in normal liquids)*. Swimming through the whirlpools requires a DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check, managing to move on a success, and sinking into the liquid, becoming trapped in the vortex without being able to breathe, on a failure. A trapped creature can break free and rise to the surface by using an action and succeeding on another DC 16 Strength (Athletics) check. Creatures with the ability to swim automatically pass Strength (Athletics) checks and only need to spend one additional foot for every 1 foot of movement (not two).

This bizarre lake is home to a large pack of **penumbral envies**. They entice unsuspecting travelers by placing treasures on the small island and remaining submerged in the blood lake, waiting for victims to go to the island to be trapped and killed. However, their latest display of temptation is far more sinister—a young human child named Klaus (**commoner**), one of Magnus Dalgliesh's missing children. Klaus' life hangs in the balance, his energy drained by the relentless influence of Penumbra, and now he has four levels of exhaustion.

Magnus Dalgliesh. If the characters have not yet found Magnus, he will be on the shore, trying to find a way to go to the island and rescue the child, but he knows that there is something wrong, though he is uncertain of what. If he sees the characters, he will try to check if they are cultists or not, and if convinced they are possible allies, he will ask them to help rescue the child. See more about Magnus in the NPCs section at the end of this chapter.

The Combat. Nine **penumbral envies** lie submerged in the depths of the lake. Five of them will surface to attack as soon as a character reaches the halfway point between the island and the shore. This distance varies from 60 to 90 feet, depending on from which direction they approach.

At the fifth round of combat, the four remaining **envies** that are hiding at the bottom of the lake will also join the combat.

Treasure. Hidden on the island, beneath a **penumbral bush** in a concealed hole, is a trove of treasures collected by the **envies** from the adventurers and explorers they have slain. Here, adventurers will uncover 132 gp, a silver comb (25 gp), a brass cane adorned with draconic symbols (35 gp), a

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copper pendant featuring a single opal (30 gp), an obsidian chalice engraved with the symbol of Bauron (25 gp), a *broom of flying*, a *+1 shortsword*, a *+1 chainmail*, a *+1 glaive*, and a grimoire that has been rendered illegible from being thoroughly soaked in blood. Should the characters find a way to restore the grimoire, it contains five wizard spells from each level from 1st to 5th (of GM's choice), but doing so would require powerful magic or a very rare alchemical process.

8 - Dragon tower ruins

You approach what appears to be the ruins of an ancient stronghold adorned with carved dragon heads on its walls. The stone, weathered and worn, seems to be occupied, as large tents and a faint light can be seen in the midst of the remnants of the tower. The smell of smoke and some kind of smoked meat wafts through the air from afar. As you approach, you see the gloomfolk patrolling the region.

Despite the crumbling walls, a faint, otherworldly energy lingers around the ruins. This residual power serves as a shield against the insidious influence of the Penumbra, rendering the immediate area safe from its corrupting touch. It is precisely this protection that has attracted a hunting party of gloomfolk from the Pincer tribe to establish their camp within the sheltered grounds. While in this location, it is possible to take a **long rest as usual**.

The gloomfolk's reception mirrors the previous encounters with the patrols, reflecting the demeanor and attitude displayed by the party. A kind and cordial reception is offered to those who treated the patrols with respect, while a cold and distant response awaits those who showed rudeness. For those who engaged in violence, aggression and immediate expulsion from their territory are the expected consequences. If they have not encountered the gloomfolk up to this point, they will be treated with suspicion and will need to prove they are trustworthy before being allowed to enter the camp.

Graxorathrar. If the characters have found Graxorathrar and are accompanying her, they will be immediately well received by the gloomfolk. If not, Graxorathrar will be here leading her people *(see more on her in The NPCs section at the end of this chapter)*.

The Hunting Patrols. The gloomfolk here are divided into five patrol groups, each composed of skilled gloomfolk trackers *(refer to Gloomfolk Patrols in Random Encounters)*. As the day progresses, two patrols venture out to search for emoguns, while the remaining three stay behind to guard the camp. During the night, all patrols return, gathering around a crackling bonfire to share their experiences and stories of the day's hunts.

The Pincer tribe has chosen this valley as the location for their seasonal hunt, with emoguns as their primary targets. The unique meat of these creatures is vital for the growth of the young gloomfolk. If the party lends a hand in gathering these "food sources," they will earn the tribe's gratitude and willingness to assist them in any way possible *(see Side Quest: The Gloomfolk Hunt in Running This Chapter section)*.

The Shard of the Mirror. Recently, one of the patrols discovered a curious object that fell from the sky near the tower. It is a fragment of Maldictus' mirror which is being kept safe in their camp. If the party shows interest in the item, Graxorathrar will request 10 emogun rations as payment in exchange for the mirror shard *(See Gloomfolk Hunt)*.

9 - Vile Quag

You approach a swamp covered in thick green mist. The ground is a treacherous quagmire, sticky mud that clings tenaciously to your every step. The air has a putrid stench, and a foreboding silence settles upon these lands. Twisted dead trees are sparsely distributed in the landscape, while no living creature can be seen.

As soon as the PCs get deeper into the swamp, each step becomes a struggle, treating all Vile Quag terrain as difficult terrain. The mist itself holds a subtle, anesthetic quality, disorienting visiting senses and making navigation a formidable challenge. To traverse this swamp without getting lost, the party or the guide must succeed a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check. On a failure, they will wander into the swamp, and you can roll a random encounter.

Ambrose. If Ambrose has not been found at the beginning of the chapter, he will be at the edge of the swamp and will approach the PCs in search of help to find his sister, and eliminate any witch or hag they find.

The Hags Hut. If the characters explore the swamp they will end up finding a hut on the top of a small hill in the western part of the swamp. Within its confines dwell three **green hags**, Bogbelly, Mirelurk, and Poisonwell.

Bogbelly, the Mother, is a corpulent **green hag** with an insatiable appetite. She is covered in swamp muck and algae, lumbering heavily with each step. She often uses her size to intimidate and squash those who dare defy her.

In addition to the base features of a green hag, Bogbelly is Large, has Constitution 18 (+4), and 105 (11d10 + 44) hit points. She also possesses a Body Slam ability.

Body Slam. As a bonus action, Bogbelly can throw her weight around to slam into a target. On a hit, the target takes 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Spells. Bogbelly can cast *scrying* (2/Day) as an action, provided she has a high-quality crystal ball as a focus. If she wishes, she can display what the spell reveals on the ball to anyone who is looking at it.

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Personality. Bogbelly is constantly in search of food, and she has a penchant for kidnapping girls to transform them into hags, whom she considers her daughters. She accomplishes this transformation by cooking a specific soup that requires unique ingredients from the swamp. Both Mirelurk and Poisonwell were once humans transformed by her. Killing Bogbelly and using a *remove curse* spell on Mirelurk and Poisonwell could potentially restore their forms.

Mirelurk, the Murkdweller, is a **green hag** known for her elongated, webbed fingers, which she uses to navigate swiftly through the swampy terrain.

In addition to the base features of a green hag, Mirelurk has Swamp Stride, allowing her to move through swamp terrain without expending extra movement. She also has a swim speed of 30 feet and has advantage on all Stealth checks.

Personality. The most vile of the three hags, she delights in ambushing mortals who tread on her swamp. However, as the youngest and most cowardly of the three, she always obeys Bogbelly. She was once a Third Eye agent in training when she got lost during a heist; her group had fled through the use of a penumbral rift.

Poisonwell, the Tonguetwister, is a hag with a grotesquely long, prehensile tongue, covered in a mix of slime and spores. She uses this tongue to grasp objects from a distance and attack her prey.

In addition to the base features of a **green hag**, Poisonwell has Persuasion +4, advantage on all Deception checks, and a Poisonous Tongue attack. This attack can be used as an action and has a range of 15/30 ft. On a hit, it deals 3 (1d6) piercing damage and 9 (2d8) poison damage, and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute.

Personality: Poisonwell is curious and witty, frequently intrigued by the tales of mortals who venture into the swamp before meeting their demise. She often persuades Bogbelly to release those who entertain her the most. Adulating the larger hag, Poisonwell frequently succeeds in manipulating her to get what she desires. Meanwhile, Mirelurk, perceiving this favoritism, is often displeased but remains too fearful to do anything about it.

Once, she was a teenage noble girl whom her parents sold to a Purple Witch in exchange for assistance in increasing their political power. She was handed over to Bogbelly through a deal between the hag and the Purple Witch.

The **hags** are not immediately hostile, but can quickly become so if they feel threatened or disrespected or if they believe they can easily defeat and take the goods of the characters.

Poisonwell will try to talk with them before anything else, and learn who they are, while Mirelurk will try to hide and wait to ambush the characters. Bogbelly may be appeased if offered food, or if overly praised, but if she is challenged she quickly becomes angry.

If the characters sneak to investigate the hut before confronting the witches, they may wait and find a time when no witch is in the hut, as the witches often walk together, aware of the dangers of the Penumbral Plane. In the hut, they can find a tome of recipes, a collection of sinister ingredients, and a prisoner tied to one of the wooden pillars of the house.

The Recipes Tome. Open on a table are Bogbelly's recipes. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check allows one to find a recipe to turn women into green hags. The notes of Bogbelly's attempts show that she killed many to perfect this recipe, and that two of the successful attempts were Mirelurk and Poisonwell. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check may reveal that such a transformation could perhaps be reverted with a remove curse spell, after the bringer of the curse is killed.

The Imprisoned Girl. Bound in the hut is Violet, a thirteen-year-old girl abducted from the Heroes Rise orphanage by a Purple Witch, and given to Bogbelly as part of a deal. The hags harbor sinister intentions, seeking to transform Violet into one of their own. Violet, the eldest sister of the three children sought by Magnus Dalgliesh, is being pressured by the witches to consume the cursed food and become one of them, as it must be taken willingly for the curse to take effect. They can manipulate the girl, but her acceptance must stem not from fear, but from a genuine desire to become one of the **hags**.

To coerce her, the hags handed Klaus (Violet's brother) to a group of **envies** and forced Violet to witness, through a crystal ball, her brother being slowly consumed by the Penumbra. They tempt Violet with promises of her gaining the power to save her brother if she agrees to join them. However, Violet remains unconvinced by the hags and holds out hope for rescue, though she is close to despair and risks succumbing to the hags' desires.

After the PCs defeat the hags, Violet will reveal the whereabouts of her brother Klaus, weakened and trapped in a nearby lake to the southeast. She pleads for the PCs' aid, desperate to save him. Additionally, she divulges the location of the witches' hidden trove, concealed beneath the cauldron's brazier in a false bottom. Here resides a shard of Maldictus' mirror, a powerful artifact shrouded in mysteries and dangers.

Treasures. Over the table one can find a non-magical crystal ball (worth 1,000 gp). If the characters search the hut, a DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that beneath the cauldron (no roll required if Violet reveals the location), the witches have concealed 210 gp, 545 sp, four ruby-studded silver cups worth 25 gp each, a *necklace of adaptation*, a *+1 longbow*, *boots of elvenkind*, a *tameranium half plate*, a mysterious tameranium figurine with Kepesh features (The Peretuk), and one of the Maldictus' mirror fragments.

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10 - Ancient Obelisk

As you approach the edge of a desolate plain, a towering marvel looms before you—an ancient obelisk, a relic of a forgotten kingdom now lost in the annals of history. Rise about 300 feet high, the structure commands attention, adorned with intricate runes and inscriptions that wind their way from its base to its apex. Hovering above the obelisk, a colossal ghostly eye gazes ominously, seemingly fixated on all below.

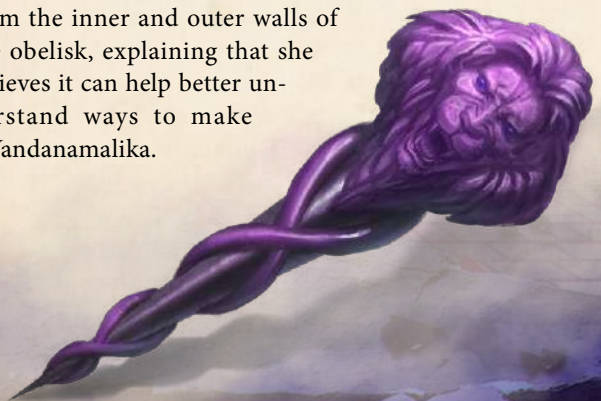
Within a radius of 333 feet encircling the obelisk, a unique aura emanates. Stealth, concealment, and all forms of illusion are futile within this domain, as any creature or object shrouded in invisibility becomes instantly visible, and all stealth rolls are made with disadvantage as a faint luminescence shines upon every individual inside this area. Spells that grant invisibility and all illusion spells are temporarily suppressed while within the aura, only to resume their effect once its bounds are left. Such is the potency of this aura that even the collectors shun this place, knowing that their abilities will be rendered impotent (if a collector is rolled as a random encounter, reroll the encounter).

At the obelisk, a massive stone door is sealed. Unveiling the path beyond requires unraveling a secret word hidden within the intricate writings adorning the obelisk's walls. To decipher the word, one must dedicate an hour to scrutinizing the inscriptions and succeed on a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana, History, or Investigation) check. Those proficient in two or more of these skills gain advantage on the check. Failure does not mark the end, as the code may be attempted again after another hour of meticulous analysis (for every three hours in this open field, you can decide to have the characters encounter one random encounter).

Finding the correct word and speaking it near the door unseals it, giving way to a hallway.

Willie Ravenwood. If Willie has not been found at the beginning of the chapter, she will be at the obelisk doors, trying to decipher how to gain entrance. Upon noticing the group of PCs approaching, she will cautiously inquire about the group's intentions in the dim light, and if she gains confidence, she will ask for help to enter the obelisk. See more about Willie in the NPCs section at the end of this chapter.

While the heroes are addressing the dangers of the obelisk, Willie will memorize information from the inner and outer walls of the obelisk, explaining that she believes it can help better understand ways to make a Vandanamalika.



10.1 - The Hallway

With the door unlocked, you step into a narrow corridor, its dimensions compressed to a mere 10 feet in width, height, and depth. At the far end stands a formidable stone door, imposing in its size. However, before you can analyze the next door, two shadowy figures materialize from the walls, ambushing you!

The creatures are two **wraiths**, which will emerge from inside the walls to attack, surprising the characters.

Defeating the creatures will cause the second stone door to open, giving way to the last room inside the obelisk.

10.2 - The Altar

Beyond the hallway door, you see a grand chamber, its vast expanse stretches 40 feet in both width and height, captivating your senses. Dominating the center of the chamber is a circular altar, its diameter measuring 10 feet. Nestled atop the altar, a pedestal supports a magnificent statue—a blink dog crafted from the precious material known as tameranium.

This room holds a tameranium statue of a blink dog; removing it will disable the effect of the obelisk *(but not the traps below)*. The statue was once a relic of the Malrokian Kingdom, used to guard and protect one of the vaults of King Malrok. However, it was stolen by Catharina, a Purple Witch who took the body of Ella Malrok, a descendant of the legendary King. She used it as a bargaining chip with a penumbral greed, who built this tower to safeguard his treasures. This greed was killed a decade ago by members of the Watchers, but his obelisk was never ransacked.

Combat. As the characters enter the room, the altar will summon two **penumbral pains** ready to attack. They were bound to the altar by the builder of the obelisk to forever guard the treasures within.

Traps. The location is protected by two mystical traps.

Magic Dart Trap (Deadly)

Trigger: This trap activates when a creature enters the corridor *(except servants of the Ungods)*.

Effect: Upon activation, eight small holes open in the wall and start firing energy darts at the intruders. The trap continues to fire its darts as long as there is a non-shadow creature inside the corridor. The trap acts at the end of each round.

Perception: Noticing the trap requires a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.

A spell or other effect that can sense the presence of magic, such as *detect magic*, reveals an aura of evocation magic emanating from the hallway.

Attack: The trap fires one energy bolt on each creature within the corridor (except on servants of the Ungods). The trap makes a ranged spell attack with a +6 attack bonus, and deals 2d10 force damage on a hit.

Countermeasures:

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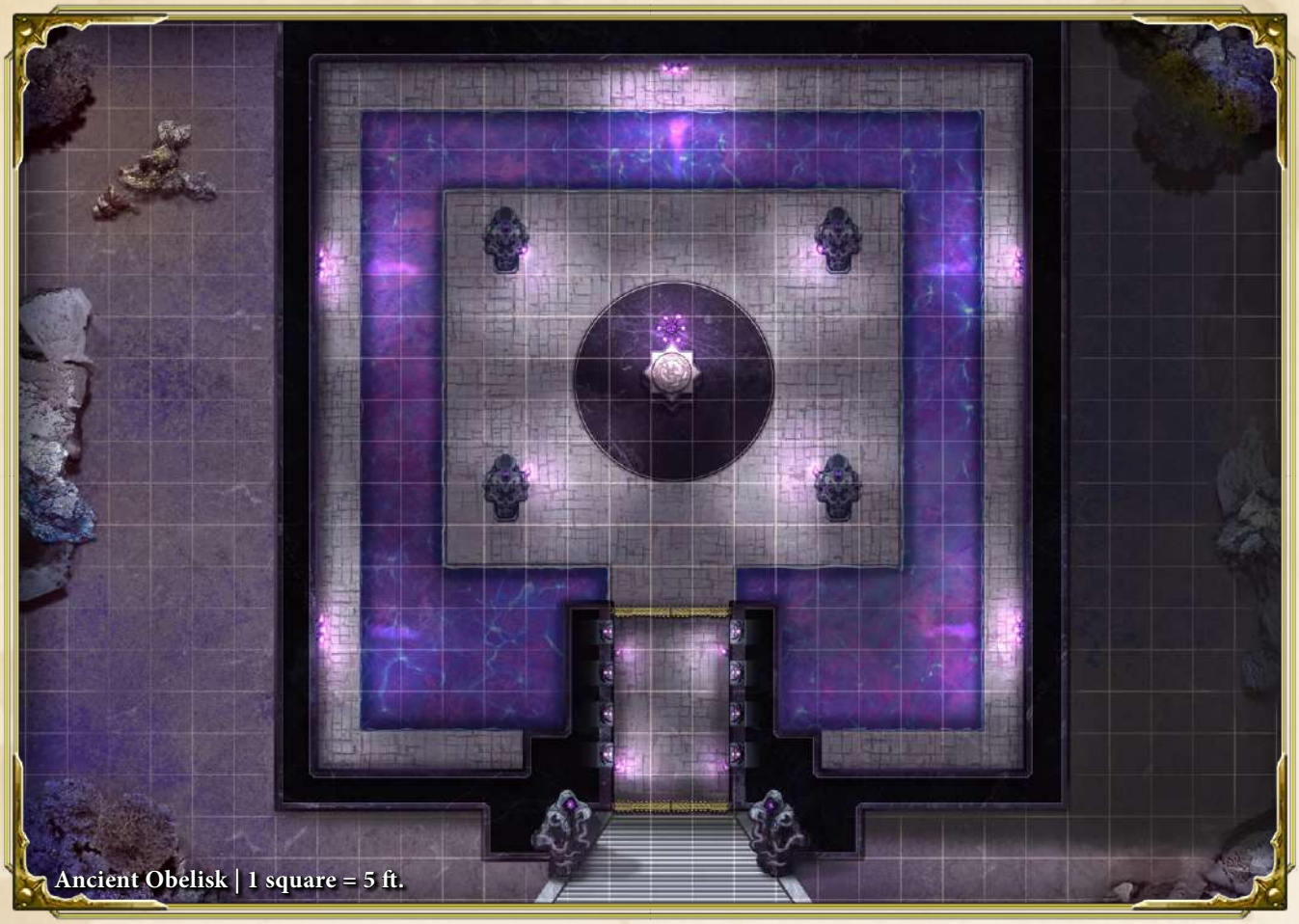

Ancient Obelisk | 1 square = 5 ft.

It is impossible to disarm the trap from within the hallway.

- The dart exit points can be blocked temporarily by inserting small scraps of metal or crushed coins, halting the darts for 5 rounds.
- A *dispel magic* cast within the hallway will suppress the dart firing for 10 rounds. After that, the trap reactivates and functions normally.

Necrotic Trap (Deadly)

Trigger: The trap is triggered when a creature enters the altar's area *(except for servants of the Ungods)*, causing the altar to charge itself with penumbral energy and begin discharging it across its area.

Effect: A creature that enters or starts its turn in the altar area takes 1d6 points of necrotic damage and must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, becoming paralyzed until the start of its next turn on a failed save.

A humanoid creature that dies from necrotic damage dealt by the altar returns as a wraith, bound to protect the obelisk in the next round.

Perception: Detecting the trap requires a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.

A spell or other effect that can sense the presence of magic, such as *detect magic*, reveals an aura of necromancy magic emanating from the altar.

Countermeasures:

- On the back wall of the obelisk is a set of arcane sigils that can be used to temporarily disarm the trap for 24 hours. Disarming it requires a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

Treasures. The characters can find the treasures left by the penumbral greed here: 12 pp, 712 gp, 1,421 sp, 7,523 cp, the blink dog statue, a *+1 short bow*, a *scroll of locate object*, a *robe of useful items*, and a *wind fan*.

Blink Dog Statue

Wondrous Item, Very Rare

Within 30 feet of the statue, creatures glow with a faint light, rendering all *invisibility* spells impossible. It also suppresses all illusions (including all spells of the illusion school) and imposes disadvantage on any stealth checks. Creatures that are hiding and enter the area must immediately reroll their checks with disadvantage. Covering the statue does not hinder its effects.

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Willie will offer a *periapt of penumbral resistance* in exchange for the *blink dog statue*.

Periapt of Penumbral Shielding
Wondrous item, very rare

While wearing this amulet, you are exempt from making saving throws to resist gaining exhaustion levels due to the Penumbral Plane's surface.

The periapt comes with a single charge. Activating it establishes a temporary 20-foot radius zone that acts as a sanctuary against penumbral influences for 10 hours. This zone permits creatures within to take a long rest.

The periapt's charge can be replenished by exposing it to the sunlight of the material plane for at least 8 hours. The charge cannot be restored while inside the Penumbral Plane.

11- Maelstrom of Earth

This enigmatic geographical anomaly is visible from afar. You could have mistaken it for a crater if the weird spiraling shape of the earth weren't so evident. It's as if the ground were liquefied and transformed into a whirlpool, only to solidify once more, forming the shape of a colossal vortex etched into the terrain.

No one is sure what caused the Maelstrom of Earth, but some believe that Emperor Baleroth was the one who caused such a massive distortion in the distant past as he worked in secret to amplify his mystical powers.

The cultists have used the lingering energies of this place to open a penumbral rift that links a concealed cave inside the Maelstrom of Earth to a secret chamber in the sewers of the Imperial Capital. This passage is what the mercenaries used to enter the capital.

To reach the bottom, the characters can walk the entire spiral, or use some heavy chains connecting the different steps of the descent, a descent of roughly 50 feet. The characters may also decide to use flying or other means to avoid falling damage to traverse to the center more quickly.

Basothar Ophis. If Basothar has not been found at the beginning of the chapter, he will be watching the Shadow Wing on the edge of the whirlpool. When he sees the group, he will approach to understand their intentions. If the PCs establish a good relationship, Basothar will ask for help to deal with the cultists in the location, as he believes they are plotting something.

The Cultists. Tenebrizon commanded a group of cultists to protect the rift and eliminate anyone trying to pass through. This is a final challenge to the adventurers he is tailing, to further nourish their souls with struggle and success before he can crush it all.

During their descent, two groups of cultists will try to intercept the characters.

Combat. The first group is composed of two **shadow mages**. They have *fly* (1/Day) spells prepared instead of *major image* (1/Day).

Their strategy will be to spread out and use their magic to attack the weakest members of the group and use *fireball* if the characters stay grouped up. They will use *fly* to their advantage either to follow the characters if they try to avoid confrontation, or to keep themselves safe from melee combatants.

Tenebrizon's Revelation. At the beginning of the first combat against the cultists, if the possessed NPC has managed to accompany the characters up to this point *(which is probable, as Tenebrizon will strive for this moment)*, Tenebrizon will finally reveal his possession. Each different character has a unique reveal, providing unique situations. See the ***"Possessed by Tenebrizon"*** entry for the specific NPC he is possessing in the NPCs section at the end of this chapter.

Almost at the end of the descent, the characters will find the second group of cultists. It is composed of one **master of pain** and seven **Shadow Wing initiates.**

If they see the characters trying to reach the center to avoid them, they will descend the chains and confront them at the bottom, at the entrance of the cavern.

This group is prepared to die; they believe they will be graced by becoming powerful emoguns if they do the bidding of their master. They will try their best to kill any character, disregarding their own safety, believing that by doing so, they will be granted a boon for the sacrifice made.

The Cavern. At the bottom of this location, the characters will find a small cavern entrance, and inside, the rift. Entering it will finally lead to the end of this chapter and their penumbral exploration.

Chapter Ending

Once the PCs traverse the rift located at the bottom of the Maelstrom of Earth, they will be transported to the Imperial Capital. The rift leads to the sewers surrounding the imperial arena and is presently unguarded by additional members of the Shadow Wing, as they believed the number of cultists is enough to fend off any intrusion.

Upon emerging in the city, the PCs will encounter a peaceful town, utterly unsuspecting that a penumbral rift lurks in its sewers, and meet some **Ironhand soldiers**, who will promptly inquire why they are emerging from the sewers and inform them that visitors are supposed to be lodged and that the sewers are not suitable for them. But they will let them go without further questioning.

If the PCs reveal the presence of the penumbral rift in the sewers, they will see the astonishing efficiency of the Ironhand army. One soldier immediately checks and guards the rift, while another rushes to inform their superior, who, in less than half an hour, will isolate the rift site. In about an hour, a group of Imperial mages will arrive to begin the procedures to prevent creatures from crossing it.

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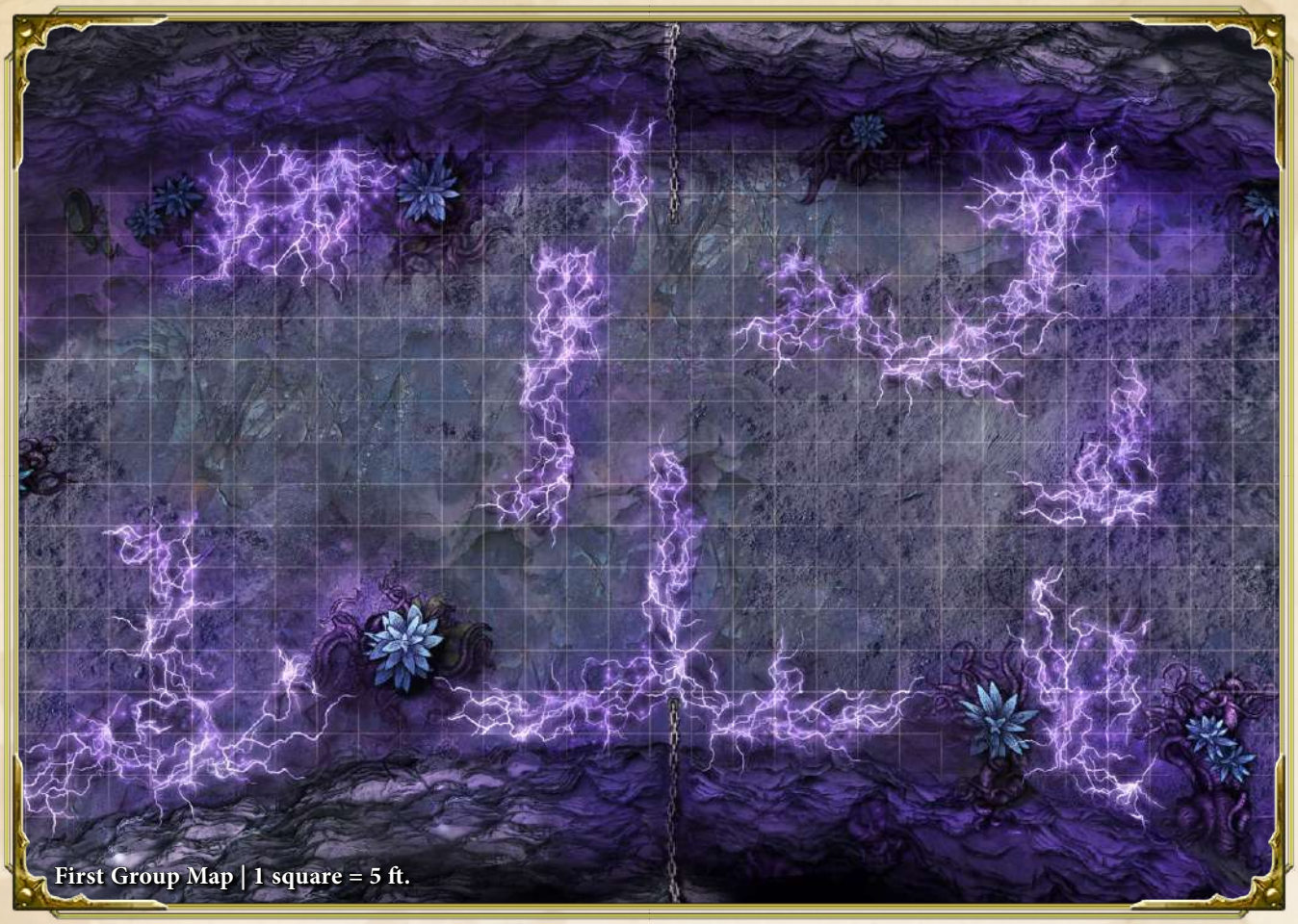
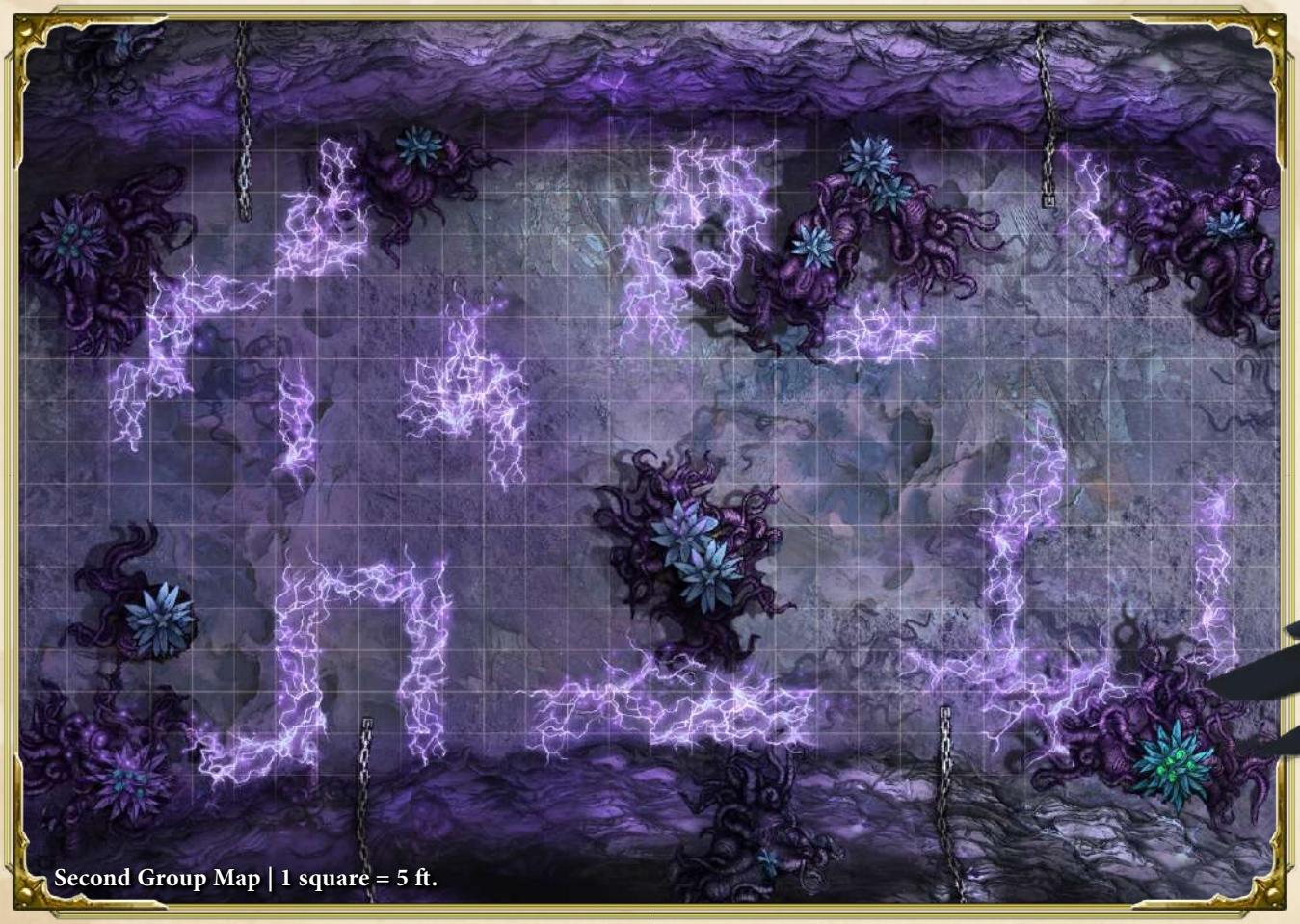


First Group Map | 1 square = 5 ft.



Second Group Map | 1 square = 5 ft.

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The Ironhand officer will ask for the characters' documents and, upon finding they have none, will decide to reward them with a temporary passport and visa, granting full mobility to the PCs within the capital. This is a reward for deciding to report the rift, even knowing they could end up in prison for entering the Empire without a proper permit. In the officer's opinion, no bandit would risk their skin to report a rift, so the characters must be good people who will not cause problems. Secretly, he will do that to keep for himself the hefty gold reward for finding a rift (500 gp).

The NPCs

Ambrose, the Veiled Harbinger

Key Concept. A talking penumbral crow that was once a sorcerer. He is on a quest to find a Purple Witch who cursed him. He possesses great knowledge on the valley and can help guide the party.

Description. Ambrose (CG raven, with immunities to necrotic and psychic damage and regeneration 10 that no damage can stop, making him virtually immortal. He also has the skills and proficiencies of a mage, but not the spells) is a spectral raven, his feathers resembling ethereal shadows. An aura of blurred motion surrounds him, giving the impression of a crow-shaped form. He has no access to his magic while imprisoned in this form.

History. As an elf sorcerer, Ambrose fell victim to an ambush orchestrated by a seductive Purple Witch, seeking to lure his sister, Adelle, into her apprenticeship. The witch wanted to turn Ambrose into a harmless animal and use him as a hostage to corrupt his sister, but Ambrose's potent magical lineage caused a mishap on the spell, fusing his essence with a spark of the energies of the Penumbral Plane.

Cleverly escaping from his captivity, Ambrose attempted to warn his sister, only to discover she had already departed for the Penumbra as the witch's apprentice. Adelle had embraced the pact in hopes of finding her missing brother. Yet, even with her newfound powers, locating him proved impossible. Manipulated by the old witch, Adelle embarked on a perilous journey to attain further strength, believing it would reunite her with her lost sibling.

For the past century, Ambrose has traversed the Penumbra, relentlessly seeking his sister. Recently, he learned of a secluded coven of Purple Witches within the Valley of the Eyes, sparking his quest for information to ascertain whether Adelle is among them.

Personality and Objectives. Despite his avian form, Ambrose maintains a kind-hearted nature, becoming mischievous over time, particularly after mastering the art of mimicking voices. Initially reserved, he gradually loosens up, employing known phrases and voices to entertain himself, distract enemies, or play pranks.

Determined to find his sister, Ambrose willingly accompanies the PCs if they agree to investigate the presence of the purple witches in the region. He implores them to spare Adelle if they encounter her, but eliminate any other witches, as they may hinder his rescue efforts.

If possessed by Tenebrizon. Ambrose already has a huge amount of torment in his life with the failure to save his sister, and his bird form causes Tenebrizon to look down on him. His current situation also makes his existence unique, making Tenebrizon unable to possess him.

Note: The unforeseen magical error that turned Ambrose into a raven was so powerful that only a wish spell, cast inside the Penumbral Plane can turn him back into an elf. So far he had not found anyone who could help him with that.

Adelle. Ambrose's sister is not in the Valley. She betrayed the Purple Witches, joining Sara's rebellion during the Kemet Invasion, and is now hiding among the teachers in the Avelum Magic Tower. This information is not critical to the adventure but may prove useful if the characters wish to assist Ambrose. Sara will not disclose this secret readily, as the Purple Witches hunt all traitors.

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Basothar Ophis, The Rebel Cultist

Key Concept. A former Shadow Wing cultist who rebelled after having a vision of betrayal and the real destructive future planned by the Ungods for Tanares.

Description. Basothar Ophis (CN human **master of pain**, with Survival +5) is a middle-aged man clad in tattered garments beneath an aged cloak. Although he is not particularly talkative, his expressive eyes reveal a depth of emotion.

History. Born into a humble peasant family, Basothar was drawn away from his home by a hermit who offered him a purpose-driven life. He eventually joined the Shadow Wing cult, dedicating many years to performing various tasks and participating in bizarre rituals in worship of the Ungods, aiming to ascend within the cult's hierarchy. During the war against the Kemets, Basothar and other cult members were forced into exile, biding their time for a more opportune moment to act.

It was during this period that Basothar participated in a divination ritual, granting him unique visions. He glimpsed an infinite struggle between the Gods and Ungods, witnessing one of the Ungods shatter and obliterate Tanares, an event that should have heralded glory for the Shadow Wing. However, this vision failed to bring solace to Basothar. Instead, he was captivated by Tamera's perfection. He saw the Ungods not as rewarding their servants, but rather using them as fodder to invade the next world. In his vision, he met his end by a scimitar wielded by an elephant man from that place.

Days of shock and catatonia followed the vision, until Basothar awakened to the realization that the perfection he had seen was actually Tanares itself. He renounced the Shadow Wing and resolved to use his acquired knowledge against them. Under cover of darkness, he eliminated his fellow cult members and embarked on a quest to dismantle the Cult of Shadow Wing.

Alongside his epiphany, the visions bestowed upon him a curse. Each time Basothar gazes upon the stars or anything directly reminiscent of his visions, he is overcome by panic. To avoid this, he has chosen to reside permanently in the Penumbral Plane, where the celestial objects of his fear remain unseen.

Strangely, his mystical powers are intact, and he is still immune to the effects of the Penumbral Plane, as are his fellow cultists, which he uses to fool them into thinking he is still part of their group.

Personality and Objectives. Basothar suffers from astrophobia, an affliction acquired during the ritualistic vision. Unable to gaze upon the sky, he considers it a curse befitting his past transgressions and seeks solace in the Penumbra, shielded from the starlit reminders. Years of loneliness and isolation have rendered him a man of few words, highly suspicious of others.

Basothar's life goal is to combat the Shadow Wing, and he currently focuses on eradicating their presence in the valley. If questioned about the cult, he openly acknowledges his former allegiance and the repugnance he now feels toward them. He willingly provides information that may assist characters in eliminating cult members, viewing it as a way to rectify his past actions.

If possessed by Tenebrizon. Basothar will usually accompany the PCs, constantly warning them about the dangers posed by the Shadow Wing. When discussing his past sect, he reverently emphasizes the formidable might of the Ungods while also expressing his deep-seated hatred and contempt for his former masters.

When the characters finally arrive at the first combat in the Earth Whirlpool, Basothar will approach a wall concealing a buried **penumbral pain**. Upon touching the wall, a chain of shadows binds Basothar's soul to the creature, leaving him connected to one of the enemies. Tenebrizon revels in the moment with a sinister laugh, abandoning the dominated cultist to his fate.

Basothar will be incapacitated by nausea while bound to the creature, and any damage done to one of them will also be dealt to the other. Killing either Basothar or the **penumbral pain** will cause the death of them both.

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At the end of each of Basothar's turns, all creatures within 30 feet of him will take 1d6 necrotic damage, including himself. Basothar will quickly come to the realization that the only way he can be free from the situation is with his death. Surprisingly, he accepts this eventuality calmly, as he prefers death over eternal enslavement to the Ungods.

If the characters have the *emotion draining dagger* (possibly acquired in Chapter 2), it can be used to destroy the chains. The only other method to save Basothar is with a break enchantment spell or a similarly powerful effect. If he is saved, he will become an ally of the characters in the Penumbral Plane, but he is unwilling to cross to Tanares because of his phobia.

Edgar, the Undying Gravedigger

Key Concept. Edgar (CG undead **wight**) dedicates himself to tending to the tombs of his fallen companions and lost travelers who meet their demise within the treacherous Penumbra.

Description. Tall and gaunt, Edgar's pale complexion and tattered old-fashioned suit, adorned with a hole-ridden top hat, reveal the absence of life in his body. His piercing black eyes speak of the undead existence he now embraces.

History. Born in a small kingdom during the beginning of the Imperial age, Edgar and his youthful comrades embarked on adventures, aspiring to become heroes of Tanares. There were four of them: Edgar the fighter, Jammyle the austere and righteous cleric of Tamera, Gutav the charlatan, but a good-hearted wizard, and Bavarov the meticulous and serious rogue with an obsession for cleanliness. However, their initial foray led them into the perilous embrace of the Penumbra. Ill-prepared and inexperienced, the group fell one by one, succumbing to the hostile environment. Edgar, the last to fall, let out a final cry of desperation before descending into madness.

To his own astonishment, Edgar awoke in an unearthly state, his body devoid of life yet driven by a restless energy. Realizing he had clawed his way out of the grave, he set out in search of his fallen friends, only to find their lifeless bodies consumed by the penumbral madness that had claimed them.

In a moment of revelation, Edgar conceived an audacious idea. If someone burying him and building a tomb in his honor allowed him to return from absolute death, could he bury his friends in the same way and deliver them from death? With new purpose, Edgar meticulously buried each of his companions, awaiting the day when they would be resurrected and embark on adventures together.

As time passed, Edgar encountered other lost adventurers from distant realms, ensnared within the Penumbra's grasp. Driven by benevolence, he guided these fallen souls to the cemetery, giving them a final resting place alongside his companions. Though he could only discern the identities of a select few, Edgar marked their graves with respect and reverence.

Personality and Objectives. Grim and melancholic, Edgar mourns the delayed return of his companions, forever yearning for their reawakening. When he encounters a party of adventurers, he approaches with caution, fueled by curiosity and avoiding conflict. He craves stories from the material plane, wanting to remain connected to a world he once knew, so that when his companions awaken, he can update them on the world and the adventures they can undertake together. If the party shows no hostility, Edgar gladly divulges the existence of the mausoleum within the cemetery, a passageway leading to a hall untouched by the influence of the Penumbra's surface where one can rest in safety. He conveys the knowledge that the hall can be secured from within, offering weary travelers a safe haven in which to rest and recuperate.

If Possessed by Tenebrizon. Edgar behaves amicably towards the PCs, warmly welcoming them and ensuring they lend an ear to his tales of the past and his dreams. He will try to guide the characters to the graveyard,

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citing that it is a place they can rest. While they sleep, Tenebrizon will make Edgar exhume the bodies of Edgar's friends and build a massive pyre with their remains. As the PCs conclude their rest, Tenebrizon will make Edgar set the pyre ablaze, and then set Edgar free from the possession.

Edgar, gripped by anguish at the sight of his friends' bodies burning, will leap into the inferno in an attempt to save them, ultimately meeting a tragic end himself.

After the heroes leave the place, Tenebrizon will send cultists here to prepare his final use for Edgar and his friends' souls.

During the first combat at the Maelstrom of Earth location, Tenebrizon will send forth the bound soul of Edgar and his three friends as Shadows, who will emerge from the ground, pleading with the characters to free them while they are forced to attack. They will plead with them to avenge their fate as Tenebrizon was the one who did this to them.

Graxorathrar, the Esteemed Hunt Season Leader

Key Concept. A revered leader of the gloomfolk hunting pack, Graxorathrar is chosen by her tribe for her unwavering capabilities, committed to protecting her pack at all costs.

Description. Graxorathrar (CG **gloomfolk hero**) possesses a powerful and imposing physique, a female torso fused with a purple scorpion adorned with vibrant yellow brindle stripes. Though she may appear a formidable warrior, her true strength lies in her cautiousness towards her tribe's welfare. Should the PCs earn her favor, they will gain a lifelong ally.

History. Born into the Pincer tribe, Graxorathrar exhibited extraordinary hunting prowess from a tender age, swiftly joining hunting groups. During the Kemet Invasion, her tribe sought sanctuary within a cavern nestled near a penumbral rift. However, Graxorathrar viewed the Tanarean Invaders as formidable prey, launching daring forays to hunt and vanquish these enemies.

Her prowess and triumphs led the tribe to choose her as the leader for this hunting season, a role in which she refuses to disappoint.

Personality and Objectives. Graxorathrar harbors unwavering loyalty towards her tribe, which may manifest as gruffness owing to her life of hunting. Yet beneath her rugged exterior lies a compassionate soul. She relishes joining adventurers, listening to tales of grand exploits, and sharing her own heroic narratives.

Presently, Graxorathrar is roaming the region to hunt emoguns, creatures essential for nourishing the young who will arrive in the upcoming season. Failure is not an option. Should the PCs choose to aid her cause by providing or fetching the remains of defeated emoguns for the hunting party to process into rations, she will extend her gratitude. In return, she shall provide the adventuring party with a secure haven to rest.

If possessed by Tenebrizon. She will be helpful to the characters at first, and will invite them to rest at their camp in the Dragon Tower Ruins *(location 8)*. There Tenebrizon will make Graxorathrar devise a daring plan to target an elusive prey that no member of the Pincer tribe has ever dared to hunt before – a penumbral dragon. The chosen one for this perilous mission is Maldictus, in his lair *(to the south of the valley)*. She extends an invitation to the heroes, praising their strength and suggesting that their presence will mitigate potential losses.

Unbeknownst to the rest of the tribe, this attack is, in fact, a suicide mission. The tribe will face a devastating massacre at the hands of the formidable penumbral dragon, and Tenebrizon will make Graxorathrar flee and survive alone, leaving her fellow hunters to die. After he ensures she is safe, he will end the possession,

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leaving her to carry the heavy burden of blame for the failed hunting expedition and the lives lost of her comrades.

During the first combat at the Maelstrom of Earth location, the characters will find six **gloomfolk zombies** accompanying the two **shadow mages**. The characters will be able to recognize by their clothes and weapons that they are some of the gloomfolk who welcomed them in the Draconic Tower Ruins. If they manage to find and convince Graxorathrar to come along with them, she will be paralyzed in despair while the zombies are alive and will be unable to assist in this combat. After that, she will be devastated by seeing what happened to her tribesmen.

Gloomfolk Zombie

Medium undead (gloomfolk), neutral evil

Armor Class 8
Hit Points 22 (3d8 + 9)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	6 (-2)	16 (+3)	3 (-4)	6 (-2)	5 (-3)

Saving Throws Wis +0
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8
Languages Understands the languages it knew in life, but can't speak them
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the gloomfolk zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking an additional 3 (1d4) poison damage and contracting the rotting fever disease on a failed save.

Rotting Fever: The victim develops a high fever and sweats profusely six hours after the initial infection. All Strength and Dexterity checks, attack rolls, and saving throws are made with disadvantage. After 24 hours, the affected creature must make another Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature's maximum hit points are reduced by 1d4; this reduction persists until the disease is fully cured or spells such as *greater restoration* is used. *Lesser restoration* or other disease-curing magic, or succeeding on the saving throw two days in a row, ends the disease and all its effects.

Pincer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Magnus Dalgliesh, the Shadow Investigator

Key Concept. A dedicated investigator is searching for abducted children from Heroes Rise, believed to have been taken into the Penumbra.

Description. Magnus Dalgliesh (NG half-elf, see page 138) is a serious man, perpetually smoking a cigar that he always prepares himself. He dons a green overcoat that conceals his fine attire.

History. Born into a noble family of modest means, Magnus served as a penumbral scout in the Imperial army during the Kemet Invasion. Although he officially resides in Heroes Rise, he traverses Tanares, delving into cases intertwined with Penumbra entities and Shadow Wing activities. Recently, an old acquaintance responsible for the Heroes Rise orphanage sought Magnus' aid, suspecting the presence of a penumbral creature. Upon investigation, Magnus discovered that children had vanished from the orphanage on the same night. Swiftly gathering clues and evidence of the abductors, he deduced that the children had been taken into the Penumbra by a group of Purple Witches. Utilizing the portal hidden at Heroes Rise, Magnus ventured into the Penumbra by use of magic, tracing the children's trail to the Valley of Eyes.

Personality and Objectives. Serious and reticent, Magnus may appear lost in daydreaming, but his attentiveness to minute details surpasses comprehension. Having personally witnessed the horrors wrought by the emoguns, he is resolute in preventing their recurrence and remains in a constant state of vigilance. Magnus harbors deep concern for the well-being of the abducted children, recognizing that even if their physical forms remain intact, their minds may be ravaged by the Penumbra's influence.

While he is mysterious, he is adamant against evil, refusing to partake in it or allow any action that will harm innocents in any way. Against cultists and evil beings, on the other hand, his methods are as varied as the situation requires, seeing no problem with extreme measures as he feels that they are justified by the suffering these beings cause to others.

If possessed by Tenebrizon. Magnus will fervently urge the group to unravel every mystery of the Valley, explore all its locations, and confront all its inhabitants. Yet, his true intention is to hinder and exhaust the group by subjecting them to an onslaught of maximum encounters in an environment where finding a place to rest is a rare luxury.

During the first combat at the Maelstrom of Earth location, Tenebrizon will compel Magnus to betray the characters by attacking any other allies present, targeting the most vulnerable ones first. If the characters are alone with Magnus, he will side with the cultists to attack them.

However, Magnus' morality and willpower are impressive, and unlike all other possessions by Tenebrizon, Magnus will appear to resist. Considering that Magnus is under Tenebrizon's control but is also under the effect of the confusion spell, only being able to act entirely according

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to Tenebrizon's desires on a roll of 9 or 10, and acting as described in the spell on all other rolls.

If the characters defeat the cultists and Magnus remains as an enemy, he can make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw at the end of each of his turns. If he succeeds, he will force Tenebrizon out of his body with an amazing feat of mental strength. With each failure, he will remain another turn under Tenebrizon's control, but still under the confusion effect.

Magnus Dalgliesh

Medium humanoid (half-elf), neutral good

Armor Class 16 (mithral breastplate armor)
Hit Points 71 (11d8 + 22)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +5, Dex +6, Wis +6
Damage Resistances necrotic
Skills Acrobatics +6, Insight +9, Investigation +6, Perception +6, Stealth +6, Survival +6
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Deep Speech, Elvish
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Detective's Cunning. Magnus cannot be surprised and has advantage on saving throws against Illusion or Enchantment spells.

Evasion. If Magnus is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, Magnus instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

Keen Hearing and Sight. Magnus has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or sight.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, Magnus can take the Hide action as a bonus action. Its stealth bonus is also improved to +9.

Weakness Exploiter. If Magnus moves less than 10 ft. and hits a target with a weapons attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra (2d8) damage of the same weapon type.

Spellcasting. Magnus is a 11th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). Magnus knows and can cast the following ranger spells:

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds*, *detect magic*, *goodberry*, *hunter's mark*
2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration*, *locate animals and plants*, *locate objects*
3rd level (3 slots): *nondetection*, *protect from energy*

Actions

Multiattack. Magnus makes two melee or ranged attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Handaxe. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, ranged 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Reactions

Parry. Magnus adds 4 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, Magnus must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Equipment

Mithral Breastplate, Ring of Resistance (necrotic), 1 Amulet of Planes (Penumbra only), 1 Silver Rapier, 1 hand crossbow, 40 bolts, 1 explorer's pack, 2x Handaxes

Willie Ravenwood, Relic Hunter Raider

Key Concept. An experienced adventurer mage raised and trained by the Relic Hunters, devoted to the new Republic.

Description. Willie Ravenwood (LN human **mage**, with Acrobatics +5 and new spells) is a determined and adventurous young woman, a proud and valued member of the esteemed Relic Hunters. Clad in shabby but practical attire suitable for fieldwork, Willie wears a mixture of rugged leather armor and lightweight, functional clothing, which vaguely resembles that of a wizard. This reflects her relentless pursuit of unraveling mysteries and recovering valuable resources for the Republic's cause.

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History. Tragedy struck when Willie, the daughter of noble merchants from Fisherman's Wharf, lost her parents during the devastating Kemet Invasion. Left under the care of her enigmatic and elusive uncle, Marco, a seasoned member of the Relic Hunters, Willie's childhood was filled with secrets, mysteries, and danger. Marco's constant search for artifacts led him to take her with him on his adventures, imparting his knowledge and magical training to her, transforming her into a capable field research mage.

Currently stationed at the Headquarters of the Relic Hunters in Fisherman's Wharf, she embarked on a mission to the perilous Valley of the Eyes. Dispatched to the Valley, Willie responds to a fellow member's report of an obelisk adorned with ancient inscriptions, possibly linked to the construction of a fragment of the legendary Vandanamalika. Her objective is to retrieve items of great significance that can aid the Republic in accomplishing its vital goals and bring her more renown among Relic Hunters.

During a recent fateful encounter, Willie and her comrades faced a perilous assault by the fearsome emoguns. Employing her arcane abilities, she selflessly distracted, deceived, and misled the attackers, ensuring the survival of her companions as they fled back to Tanares. Now journeying alone, Willie seeks a group of brave adventurers to aid her in overcoming the challenges that await her in the valley.

Personality and Objectives. With sharp wit and intelligence, Willie is a paragon of loyalty to her friends. Her uncle and Minister Sedura serve as her greatest heroes and sources of inspiration. Clad in resilient attire suited for the field, she cherishes her uncle's leather jacket, considering it an essential emblem of a respectable Relic Hunter.

Willie dedicates her time to researching potential sources of funding, which can fortify the Republic. She fearlessly places her life at stake, if necessary, to achieve this noble objective. In the presence of adventurers, she stands as an inspiring ally, a catalyst for dangerous quests and adventures, always urging those around her to seek new locations to explore and new knowledge to unearth.

*Willie also has the following spells in her spellbook and can replace any spell prepared with them (from Tanares Sourcebook): *locate penumbral portal, Longburrow's comfortable cottage, Longburrow's cozy campfire, Longburrow's homey hearth*.

If possessed by Tenebrizon. Willie will exhibit extreme haste, attempting to persuade the PCs to swiftly traverse the Valley, even discouraging them from taking necessary rests, all in a bid to evade potential dangers. However, his true motive is to disrupt the group's much-needed rest and wear them down further throughout the journey.

She will try to guide them to the obelisk, and upon reaching it, her recklessness will be evident, as she becomes an easy target for the traps, showing little concern for disarming them. Unbeknownst to Willie, Tenebrizon is aware of the central trap of the obelisk and aims to use it to his advantage. The villain wants Willie to die in the necrotic trap and make her soul be bound to protect it as a **wraith**, forcing the characters to destroy her soul.

If Willie survives this and arrives at the first combat at the Maelstrom of Earth location with the characters, Tenebrizon will make her take the most risky actions and act with great recklessness, being as ineffective as possible against the enemies while not clearly revealing himself. He will try to make her die or force the characters to suffer to protect her.

If she again survives both encounters, Tenebrizon will reveal himself and force her to attack the characters, using Willie's best spells to surprise them. He will try to cause the characters to kill her or finish her off himself using one of her own spells.

If the characters bring her body to the Relic Hunters, they will be able to resurrect her if they are quick enough. It will take a toll on her, and she will be glad if she did not kill anyone while dominated; if she did, she will be depressed and in great anguish from what she will perceive as her fault.

Consider awarding 2,500 XP to each PC for completing this chapter. The recommended level for ending this chapter is 7th. If your group is above or below, consider adjusting future encounters and side quests to speed up or slow down their progression.

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Chapter 5
An Imperial Passport

This short chapter will present adventure ideas in case the characters decide that venturing into the Penumbral Plane is too dangerous.

While the journey through the Penumbral Plane is the most interesting, giving the characters the freedom to forge their own path into the adventure is always more engaging.

So, here we will provide simple plot hooks and various ways you can guide the characters from the city of Heroes Rise to the Empire's Capital, where Chapter 6 will unfold.

Feel free to add more quests or combat encounters, or alternatively, skip this chapter by selecting one of the NPCs they befriended earlier to help them obtain the passports without further complications.

Using Tenebrizon in this Chapter. There are no specific NPCs that Tenebrizon will possess. Feel free to use him to enhance the narrative in accordance with the concepts established in the Introduction Chapter of this book, or save his appearance for Chapter 6 if you so prefer.

The Imperial Border

The imperial border is under the vigilant watch of the unyielding Ironhand, ready to use force against any intruders. Conversely, the bureaucratic proceedings at the border move at a sluggish pace, which might leave the characters stuck in a frustrating limbo. They must seek out someone with the right connections and influence to expedite their journey to the capital.

To discover an alternative route to the imperial capital, the characters will need to rely on the relationships they've cultivated in previous chapters. If they haven't yet forged bonds of trust or friendship with the NPCs, this is the opportune moment to do so, as many of these individuals hold the keys to different paths, securing a passport or a safe route to the imperial capital.

Running this chapter

Getting a Passport

To travel and investigate the imperial capital for the killer, the characters will need an imperial passport, which grants permission to enter and stay in the empire. To obtain this passport, characters will have to contact imperial officials, diplomats, or counterfeiters who can provide them with the necessary documents. Remind your players that, at this moment, the best way to obtain this passport is by being diplomatic and friendly; brute force, if not used in a surgical way, is often better left unused. Players can try to obtain a passport to legally enter the empire in many ways, but these four methods may yield the best results:

- If they have cultivated a good relationship with Major Lik of the Ironhand, he may ask them to do some favors in exchange for taking them on their trip back to the imperial capital inside the Turtle ship and, of course, providing documents of stay.
- If they attempt through common and bureaucratic channels, they may be interviewed by imperial officials who will likely deny them entry, given the unstable situation between the Republic and the Empire. A noble from the empire present at the embassy may witness the situation and might ask for more complex favors in exchange for assistance. If they obtain permission, the characters will use the ancient network of portals to travel to the imperial capital.
- If they approach the Republic official bodies, or Zalir, and have maintained a good relationship with Joya, Sedura's spy, she might offer forged documents allowing them to enter the Empire using the old network of portals.

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- If they have established good relations with Yama's envoys, who intend to go to the Empire soon, they can be taken as "servants". However, this requires favors in return; if fulfilled, the envoys will transport the characters on their ships to the empire.

This chapter allows the characters to explore the different ways to enter the Empire. They may instead (if they have not closed it) return and take the portal to the Penumbral Plane at any time, going to chapter 4, or decide to take one of the alternatives above.

You may also create other alternatives to obtain the documents, or to enter illegally in the Empire, such as hidden in a ship's cargo, or going with pirates. Let the character explore and see the benefits and consequences of their actions.

Entering the Empire

Allied with the Empire - Talking with Major Lik

If the characters are in good standing with Major Lik, and they ask him for a way to go to the Empire, he will make an offer to the characters.

He suspects that Lieutenant Ray Einhorn, who is currently in charge of the Empire's embassy, may be using his position for personal gain. He believes that Lieutenant Ray is hiding vast amounts of wealth obtained by corruption, and keeping them hidden in a nearby barn. He can't act here because the barn is outside of the embassy and is the Republic lands, and he wants to avoid giving the Republic an excuse to accuse the Empire of unlawful actions on its territory.

He offers the characters passports into the Empire, and they travel there in his ship if they help him find proof of Einhorn corruption, but they must follow three strict conditions.

- First, they must not create a scene or draw attention, or worse cite they were working for him.

- Two, if there are Ironhands defending the place, they must try to avoid conflict with them. If necessary to combat it's acceptable but killing them is not.
- Protect the mounts in the farm, they are irreplaceable Imperial griffins.

Extra plot hooks. If you desire to extend this plot and create extra encounters to allow the group to gather more XP, consider enhancing this path with one of the plots below at your choice or by rolling randomly on this table.

Roll	Plot Hook
1	**The Lost Griffins.** Some of the griffins end up escaping, either due to the party's actions or by accident caused by an NPC. The characters must search and find a way to recover the lost griffins that flew to the mountains.
2	**The ghost in the Barn.** The previous owner of the farm, Adam, was killed by Lieutenant Ray, who forged documents to simulate the sale of the farm at a low price, causing Adam's family to lose their only property. The ghost of Adam is seeking revenge and a way to help his family.
3	**Wererats Burglary.** A band of wererats discovered that treasures were being kept at the barn. They created an underground tunnel and have recently stolen the boxes from the underground chamber. When the characters arrive, they will see the excavated tunnel and be forced to track down the thieves and recover the documents to bring them to Lik.
4	**More Corrupts.** Once found, the documents will implicate another officer who is in the Republic, Sergeant Raven (CE **knight**). He is hiding in the manor of a merchant who was his partner in crime. Major Lik can't proceed with a search on houses in the Republic and asks for the characters' help to find the man.
5	**Lost Document.** Major Lik was secretly expecting another document to be part of the stack, one that could implicate the Empire in some assassinations inside Republic lands. He wanted that document destroyed, but now it is lost. He wants the characters to help find it as he can't go around investigating things in the Republic without arising great suspicion.
6	**Bandit Group.** A group of criminals had already set their eyes on Lieutenant Ray and where he was hiding his coins. They were planning to invade the barn and search it when one of their scouts saw the characters entering the palace. Now, the bandits are mobilizing, fearing that the characters are there to take away the valuables.

The Barn. The barn in question houses a trained griffin that will attack the characters unless they know the command to make it rest. This command can be obtained by talking to the farm keepers or by quietly observing the barn and seeing them work.

Inside the barn, a hidden door *(requiring a DC 15 Perception check to notice)* leads to an underground chamber guarded by Ironhand soldiers—a group comprising three Ironhands *(one **Ironhand soldier**, one **Ironhand brute**, and one **Ironhand arbalist**)*.

Within this secret chamber lies a trove of valuable items, including expensive furniture, fine wines, exquisite art pieces, and a box containing weapons crafted from precious Amber *(a great sword, a long sword, a short sword, and a scimitar)*. Two chests hold a collection of gems (three worth 50 gp each,

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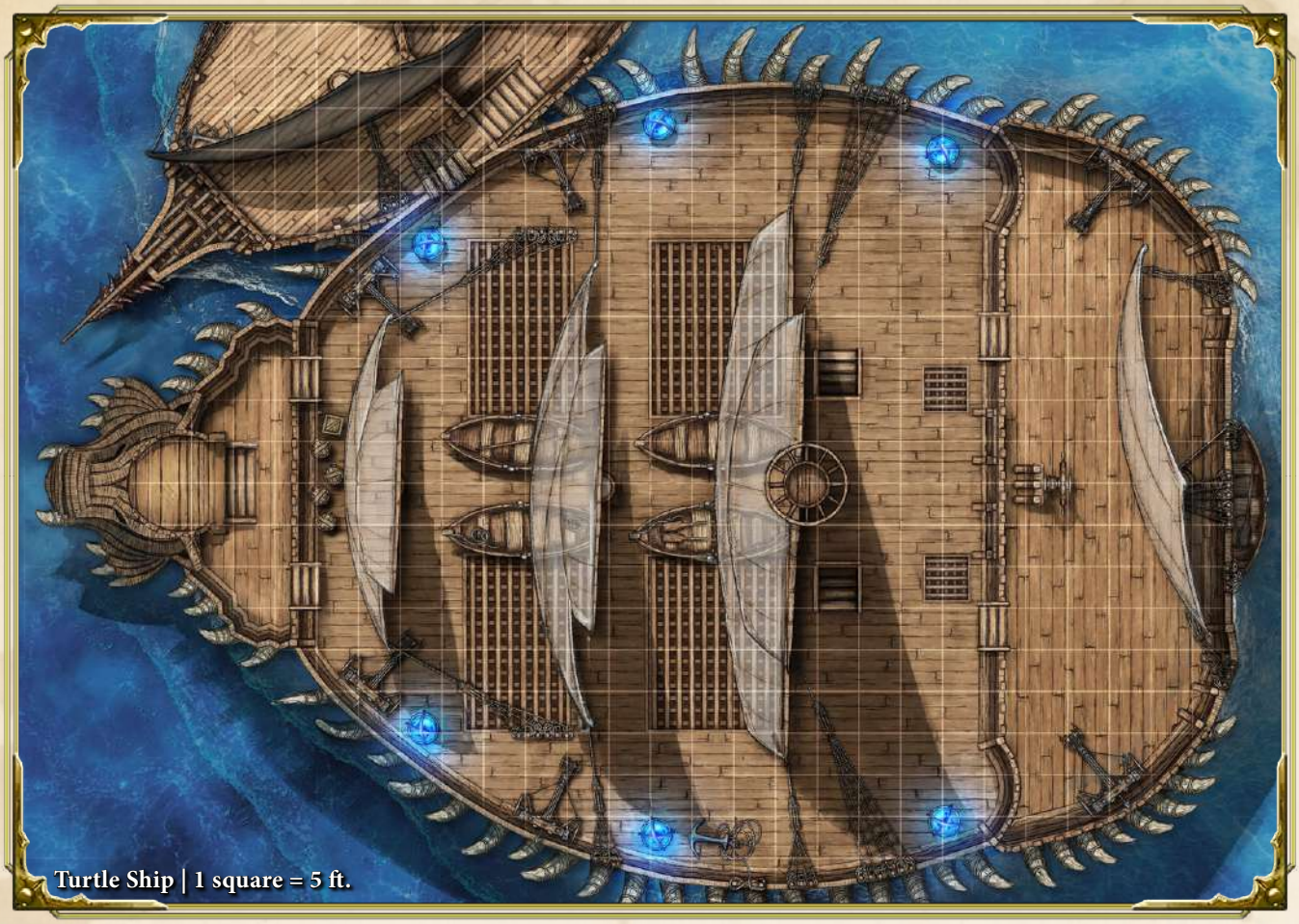

Turtle Ship | 1 square = 5 ft.

one worth 100 gp, and another worth 500 gp) and 500 gp in coins. Additionally, there are documents proving ownership of land properties in the republic, a partnership in a tavern, and incriminating letters. These documents serve as evidence of Lieutenant Ray's shady dealings.

When the heroes deliver these documents to Major Lik, he engages in a lengthy conversation with Lieutenant Ray and concludes the audit by declaring Ray guilty of acting against the wellbeing of the Empire, and executing him on the spot, which can be a shocking and brutal scene.

Upon return, Major Lik offers the heroes a journey aboard a majestic turtle ship. He assures them that their passports will be provided en route, and the ship is scheduled to set sail at the break of dawn tomorrow. The heroes must be punctual, as Major Lik warns that he will not wait for stragglers.

The Ship Trip. At dawn, the ship sets sail for the imperial capital. Major Lik makes it very clear that the journey will take six days and that the favor the heroes did covers the cost of the passports and the voyage, but not their meals onboard. However, being a generous person, he agrees to provide food as long as the heroes assist in maintaining the ship's security in case of pirate attacks. Major Lik has received intelligence that a group of Kolbjörn rebels has been attacking Empire-aligned ships along their route, and an assault against the turtle ship is highly likely. To ensure safety, he will advise the characters to stay prepared to face these rebels.

The Major's predictions then prove accurate after two days of sailing, when a group of three ships launches an attack. The Ironhand ship's mystical cannons begin to fire, and two of the ships get locked in a long-distance battle. However, the third ship successfully intercepts them, and the rebels board the turtle ship.

While the pirates are invading the ship, the Ironhands are focused on aiming the cannon combat, leaving the characters to deal with the invaders. As the six pirates (CN **bandit captains**) charge, the characters have no choice but to fend off their attack.

If the characters survive the attack they will be able to get to the Empire, and receive the documents as promised by Lik. **See the Chapter Ending section**.

The Empire Embassy. If the characters seek the embassy to obtain the necessary documentation, they'll discover a mansion situated not far from Zalir's estate, where the embassy resides amidst unusual activity. The presence of numerous Ironhand guards both inside and outside the building, alongside individuals donning imperial insignia and engaged in document perusal, hints at the embassy's current state of affairs.

Upon arrival, the characters will be greeted by **Sloane** (LN **noble**), the embassy's receptionist. When the party explains their need for documentation, Sloane regretfully informs them that the embassy is temporarily unavailable for

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such services due to an ongoing audit by Imperial Officials. However, she offers to schedule an appointment for the heroes, setting it for 30 days in the future when the embassy is expected to return to normal operations. She reassures them that after the visit, their passports will be processed within 30 days, boasting that they take pride in being among the speediest embassies in Tanares.

Before the characters could leave, a man will approach them and identify himself as **Lieutenant Ray Einhorn**. ***This only happens if the characters did not do the Major Lik investigation of the barn.***

In charge of overseeing the embassy, Lieutenant Ray finds himself under intense scrutiny. When he spots the characters within the embassy, he seizes an opportunity and invites them to a discreet meeting outside, as the embassy is swamped with investigators.

Lieutenant Ray will first check if the characters are willing to do a special task in order to get a "speed up" on their passports. He will check if the characters seem trustworthy and if they are up for some shady business. If he accepts that they may accept the deal he will offer to get them the passports they need if they help him with a problem.

He wants the characters to stand guard at a nearby barn owned by a griffon trainer for a duration of three days. Should imperial officials make an appearance at the barn during this period, the characters are to maintain a vigilant watch without interfering. However, once the officers depart the barn, their mission is to intercept them and pilfer any documents or items they carry, with a particular focus on acquiring papers. These papers must then be passed under the door of a specific house in the docks.

Should the characters consent, Lieutenant Ray will indicate the place of the farm and conclude the conversation with a stern reminder: *"Remember, I've never seen you, and you've never seen me."*

On the second day of their surveillance, a carriage bearing an imperial inspector will arrive at the barn. The inspector (N human **noble**) will spend approximately 30 minutes inside the barn before exiting with two small trunks and a box in tow. The carriage will be guarded by a squad of Ironhands, comprising three Ironhands *(one **Ironhand soldier**, one **Ironhand brute**, and one **Ironhand arbalist**)*. The carriage will then depart from the farm en route to the city, and it will be the characters' duty to intercept it.

The two chests contain expensive furniture (worth 150 gp), fine wines (worth 75 gp), exquisite art pieces (worth 400 gp), and a box containing weapons crafted from precious amber *(a great sword, a long sword, a short sword, and a scimitar)*. The box holds a collection of gems *(three worth 50 gp each, one worth 100 gp, and another worth 500 gp)*, many documents and 500 gp in coins.

If the characters bring the documents to the indicated house, on the next day Lieutenant Ray will provide them with the passports as promised. He will tell the characters that they may keep whatever else they found.

With that the characters may use a portal to officially enter the Empire. **See the Chapter Ending section**.

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Allied with the Republic - Talking with Joya, The Spy

If the characters are in good standing with Zalir, Joya, and the Republic, and they ask Zalir or Joya for a way to enter the Empire, they will be invited to a meeting at Zalir's mansion.

Joya will be with Zalir, and she will offer to make counterfeit passports and permits for the Empire for the characters. She explains that her counterfeits are almost perfect and will pass any examination, except if they are taken to be analyzed by a specialist, which will only occur if they get sent to prison or try to meddle with complex documentation, like attempting to buy land in the Empire.

The only problem she has is that she is lacking some materials, and the local merchant named Arbul who sold specific inks has not been seen since his last journey to deliver goods to a small village to the west. If the characters can investigate the issue and get the supplies, she will be able to craft the forgeries for them.

The Missing Merchant. **Arbul Fizzlestep** (CG gnome **spy**) is not a true merchant but a Republic spy who helps with acquiring unique restricted products, smuggling illegal goods across borders, and even smuggling rebels and political criminals from the Empire into the Republic.

He was going to a small village near Heroes Rise to bring a deserter, Ironhand officer **Sergeant Bernard Huswool** (N human **guard**), who asked for asylum to flee the Empire after they imprisoned and brainwashed his brother into an Ironhand soldier for speaking against the Emperor's practices against the refugees in the poorest parts of the Empire.

Sergeant Bernard entered the Republic aboard Major Lik's ship, but fled to join Arbul as they had already agreed beforehand. However, Empire spies intercepted the messages and, unbeknownst to both of them, followed Sergeant Bernard and discovered who was helping him.

An Ironhand unit attacked and captured Arbul and Bernard. They sent a message to Major Lik for further instructions but they are still awaiting orders from him on what to do, as the assassination of Vang was outside of their plans and now things are much more complex between the Empire and the Republic. With the Republic tailing all Empire people in the city, and with the lockdown that occurred, the Ironhand unit is stranded without orders.

The characters may track them, find the small hut near the village where the merchant and the sergeant are being kept prisoners, and free them. At the hut, the characters will find a unit composed of two Imperial spies *(**spy**)* and two Ironhands *(one **Ironhand soldier** and one **Ironhand brute**)*.

Dealing with them and returning to Joya with Arbul will allow her to obtain the necessary ingredients and craft the documents. With that, the characters may use a portal to "officially" enter the Empire. **See the Chapter Ending section**.

Extra plot hooks. If you desire to extend this plot and create extra encounters to allow the group to gather more XP, consider enhancing this path with one of the plots below at your choice or by rolling randomly on this table.

Roll	Plot Hook
1	**The Shadow Behind it All.** The revelation regarding Sergeant Bernard's desertion was, in fact, conveyed by members of the Cult of Shadow Wing who had infiltrated the ranks. They aim to kill Arbul and the Ironhands, and further escalate the conflict between the Empire and the Republic with fresh accusations. The cultists have plans to attack the hut, eliminate everyone inside, and then leave the scene for the villagers to discover.
2	**Yet Another Goblin Ambush.** A band of goblins has been targeting merchant wagons near the road to the village, seeking wealth and food. They have chosen not to confront the imperial soldiers, but they might not show the same restraint with the characters.
3	**The Wife.** After the characters rescue Sergeant Bernard, he will reveal that another Ironhand officer, named Sergeant Jill (NE human **knight**), was present and took his wife, who had been waiting for him in the village. He'll explain that he fled the Empire to wed her, a spy for the Republic. Jill's intention is to extract information from the spy and persuade his friend to rejoin the Empire. Bernard is desperate and will implore the characters to assist him in rescuing her.
4	**Brother's Dilemma.** Bernard's brother was assigned as one of the soldiers working under the command of the imperial spies (he is the Ironhand brute). Bernard will beg the characters not to kill his brother, urging them to find a way to restrain him in the hopes of eventually curing him. Although no known method exists to reverse the brainwashing, perhaps Zalir could assist in finding a solution?
5	**Counterespionage.** Upon arriving at the hut, the characters won't find Bernard or Arbul but will instead encounter a trap set by the Ironhands. The group will come to understand that someone within the Empire sought to test the loyalty of certain individuals by leaking false intelligence to see if it would reach the Republic. And it did. Once they return to Joya, the characters must work to rescue the spy embedded within the Empire's Turtle Ship and determine Arbul's true whereabouts.
6	**Lost Products.** Once the characters finally locate Arbul, they'll face another setback: his home has been plundered by bandits during his absence. It's likely the Imperial Spies fed the bandits this information. Arbul now requires assistance to track down these bandits, who are believed to be hiding in the mountains, to retrieve the essential ink for Joya.

Allied with Yama - Talking with Miss Kyzoko

If the characters are in good standing with Yama and Miss Kyzoko (this route should be unavailable if she or her husband Kyomoru have died), and they ask her for a way to go to the Empire, she will make an offer to the characters.

She can bring them along as servants of the Yama diplomatic corps, on their route back to Yama. She was already planning to stop at the Empire's capital city to check on things at the Yama embassy, so it will not cause her any detour.

She only asks them to help run a small errand in exchange, as she will have to prepare the documents, and she is currently worried about the whereabouts of an old friend, May Ling, who moved to Heroes Rise. She explains that May Ling is known for growing rare medicinal flowers and herbs, and she had requested a shipment of poppy seeds from Lady Kyzoko but hasn't shown up to collect them. Lady Kyzoko is worried because May Ling has never missed an appointment with

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her. She asks the characters to take the seeds, which are in a small leather bag weighing 1 lb, to May Ling and find out what's going on.

May Ling's Farm. The characters will have to leave Heroes Rise and walk for around twenty minutes to reach her farm, a small but very beautiful place filled with flowers and exotic plants of different kinds, making the place seem more like a huge and well-cared-for garden than a farm.

As they arrive, they will encounter a serious situation; two shambling mounds are causing destruction on the farm. They can see some dead workers, one vanquished shambling mound, and a few people taking refuge on top of a cellar.

The plant creatures quickly turn their attention to the characters and will begin to move in their direction to attack.

If the characters manage to kill the shambling mounds and save May Ling and the remaining workers, May Ling will invite them to her house and offer them tea. She will give a greater healing potion (uncommon) to each character, and a letter for them to bring to Lady Kyzoko.

Lady Kyzoko will greatly appreciate the characters having saved her old friend and, in addition to helping with their traveling problem, will reward the characters with a magic katana (*sun blade*).

If the characters choose not to confront the shambling mounds and only return with the information on the situation, Lady Kyzoko will still honor her part of the agreement but will hire a group of heroes from the guild to assist May Ling and deal with the creatures, deciding to leave the city only when she is sure May Ling is safe.

Extra plot hooks. If you desire to extend this plot and create extra encounters to allow the group to gather more XP, consider enhancing this path with one of the plots at your choice or by **rolling randomly on the table at the next page**.

Chapter Ending

This chapter will conclude once the characters finally find a way to enter the Empire, whether legally, illegally, or with false documents.

The characters might discover alternative routes besides the ones presented here; feel free to create additional ways they can cross into the Empire's Capital.

If the characters arrive by ship, they will be at the Capital's docks. If they arrive by portal, they will arrive at the heavily guarded portal hub in the palace ward of the city.

Consider awarding 2,500 XP to each PC for completing this chapter. The recommended level for ending this chapter is 7th. If your group is above or below, consider adjusting future encounters and side quests to speed up or slow down their progression.

Portal Traveling in Tanares

Before the Kemet Invasion, the empire maintained an extensive network of portals that covered most of the Tanares continent. Many of these portals were destroyed during the war, but a remaining grid still enables travel to many places on the continent through a few portal jumps.

Due to the current cold war, the portals that cross national barriers are sealed and are only opened when messages, confirming the need for use and the identity of those using the portal, arrive by magic on the other side. The documents are checked and the use of the portal is subject to the approval of the ambassador.

With the passports they obtained from either Joya or Lieutenant Ray, the characters gain permission to use the portal network, swiftly arriving at the capital.

When the characters manage to get into the Empire's Capital you can go to Chapter 6 to continue the adventure.

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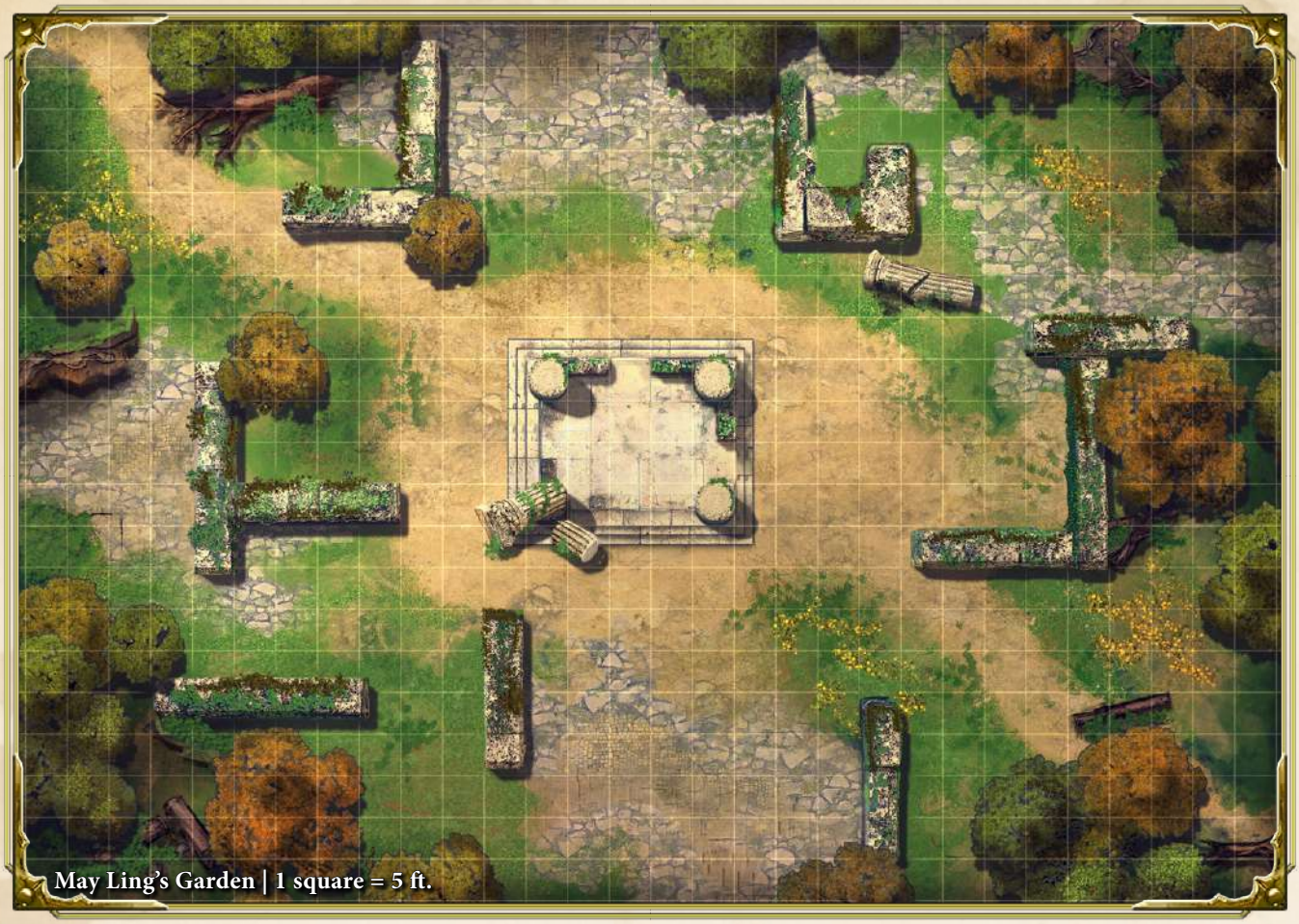

May Ling's Garden | 1 square = 5 ft.

Roll	Plot Hook
1	**Where it all began.** May Ling fears that her workers could fall victim to shambling mounds. She suspects that a wizard who recently moved to a neighboring farm is responsible and urges the characters to investigate. The wizard (CN human **mage**) has been delving into the regenerative abilities of creatures. He captured trolls and shambling mounds for his studies, but some escaped, and they are now menacing nearby farms.
2	**The Seeds of the Problem.** The seeds Kyzoko asked you to procure were not intended for mere gardening. Instead, they're essential for lifting a curse paralyzing a Treant. Another vital ingredient she seeks is the blood of a ***gorgon*** or a ***medusa***. While she has identified potential locations for these creatures, she requires brave adventurers to undertake the mission.
3	**It is Always the Cult of Shadow Wing.** A purple witch (**Purple Witch sorcerer**) has utilized her powers to inhabit the body of a ***medusa***, using it to petrify creatures and establish a grotesque garden. She has already claimed several of May Ling's workers, intending to expand her eerie collection. The witch orchestrated the shambling mounds' invasion of the farm, aiming to ensnare May Ling as the centerpiece of her petrified collection.
4	**Overtaken Marsh.** Wetlands near the farm have become infested with shambling mounds and an abnormal number of rats. May Ling is concerned that this could pose a significant threat to Heroes Rise if their population continues to grow. Unknown to most, this location conceals a small penumbral rift, through which penumbral miseries and penumbral disgusts enter Tanares. Their presence, coupled with the shambling mounds, transforms the marsh into a putrid swamp.
5	**The Broken Circle.** Among the workers rescued from May Ling's farm is an elderly individual who identifies a peculiar symbol on one of the shambling mounds. It signifies an ancient druidic clan exiled from this region long ago. In truth, these druids placed magical protections around their sacred burial grounds. Now, thieves have breached this seal, awakening the shambling mounds in the vicinity. This disturbance either needs to be neutralized or sanctified by a druid. *(If the "Where It All Began" plot is in play, the mage initially captured shambling mounds near this druidic grove, and he can point out its location.)*
6	**A Lost Gem.** Within one of the defeated Shambling Mounds, the characters discover a fist-sized, round yellow gem. This gem is sentient, crafted as a mentor and companion for young aristocrats. It entreats the characters to reunite it with its friend, recounting how they were ambushed on the road by the mounds, leading to its entrapment. However, it believes its companion managed to escape. In reality, this friend is a noblewoman from Heroes Rise. After her carriage was attacked and she lost her cherished gem—a companion of over two decades—she was abducted by local bandits demanding a ransom from her city-based family. The gem can sense her whereabouts and might be the only lead to save her before tragedy strikes.

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Chapter 6
The Imperial Capital

Following the clues the characters obtained in Chapter 3, the characters arrive at the Capital city of the Empire. Here, the Cult of Shadow Wing has a hidden fortress, and this is the last clue the characters have on the whereabouts of Gary's mercenary group.

The Capital is a huge and wealthy city, but also a place of great conspiracies and corruption, a suitable nest for the Cult to hide their actions. While Emperor Baleroth uses his full might to restrain the spread of followers of the Ungods in his domains, cultists have always found ways to infiltrate even the heavily surveilled capital of the Empire.

Empire's Restrictions on Arcane Magic

GM Note: In the Empire's capital, arcane magic use is strictly regulated. To use arcane magic within the city, an official Imperial permit is required. Additionally, special permits are necessary for crafting magic items or conducting arcane research.

If caught using arcane magic without proper authorization, penalties range from a fine of 250 to 1,000 gp, or up to 10 years of imprisonment. The severity of the punishment depends on the seriousness of the offense and the level of the spell cast.

While the Empire does not have an immediate way to detect spellcasting, many citizens are vigilant and willing to report any unauthorized magic they witness.

Acquiring a permit should be challenging, but adjust the difficulty as you see fit to make it engaging for your players.

Arrival at the City

The characters have a few different paths they may take to enter the city.

Via Penumbral Plane. The characters may have followed the mercenaries' tracks and arrived using the hidden Penumbral Rift. This means they enter the Empire illegally, but they may obtain permits if they report the rift immediately *(see Chapter 4 ending)*.

Without a permit, they must evade authorities, as they risk imprisonment if checked without proper documentation.

With Major Lik. The characters may have assisted Major Lik, a high-ranked Imperial Army Officer. If they do so, they arrive at the port with the Turtle Ship. Arriving this way means they will have proper permits and even some extra freedom in the city. Low and medium-ranking Ironhand officers are likely to assist the characters due to Major Lik's influence.

With the Yama Diplomats. They receive temporary permits as servants of the Yama diplomatic corps. They arrive via a portal and are guided to Little Yama, where the Embassy is located.

Their permits are not of a diplomatic grade, as they can only be issued to diplomatic members, but they are entering as the diplomats' employees. They may remain in the Empire for 30 days, requiring renewal with the Yama embassy and proof of working for them if they desire to stay longer. They enjoy most of the accesses common citizens can, except that they can't buy lands in the Empire and must leave before the expiration of their permits.

With False Documents. The characters may have found a way to obtain false documents of entry to the Empire, and arrive probably by a portal (they may also rent flying mounts or arrive by ship, but those options make the journey longer). In this case, they will be mostly on their own after arriving in the city. The documents allow them to stay in the capital

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with no time limit and fool any street check of documents. But if they present it to register the ownership of land, get arrested, or if higher authorities check the documents, they will be found to be falsified, which may end with accusations of espionage or worse.

GM Note: Check the relevant locations for the descriptions you'll need to introduce the players to the scene of their arrival in the city, as it can vary greatly.

Exploring the City

Positioned at the heart of the Tanarean Empire, the Imperial Capital is a monumental symbol of Emperor Baleroth's formidable reign, embodying the Empire's wealth, control, and vision for unity. It is the epicenter of authority, a harmonious blend of wealth and restrained freedoms, all under the watchful eyes of the Emperor. Upon entering the city limits, the meticulous order is palpable, each district reflecting societal hierarchy and function. The rigid regulations ensure that only descendants of homeowners reside within the walls, compelling newcomers to seek refuge in the outskirts, or pay the high prices of the inns. The Imperial Capital is a myriad of magnificent stone structures and immaculately kept gardens, with the colossal Imperial Palace and Arena of Fate etching the skyline.

The Ironhand patrols keep an omnipresent watch to preserve order. The regulations governing magic are strict, with arcane spells requiring explicit permits and any transgressions meeting with severe repercussions. The city's guardians, funded by the Empire, and the penalties for any destruction contribute to the pristine ambiance that is meticulously maintained.

The Imperial Capital is not only a hub of political and economic activity but also a melting pot of diverse factions and entities, both legal and clandestine. Many organizations in Tanares aspire to carve a niche here, from the spies of Third Eye to the nobles of the Bloodbound, all while concealing their schemes. The city's markets combine luxury and rarity with the illicit, upholding the saying, "Everything in Tanares can be found in the Empire's Capital."

The legendary Arena of Fate stands as a symbol of governance and entertainment, offering spectacle for the citizens. It is also a battleground for various factions, each sponsoring champions to uphold their interests. Despite the semblance of order, the city has its shadows: The oppressive government, many factions competing for power, and the Cult of Shadow Wing hidden in the middle of the most populated city of the continent. As adventurers delve deeper into the Capital, they uncover layers of its history, politics, and web of power and influence. Unraveling the mysteries and navigating the complexities of this city could range from hours to days or weeks.

The pacing between exploration, combat, and quests is in your hands. You can use the following content in the way that will be most interesting to immerse your group and create an engaging story.

Running this Chapter

This chapter primarily focuses on the search for the Cult of Shadow Wing's hidden Fortress and the whereabouts of Gary's mercenary band.

The characters, at this point, should already be aware that the Cult of Shadow Wing has more sinister plans. Catching the mercenaries and proving who is behind the murder of Vang has now become a secondary goal, as Tenebrizon keeps following the characters and making their lives a nightmare.

If the characters are not yet engaged against Tenebrizon or are unaware that the Cult of Shadow Wing has much darker plans, use Tenebrizon's possession to disturb the characters.

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Let him taunt and lure them. He wants them to find his lair to use the characters' souls, so he will offer pieces of information to allow them to move forward. But remember, each time he 'helps' the adventurers, he also brings suffering. He believes they should be punished for failing to find more by themselves.

GM Note: It is not possible to use divination magic to find the whereabouts of the temple. See **Chapter 7 - Temple Protections** for more information.

Summary of the Chapter

The characters can explore the fourteen districts of the Imperial Capital, its multiple locations, and meet many different NPCs. Each district features its unique description, main locations, NPCs, and quests that the characters can choose to undertake.

You are free to build these quests into intriguing adventures that allow the characters to explore more of the Capital, making them as long or as short as your group prefers.

The characters' primary goal is to locate the hidden fortress of Shadow Wing and determine the whereabouts of Gary's Mercenaries. Many different paths lead to this outcome, and you can build your own during the side quests presented in this chapter.

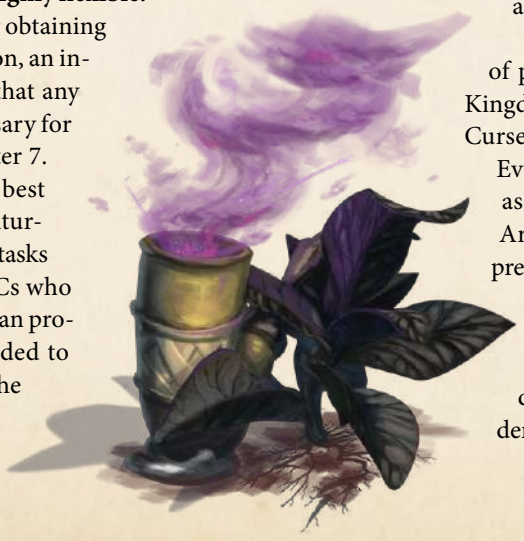
Where is the Cult of Shadow Wing Fortress? It is in the underground of an inconspicuous Inn in the Old Town district, called **Hogaw's Wind Inn.**

How can the characters find its location? The characters have many different ways of uncovering this information.

- They may track one of the many plots of the Cult in the city and finally get to their hiding place.
- They may gain favor of powerful individuals in the city and enlist their help to uncover the location.
- Check the **Random Encounters** section in this chapter for side quests that can advance the adventure, or explore the **Districts** section, which also contains unique plots. These can provide the characters with allies who can help them discover the location of the Shadow Wing's hideout.

The duration of this chapter is highly flexible. There are a few defined methods for obtaining information about the Cult's location, an intentional design choice to ensure that any quest might yield a vital clue necessary for the characters to advance to Chapter 7.

Utilize this chapter's content as it best fits your campaign. Once the adventurers have sufficiently completed their tasks in the Capital, you can turn to NPCs who have received the party's aid. They can provide the essential information needed to locate either Hogaw's Wind Inn or the concealed underwater entrance in the Rubicund River.



GM Note: The fortress of the cult is a very hard to find location, as it stood for many years hidden from the Imperial forces. At this time, the cultists are acting more boldly, incited by Tenebrizon to further create chaos to uncover his plot from the truly powerful individuals of Tanares. But even with their carelessness, finding this place should be a feat of heroism, and require a mixture of dedication, luck, and powerful allies.

You can make it more or less demanding to find based on the needs of your campaign, as the most important aspect is tailoring it for your players' enjoyment.

Tenebrizon's Possession

As in other chapters, Tenebrizon may possess various NPCs during this chapter. Given that there are multiple routes the characters can take, feel free to utilize his possession in the best way to enhance your story.

See random encounters 8-10, "**Tenebrizon's Appearance**," for the most significant way in which Tenebrizon can make his presence known in this chapter.

Tenebrizon's goal is to create as much chaos in the city as possible and lure the characters into the temple alone. There, he wants the adventurers to either prove weak and end up being captured by the cultists, or succeed and find the portal that leads them into his lair, where he can confront them himself.

If the characters are struggling to progress towards the goal of finding the Shadow Wing Temple, use Tenebrizon to do two things: first, to emphasize the urgency—as the longer they take, the more destruction Tenebrizon causes. Second, to offer them hints as Tenebrizon wants them to find the temple, but he also wants them to go alone.

The Splendor of the Imperial Capital

The Imperial Capital radiates magnificence, sheltering the seat of the Emperor Baleroth. Enclosed by arcane-infused pylons, the city symbolizes the Empire's wealthy economy, dominating political authority, and the Emperor's aspiration to conquer all Tanares.

This luminous city emerged as a beacon of power in the aftermath of the Mystical Kingdom's fall and the onset of the Malrokian Curse. Emperor Baleroth, fortified by the old Evolutionist Church, designated the city as his dominion's nucleus, incorporating Arena duels and stringent regulations to preserve harmony. The combination of prosperity and restricted freedoms characterizes the city.

Perched amidst verdant valleys and diverse woodlands, the Imperial Capital is demarcated into Upper and Lower Districts,

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epitomizing the dichotomy between opulence and endurance. The city features majestic edifices, ornately adorned stone constructions, and impeccably cultivated gardens. The Arena of Fate and Imperial Palace are the city's crown jewels.

Imperial Capital Summary

Population: Approximately 680,000.

Leadership: Under the stern rule of Emperor Baleroth, the city experiences political stability and stringent control, with the Ironhand Army maintaining order. The day-to-day bureaucracy is taken care of by the Lord Mayor Frenzuck.

Military Strength: The Ironhand Army has around 34,000 soldiers in the city, the most impressive army of Tanares.

The City

The Imperial Capital is a shining jewel and the seat of Emperor Baleroth's power. It is the largest and most vibrant city on the continent, characterized by grandeur, surveillance, and strict societal order.

History/Background

The Imperial Capital rose to prominence following the collapse of the Mystical Kingdom and the onset of the infamous Malrokian Curse. Emperor Baleroth, with the backing of the Evolutionist Church, established the city as the epicenter of his reign, introducing Arena duels and stringent controls to maintain order. Despite the societal shackles and constrained magical access, the city has witnessed a blend of prosperity and restricted liberties, with meticulous control of information and magic.

Geography/Environment

Situated amidst varied landscapes of verdant valleys, grasslands, and diverse forests, the Imperial Capital is divided into Upper and Lower Districts, reflecting the dichotomy of opulence and resilience. The city's deliberate layout and controlled expansion are marked by majestic buildings, ornately decorated stone structures, and meticulously maintained gardens. The Arena of Fate and Imperial Palace dominate the cityscape.

Population/Demographics

The city is home to a diverse populace, with residency within the walls reserved for homeowners' descendants, pushing newcomers to districts outside. The population is governed by a social structure defined by class divisions and wealth distribution, with the majority adhering to Celestianist reform. The city houses various factions, guilds, and entities—both legal and illegal—aiming to establish influence.

Economy/Industry

The Imperial Capital is a nexus of economic activity, relying heavily on international trade, service provision, and agricultural exports. The markets form a cultural melting pot, offering a spectrum of goods from luxurious products and rare magic items to more illicit trades. The wealth within the city is unevenly distributed, primarily benefiting the elite and bureaucracy.

Government/Politics

Under the absolute rule of Emperor Baleroth, the city is a testament to political stability and control, with the Ironhand Army enforcing law and order. Government corruption is prevalent, and the citizens live under constant surveillance, with a network of informants suppressing dissent. Arena combats serve as a tool for governance, entertainment, and conflict resolution, with various factions sponsoring champions to represent their interests.

Religion/Magic

The city's architecture and culture are deeply intertwined with the worship of deities Tamera and Bauron. Post-Celestianist reform, religion has distanced itself from the Emperor, yet remains central to the city's identity. Magic is heavily regulated, with arcane spells requiring specific permits and violations carrying severe penalties.

The Districts

Sloghood. This is the "best" of the poor districts in the Capital. Families here are simple and oriented to old traditions, being a region favored by the Empire, where many low servants of nobility dwell. Here, the old Evolutionist faith still has strong roots, as many continue to believe in the ancient scriptures and disagree with the Celestianist Reform.

Uptown. A district of middle-class citizens that melds social events, masked balls, and Empire surveillance in a game of intrigue, politics, and art. All that is under the subtle influence of the Third Eye, controlling all information here.

Artisansquare. Renowned for its many shops and diverse array of artisans and craftsmen, the district symbolizes the Empire's opulence and the aspirations of its middle class. Different guilds and shops compete for market control here.

Scholarnest. The intellectual core of the Capital, this district is a cauldron of both revolutionary thoughts, religious speculations, and traditional thinking. It has celestial observatories, gatherings of philosophers, and theaters that produce the finest of philosophy and artistic expression.

Dweomer. This high-class district is the cradle of magical innovation, hosting the noble aristocratic families of wizards and the Torygg Magic Tower, where the Imperial Magic Academy is situated. It is a heavily controlled space under the influence of the Imperial Wizards.

Martpart. A vibrant commercial heart, Martpart shows the great economic prosperity of the Empire. While it is an open market with all sorts of goods, it also has its share of corruption and illegalities, with merchant militias, secret auctions, and the sale of forbidden goods occurring beneath the surface, even with the heavy patrol of the Ironhand.

Arenarea. Dominated by the Bloodbound Mafia, this district holds elite gladiator schools, wealthy mansions, grand monuments celebrating the Empire's glories, the Hippodrome, and the legendary Arena of Fate. It also hosts gambling dens and the only casino in the city.

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Oldtown. The historic heart of the city, where the rich traditions of the past are preserved through its architecture. This is where most of the primary product processing in the Capital takes place. The district is home to a unique blend of long-standing businesses, great forges, and the Capital's largest slaughterhouse. It also houses the city's cemetery, managed by the Gravekeeper's Guild, as well as the Celestianist Temple of Moon Tower, dedicated to Bauron. This region is governed by a council of wealthy families with significant influence over Oldtown's economy.

Neckoffoods. This district serves as the home for farmers and agricultural landowners of the Capital. It pulsates with the vibrant energy of hardworking families, bustling vegetable markets, and aspiring combatants training to fight in the smaller Braves Arena. Some elders are more than meets the eye; retired famous adventurers now reside here. It is also a home for some rebels opposing Baleroth's government who keep a low profile living here.

Boomburbs. Marked by poverty and crime, Boomburbs is primarily inhabited by refugees and their descendants. It is a hub for illicit magical instruction, provided by elusive wizards and the Windspeaker Temple, which covertly promotes magic while offering aid to the community. Though this is the most perilous region of the city, it remains largely under the strict supervision of Ironhand patrols—except for the "Worst Area," where officers deliberately neglect their duties.

Downtown. A central district exclusive for mid-tier nobility, it is distinguished by its majestic Celestianist Cathedral and the renowned Sara Sonata Memorial Hospital. Home to elite shops with restricted access, the district is a place of social contrast, where elitist nobles clash with lesser social castes, mainly because of the Cathedral.

Palacedomain. A prestigious district showcasing grandeur and political power, the Palacedomain District is home to high-class nobility, the upper echelons of the Ironhand military, and the Imperial Palace. The stunning gardens, plazas, and grand mansions have been built to display the Empire's might to all who visit.

The Laws of the Empire

The Imperial Code

In the Imperial Capital, laws are rigid, and justice is swift. Adventurers prone to violence and pillage have short lifespans here, facing severe penalties for crimes like assault, arson, theft, and murder.

Individuals caught engaging in overt criminal actions are swiftly apprehended and arrested by the magically brainwashed Ironhand Soldiers. Charged offenders then face an Imperial Magister for judgment, with advocates potentially intervening on behalf of characters allied with influential individuals or factions. The last resort is often a trial by combat in the arenas.

Strict enforcement of laws means characters could face penalties ranging from exile and hard labor to imprisonment in Iron Hold Fortress Prison or even execution.

Crimes and Punishments in the Imperial City

Treason. Defined as any act that undermines or attempts to undermine the Emperor or the stability of the Imperial City. This includes conspiracy, espionage, and subversive speech.

Punishment: Execution or Ironhand conscription (psychosurgery).

Murder. The killing of a person without valid justification.

Punishment: Execution or Ironhand conscription (psychosurgery).

Robbery. Taking or attempting to take anything of value by force, threats, or by putting the victim in fear.

Punishment: Imprisonment for up to 10 years.

Burglary. Entering a building or occupied structure intending to commit a crime.

Punishment: Imprisonment for up to 10 years.

Assault. Intentionally causing significant bodily harm to another individual.

Punishment: Imprisonment for up to 10 years or Ironhand conscription (psychosurgery), depending on severity and circumstances.

Theft. The act of taking someone else's property without their consent, depriving them of it permanently.

Punishment: Imprisonment for up to 10 years or amputation of one hand, depending on the value of the stolen item.

Fraud or Forgery. Deception intended to result in financial or personal gain.

Punishment: Imprisonment for up to 10 years, or execution or Ironhand conscription (psychosurgery).

Smuggling. Selling, transporting, or importing illegal substances, unregistered magic items, or other unlawful goods.

Punishment: Imprisonment for up to 10 years, execution, or Ironhand conscription (psychosurgery), depending on the substance and quantity found.

Public Disorder. Any behavior that disturbs the peace or disrupts the order of the city, such as brawling in public spaces, public intoxication, or loud disturbances.

Punishment: Imprisonment for up to 5 years.

Unauthorized Use of Arcane Magic. Using arcane magic without a permit, creating magic items without authorization, or teaching magic outside of Torygg Magic Tower, among other similar violations concerning the control of magic.

Punishment: 100 gp fine or up to 10 years of imprisonment. Repeated offenses may result in Ironhand conscription (psychosurgery).

These are general guidelines that can be modified depending on the severity of the crime, prior convictions of the offender, and other specific circumstances related to each case.

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Detaining Characters

When authorities move to arrest player characters, there are two ways to handle it. Firstly, you can roleplay the encounter with the Ironhand Soldiers and Officers, allowing characters to comply or resist and possibly turning the scene into a tense combat or escape situation.

Alternatively, you can inform the players that their characters have been arrested, then describe the arrest and detainment in Iron Hold Fortress Prison, located in the Ironside District, leading up to the trial. Despite player characters lacking control over the situation, you can offer ability checks to influence the outcome, such as a Charisma (Persuasion) check to bribe an official or create enough doubt for case dismissal.

Imperial City Law Encounter. The law and the Ironhand are crucial aspects of life in the capital of the Empire, and its people are accustomed to relentless vigilance and harsh consequences for law-breaking.

You may introduce encounters with law enforcement at any point in this chapter when you deem it necessary for the characters to experience firsthand the strict rule of law. Whether they've just entered the city or have been causing a bit of trouble, facing the law can serve as a firm reminder of the powerful forces that maintain order in the city.

However, remember that this encounter isn't just about enforcing the law; it's also about showcasing the living nature of the city and its inhabitants. From the stern faces of the Ironhand soldiers to the diverse array of lawyers available for hire, the city is brimming with opportunities for roleplay and negotiation.

Often, a group of Ironhand patrols consists of one officer, usually represented as a **knight**, but higher-ranking officers may be better represented as **gladiators**. They are accompanied by a contingent of soldiers whose composition may vary. Some common formations accompanying an officer are:

Roll	Formation
1	One Soldier
2	Two Soldiers
3	One brute, two soldiers
4	One brute, three soldiers
5	One brute, three soldiers, one arbalist
6	Three Brutes, three arbalists
7	Two brutes, three soldiers, one arbalist
8	Three brutes, two soldiers, three arbalists

Read this to the players if their characters have an encounter against a law enforcement patrol.

Approaching you, a group of intimidating figures emerges from the crowd. They are Ironhand Soldiers — mind-controlled servants of Emperor Baleroth — and an Ironhand officer. They march towards you with grim determination, their cold, gray armor glimmering ominously. The officer, the most intimidating of the lot, is a black-bearded warrior wearing a tabard adorned with heraldry that showcases his noble birth. He extends his gauntleted hand and commands in a voice as solid as it is resounding, "Halt, sojourners. Produce your documents or state your place of work and dwelling."

His stern demand pierces the air like a cold winter's wind, serving as a stark reminder that amidst the intoxicating beauty and diverse wonders of the Imperial Capital, unbending rules and harsh laws form the city's granite foundation.

Negotiation. The PCs can attempt to negotiate their way out of the situation. This could involve passing a DC 15 Charisma check or presenting an official seal or symbol that the authorities recognize and respect. The DC can vary depending on the situation, and the outcome may be adjusted based on the arguments presented by the characters.

Running Away. If the PCs choose to run, they risk attracting further attention from the Ironhand soldiers and being marked as fugitives, facing arrest upon their next encounter with city law enforcement.

Arrest and Punishment. If arrested, the PCs will be taken to the Iron Hold Prison, also known as The Phantom Fortress, located a few miles from the capital. Transport is usually via a reinforced wagon, escorted by at least two officers and 3d6 soldiers.

The PCs remain there for at least three days before trial. During the trial, they must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or (Deception) checks to persuade the judge of their innocence. The DC can be adjusted based on the severity of the crime, evidence, testimonies, and other circumstances.

Characters may instead request a trial by combat against their accuser. This option is only available if there is reasonable doubt regarding their guilt and is considered a sacred right bestowed by the gods.

Lawyers and Defense Checks. The PCs can hire a lawyer to assist in their defense. The lawyer can guide them through the legal process, prepare their defense, and represent them during the trial. Here is a list of available lawyers:

Name	Species	Fee	Bonus
Alaric Steelclasp	Dwarf	100 gp	+3 bonus
Elissa Brightwhisper	Elf	150 gp	+5 bonus
Gallard Roughstone	Human	75 gp	+1 bonus
Nyx Shadowfoot	Halfling	90 gp	+2 bonus
Taranis Glitterpixie	Soulborn	120 gp	+4 bonus
Yrith Silverthread	Elf	180 gp	+6 bonus

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To determine the outcome of the defense, the GM may call for a Defense Check. This check combines the PC's Charisma check (as a measure of their persuasive ability) with the competence of their lawyer (the more expensive, the more skilled they are likely to be).

To make a Defense check, the player rolls a d20 and adds the higher of their Charisma modifier or the lawyer's bonus to the roll.

The GM sets the Difficulty Class (DC) for the Defense Check based on the severity of the crime, the quality of the evidence, and the disposition of the judge. A typical DC might range from 12 for a minor crime with weak evidence to 25 for a major crime with strong evidence.

On a successful check, the lawyer convinces the court of the PC's innocence or negotiates a lesser punishment. On a failure, the PC is found guilty and must face the consequences.

Escaping the Phantom Fortress Prison

If arrested, the PCs will be taken to the Phantom Fortress, a notoriously secure facility known for being virtually escape-proof. They will remain there for at least three days before trial. During this time, they might attempt to escape.

The Phantom Fortress

Nestled on an isolated hill a few miles from the capital, the fortress has fifty-foot-high stone walls. Serving dual purposes, this circular stronghold functions as both an impregnable military bastion and a maximum-security prison. Guards patrol the walls, providing the first line of defense and maintaining vigilant watch against external threats and potential escapes.

Beyond the walls, the architecture unfolds in a cruciform layout, dividing the interior into four courtyards. At the intersection of these wings, a towering central edifice rises even higher than the walls. This monolithic structure serves as the pillar of the fortress' dual functions.

While three wings and the two upper levels of the central tower focus on the military aspect of the fort, the lower levels and one wing are dedicated to the prison. This prison wing houses soldiers' quarters, a mess room, officer chambers, as well as a section of uniquely fortified cells. The cells in the prison wing are protected by anti-magic fields and designed to incarcerate particularly dangerous individuals.

Descending into the depths of the central tower via a mechanical elevator reveals another facet of the prison—an underground "open jail." This network of chambers offers prisoners a feeling of freedom while eliminating any hope of escape. Accessible solely through the elevator, this area is a masterpiece of psychological manipulation. The open

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jail features seven expansive rooms where inmates can arrange their living spaces, as well as a sunlit garden accessible through a narrow tunnel. This garden, protected by solid steel grates overhead and another over a small bathing river, is enchanted to alert the guards of any unusual activity.

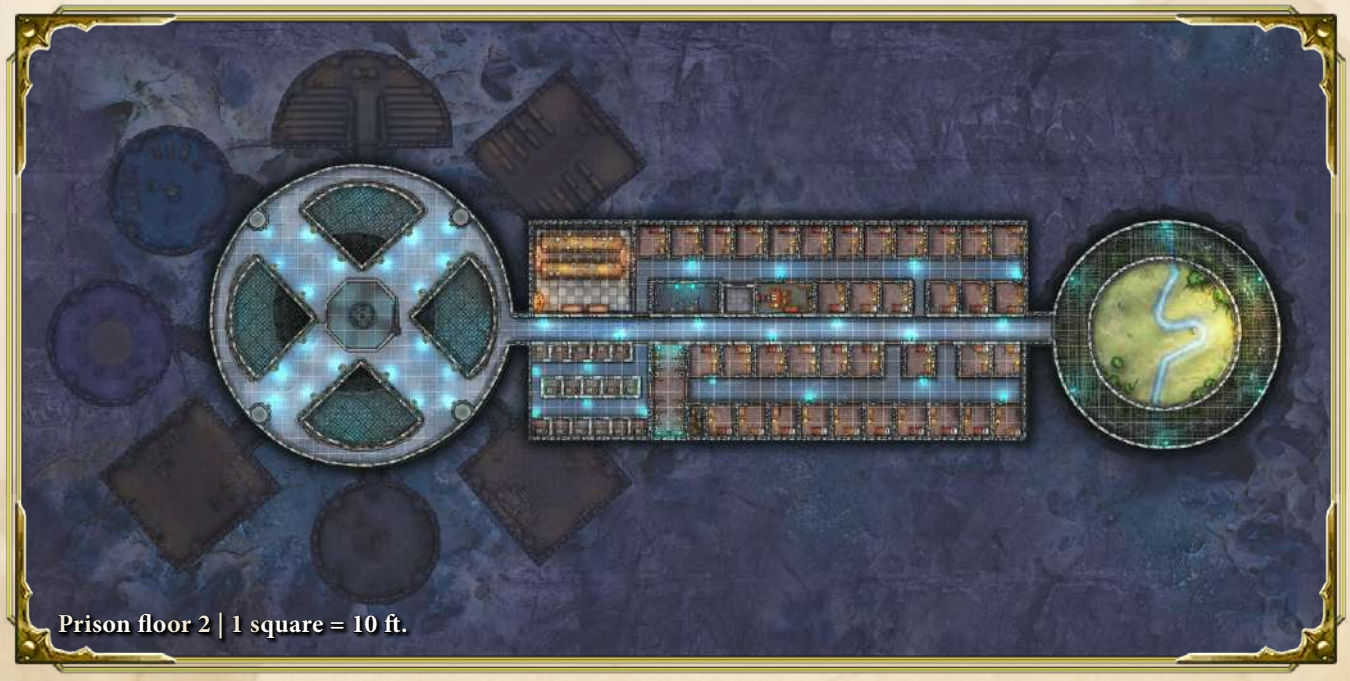
An arcane network of surveillance, comprised of scrying orbs and mirrors, silently monitors every activity, poised to alert the guards and suppress any attempt of rebellion. To further pacify prisoners, the open jail includes a library and a temple, with contents carefully curated to indoctrinate prisoners into the Empire's worldview. Tokens earned through good behavior or the provision of information can be exchanged for modest comforts, creating an illusion of choice and agency.

Yet even darker forces are at play here. Bound ghosts haunt the underground chambers, lending the fortress its name. They infiltrate the prisoners' dreams, insidiously manipulating their will to be aligned with the Empire's interests.

The Escape

The Iron Hold Prison is designed to prevent escape, but with the right skills, luck, and planning, the PCs might succeed.

Prison floor 1 | 1 square = 10 ft.



Prison floor 2 | 1 square = 10 ft.

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General Information

Guards. All groups consist of 1d4 Ironhand soldiers, led by an Ironhand Officer (human, **knight**). Usually, there are no groups in the Open Jail area; one group stays near the elevator on the level above, another near the high-security cells, and another in the corridor at the center of the prison wing. If the alarm is sounded, the entire fortress may rally to stop a jailbreak, summoning hundreds of soldiers. However, mobilizing them requires time; after an alarm is sounded, they take at least 5d4 minutes to arrive.

Surveillance. A network of scrying orbs and mystic mirrors monitors the prison area. Keen eyes and soft footsteps—a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check followed by a DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check—are essential to slip past this arcane overwatch. Disabling one requires a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check but triggers the alarms.

Scaling the Outer Walls. Climbing them requires a DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check. A DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check could reveal a pattern in the guards' patrol, offering more time to climb before being caught by the guards.

Tokens for Good Behavior. Resourceful characters may earn tokens via good behavior or subterfuge. While normally exchanged for better food, beer, or luxuries, a sufficient number of tokens may allow a prisoner in the high-security cells to be transferred to the open jail area. Acquiring these aids requires smooth talking—a DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Deception) check to sway an otherwise resolute guard.

Officer Persuasion. A charismatic PC might attempt to persuade an officer to help them, perhaps through bribery or by appealing to the guard's sympathies. This would require a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

Stealth. Once out of their cells, the PCs must avoid detection by the guards. This requires successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

High Security Area

Anti-Magic Cells. Prisoners deemed too dangerous for the open jail area are imprisoned here. Filled with runes of arcane suppression, these cells continuously nullify magical effects. It is impossible to destroy the suppression runes from the inside. Still, someone in the corridors can attempt to disable the runes by succeeding on a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check. Disabling them will instantly sound the alarm, requiring swift and decisive actions after that.

Cell Lockpicking. Using a makeshift or hidden lockpick, a PC could try to unlock their cell door. This requires a DC 18 Dexterity check with thieves' tools.

Open Jail Area

The Mechanical Elevator. To use this solitary conduit for escape, characters must cunningly trick the guards. They must fool the guards into lowering the platform for them to board it. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Deception) check might do the trick.

Sunlit Garden. A prisoner can attempt to flee by destroying the steel grates protecting the open ceiling or the small river exit leading to the sewers. A successful DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check could bend the bars enough to allow passage, albeit at the cost of sounding the alarm.

Consequences and Repercussions

Remember, escaping from prison is a serious crime. If the characters are caught, they can expect their punishments to be significantly harsher. If they manage to escape and avoid recapture until after their trial date, they will be considered fugitives and hunted by the Ironhand. Their status as fugitives may also affect their interactions with NPCs in the Capital and the entire Empire.

Random Encounters in the City

GM Note: Different from other Random Encounters in other chapters, this list of encounters is not supposed to be a series of random combats, but different situations that may become interesting plot hooks and side quests for the characters.

While the characters should be free to explore the city, it is important for them to have leads or short-term goals while they search for the primary objective in this chapter: the Shadow Wing hidden fortress.

After you let the characters see the city, and you feel the need to introduce some goal for them to have a lead on their exploration, roll on the table below and use the encounter.

Whenever you feel the characters are lost and have no other leads on how to progress, roll for another random encounter.

GM Note: It's not good to overwhelm the players with many side quests or events, but it's also not advised to let them experience being lost.

If you see that the players don't know where to go, use a random event to spice things up and maintain the flow of the game.

As in other chapters, there is no predetermined number of encounters or specific timings for when to initiate them; feel free to use the table below at your discretion for the best possible experience.

Each encounter on this table can only be rolled once. If a number was already rolled, reroll the die.

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D10 Roll	Encounter
1	Cultist Ambush (Palacedomain)
2	Ironhand Patrol (Downtown/?)
3	Third Eye Agent (Uptown/Third Eye)
4	Watchers Scout Group (Watchers/Sloghood)
5	Noble's Carriage Assault (Arenarea/Bloodbound)
6	Young Thief (Boomburbs/Rebeldes)
7	Soulborn Banker Poisoning (Artisan Square/Bank of Hajal)
8-10	Tenebrizon's Appearance

1 - Cultist Ambush

A group of Shadow Wing cultists are assigned to eliminate the characters. They are searching for them in the city and will wait for a suitable moment when there are fewer witnesses and no way for the characters to escape.

The characters can make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice that some strange people are following them.

Running the Encounter. After being found, or finding a suitable opportunity to attack, the cultists will strike to eliminate the characters.

The group includes one **master of pain**, one **shadow mage**, and three **Shadow Wing initiates**. They attack the characters, prepared to die for their cause. They look completely insane, except for the Initiates, who seem entirely emotionless.

Encounter Aftermath. The characters may obtain information from the cultists in different ways:

- **If they are able to force the cultists to talk by magic or intimidation *(very difficult)*,** they learn that the cultists were sent by Lieutenant Henry Juvelius, an Ironhand Officer working for the Cult, to kill the characters.
- **Scroll in the master of pain's pocket:** They find a letter that says *"Your next targets will be determined by one of our infiltrators. Go to the Tyreen's Verdant and wait in the northeastern bank, an officer will approach and give you further instructions."*
- **Investigating their bodies with a DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check:** It allows the PCs to find marks on the bodies of three of the cultists (the Initiates) used by the Empire to determine the region and group of Ironhand soldiers. This is strange because the individuals who attacked you displayed emotions as usual, albeit in the insane way of the Cult.

Side Quest - The Ironhand Cultists. If the characters decide to investigate the connection between the Ironhands and the Cult of Shadow Wing. In that case, they should focus on the different wards, particularly Palacedomain, where the Ironhand headquarters are located.

What happened? A Purple Witch called **Berna Shadowscale** (CE **Purple Witch sorcerer**) has been in the Capital for decades, and she assisted High Priest Seraphina Shadowblaze (local Cult of Shadow Wing Leader - See Chapter 7) in establishing the Shadow Wing hideout in the city.

Recently, Berna was contacted by Seraphina and asked to participate in a much bigger scale plan, which she accepted. Seraphina aided Berna in capturing Lieutenant Henry Juvelius of the famous House Juvelius, a young and inexperienced officer to whom no one gave too much credit.

Berna used her gift to take Lieutenant Henry's body, using its position to manipulate the Ironhands and gather information for Seraphina.

They also began an audacious plan to have Ironhand soldiers 'disappear' in service and then request replacements to serve under Henry. In reality, they are being commanded to accept being captured and serve the cult, who twist them with penumbral magic to serve their purposes.

Problems the quest brings. The characters might face Purple Witch initiates under the command of Berna, Ironhand troops that believe Henry is still himself, and all sorts of social manipulations and plots by the cunning Purple Witch.

If the characters successfully investigate it. They may end Berna Shadowscale and her plans.

She can't reveal the hideout's location; any attempt to do so, even under magical compulsion or through mind-reading, would trigger a lethal penumbral curse before she could disclose any information.

The characters may gain the trust of the Ironhand if they can show the infiltrated Purple Witch. This will prompt them to believe that a stronghold might exist if the characters tell them about it, and they will aid in their search.

2 - Ironhand Patrol

While the characters are walking in the city, they find themselves close to a group of people crowded in an alley to see a bard playing, when a group of four Ironhand Soldiers, led by two Ironhand officers—Sergeant Annela (LN **knight**) and Squire Orlind (LE **noble**)—rush in and begin detaining everyone near the alley. They check identities by touching faces and reviewing documents or any proof of residence before allowing individuals to leave.

Running the Encounter. The characters may succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check to get away without being noticed, but if any of them are seen, the Ironhands will chase them and try to stop them. If they resist it may end in more officers and soldiers being called.

Annela is looking for an illegal wizard who used magic to charm and steal from a vendor. She pursued him for a long distance, but he used magic to disappear in the crowd of this alley. She is touching the faces of all and checking documents to find the fugitive. She wields a magical lens that reveals invisible creatures, making her immediately suspicious of any such individuals on the streets.

It is easy for anyone to notice that the Ironhands are looking for some specific person. If the PCs let themselves be checked and have a proper (or false) permit, they will be quickly dismissed.

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If they have no documents, they may try to escape the situation with a DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Deception) check, as the PCs can convince Annela they are not who she is looking for.

If the characters end up being captured, check the "Imperial City Law Encounters" in this chapter (PG. 153) to see details about imprisonment and how to proceed in that scenario.

If the characters show interest in helping out. Annela quickly explains she is after an illegal wizard who used magic to steal a valuable item from a shop's owner.

She states that she has no time to spare but suggests that if you wish to learn more, you should speak to the shop owner, who is offering a bounty to recover his stolen item. The place is the Heartmountain Jewelry in the Downtown.

Side Quest - The Stolen Jewel. If the characters decide to investigate the stolen jewelry, they may go to the store to find more and begin their investigation.

What happened? A wizard named Turmalind Thrud (N **mage**) had his wife Angela Thrud, taken by the High Priest Seraphina Shadowblaze *(the local Cult of Shadow Wing Leader - See Chapter 7)*, and is being forced to work for her, collecting items for dark rituals. He is afraid that soon she will even ask him to kill people.

Whenever Turmalind refuses or fails, his wife is tortured by the cultists, which makes the wizard unable to refuse anything Seraphina asks of him. He is terrified of failing in his tasks, and he always receives a message from a crow that arrives at his window in a shabby house he is allocated in the Boomburbs.

After stealing the shop's owner, he must take it to the Oldtown region and leave it hidden inside a barrel in a specific alley. Then, Turmalind will keep being used by Seraphina to commit crimes around the city.

Turmalind's Spell List:

- Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation*
- 1st level (4 slots): *charm person, disguise self, silent image*
- 2nd level (3 slots): *misty step, spider climb, suggestion*
- 3rd level (3 slots): *haste, fireball, fly*
- 4th level (3 slots): *arcane eye, greater invisibility, dimensional door*
- 5th level (1 slot): *cone of cold, dominate person*

Problems the quest brings. Locating Turmalind within the city may present a challenge that demands thorough investigation and the skills to apprehend an elusive mage.

The characters may find cultists trying to facilitate Turmalind's job if the characters start to get in his way. His next targets are large rare gems; if he commits a second heist, Ironhand investigators may discern the pattern. You can choose a place for him to go next, roll 1d4 (see table below), or create your own.

D4 Roll	Target
1	A ring with a huge topaz of a Bloodbound leader who often plays cards in the casino (Arenarea).
2	The Azure Crown, a tiara with a rare blue gem, given by a Baron to his wife to be used in their marriage ceremony to be held at the Celestianist Church (Downtown).
3	A relic sword with a large ruby on its pommel, it is owned by a retired gladiator (Neckoffoods).
4	A golden diamond that will be auctioned in an event at the residence of an influential merchant (Martpart).

If the characters successfully investigate it. If the characters stop Turmalind's heists (and maybe their escalation to assassination attempts), besides rewards from those they have helped, they will be able to learn of Turmalind's story (if he is left alive or if they research his room).

Suppose Turmalind is captured and recognizes his failure. In that case, he will plead with the characters to either free him or assist in rescuing his wife, fearing she will be tortured and killed if he remains imprisoned.

The characters may trust Turmalind, and if they do, the mage will help their investigation to find the hideout as quickly as possible in hopes of saving his wife. If not, the mage will end up imprisoned or dead, probably sealing the fate of his wife.

3 - Third Eye Agent

A member of the Third Eye is aware that the characters are in the city investigating the Cult of Shadow Wing (they are information brokers), and they had problems with the Cult too, so they sent one of their agents to negotiate with the characters.

The agent will find and follow the PCs, waiting for an opportunity to approach them in a secluded location where they can converse privately. The characters can make a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice that they are being followed by one cloaked man.

Running the Encounter. If the agent is discovered or reaches the characters in a private location, he will show himself and declare that he wants no hostilities. If he is attacked, he will try to defuse the situation and flee if the aggression is not immediately stopped.

The agent is **Adam Whitewing** (NE human **spy**, with Dexterity 17 and advantage on all Stealth checks). He will explain that he needs to talk with the PCs because of a common goal: to deal with the Shadow Wing.

If the characters show interest in hearing more. The agent informs the characters that, recently, some of their agents have disappeared as the Cult has been expanding into the Uptown District. Adam will offer to use his network of information to help the characters if they assist him in identifying the infiltrator within their ranks and in eradicating the Shadow Wing's presence in Uptown.

Side Quest - Alliance with the Third Eye. If the characters decide to help the Third Eye, they may be invited to Uptown,

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being offered bedrooms in a small noble's mansion belonging to a "friend" of Adam. They will receive invitations to parties where Adam believes the cultists will be present, and he will give them all the information he has to help track the cultists in Uptown and lead the characters to eliminate them.

What happened? High Priest Seraphina Shadowblaze *(local Cult of Shadow Wing Leader - See Chapter 7)*, afraid that her new surge of movement could compromise the secret stronghold's location, decided to blind the keenest eyes in the city, the Third Eye.

She knows that if anyone could uncover their actions, it would be them, so she found a susceptible and greedy noble and made him an offer of power and wealth for his cooperation. Balthazar Lindouff (see page 160), once a noble, received the cult members in his home and swore loyalty to the Ungods. His bargain increased his power but turned him into a **lesser penumbral greed** with the ability to shapechange into his human form.

Now, wielding his new powers, he leads the cultists and has transformed his manor into a house of horrors. He is hunting the members of the Third Eye and manipulating the authorities and nobles to eliminate them from the city. He was promised that if he succeeded in eliminating the Third Eye in the capital, he would receive the full powers of penumbral greed, making him much more powerful and wealthy.

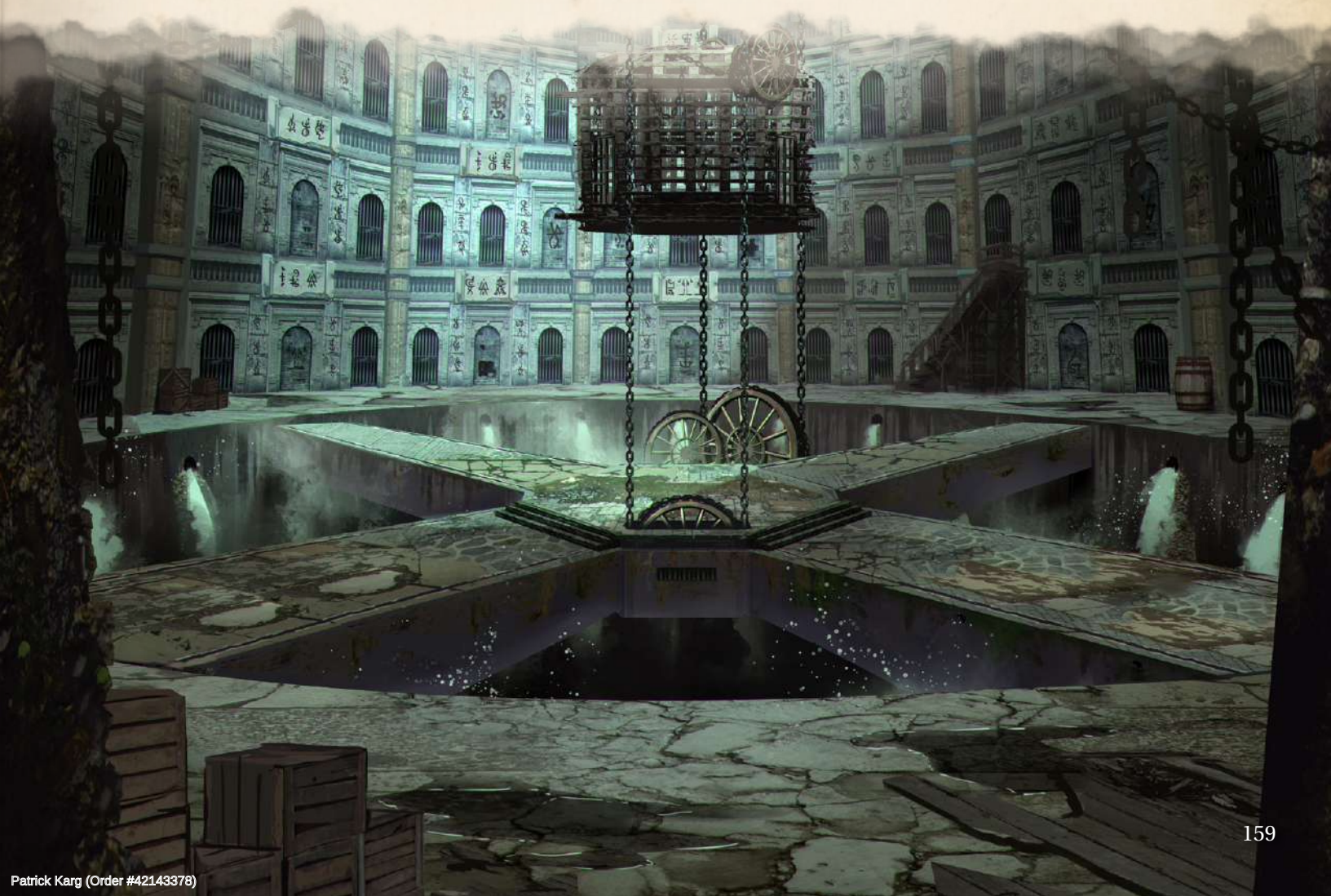
The secret leader of the local Third Eye, Oraelus of House Marcella, seeks to manipulate the characters into doing his dirty work. He is the mastermind behind Adam, but this information will never be revealed.

Problems the quest brings. The characters will have to partake in a complex investigation, going to balls and parties of the Empire's middle class and the low nobility, to try to find the ones going after the Third Eye.

Balthazar himself is a powerful threat, and he is commanding **Shadow Wing initiates**, **masters of pain**, and **shadow mages**, as well as **penumbral envies** and **pains**. Moreover, many commoners work for him, unaware of his true goals. He has many friends, both wealthy people and local influential families.

To the characters' advantage, they have the Third Eye, which has deep roots in the region, and many powerful people on their paycheck or susceptible to blackmail. In various situations, Adam may provide the characters with instructions on their destinations, objectives, or targets.

If the characters successfully help the Third Eye. The Third Eye will be able to operate freely again in the city, and they are seeking vengeance against the Cultists. Oraelus will change his efforts from protecting his family and assets to finding the cultists, using his political power to pressure the government to eliminate the cultists. He also will keep Adam in contact with the characters to provide clues that he finds on the Cultists' whereabouts.



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Balthazar Lindouff, the Lesser Penumbral Greed

Medium aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural)
Hit Points 170 (20d8 + 80)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	21 (+5)	17 (+3)	14 (+4)

Saving Throws Int +9, Wis +7
Skills Deception +6, History +9, Insight +7, Persuasion +6, Stealth +8
Damage Immunities psychic
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Common, Deep Speech, plus any three
Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Shapechange. As a bonus action, the penumbral greed can revert to its original humanoid form or turn back to its aberration form. While in its humanoid form, it cannot use its claws or covetous globes. The stats, other than appearance, remain the same in both forms.

Curse of Greed. Victims of this curse must accumulate at least 500 gp in gold, goods, or treasures every day at dusk, or their maximum hit points are reduced by 3 (1d6) points. This curse cannot be lifted by a simple *remove curse* spell. To remove it, the victim must permanently sacrifice something of great worth.

Actions

Multiattack. The penumbral greed makes two attacks with its claws and two with its Covetous Globes.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Covetous Globes. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 5) necrotic damage. Each creature struck by a globe must make a Wisdom save (DC 17) or suffer the Curse of Greed.

4 - Watchers Scout Group

The Augur has sensed a disturbance on the Penumbral Plane and a major cataclysm approaching. He sent many groups of scouts to search the Penumbral Plane and the Material Plane for clues.

One of these groups is currently in the capital, composed of one penumbral guardian and three scouting eyes. They found the unusual activity of the Cult in the city and are investigating it.

The Augur, responding to their latest report, indicated through his divinations that a specific group of individuals

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would be important in the impending cataclysm, ordering the Watchers to determine whether these individuals should be eliminated or aided.

Running the Encounter. The Watchers will investigate the characters and will only initiate contact if they are discovered or if it becomes clear that the characters are not affiliated with the Cult. The characters may need to persuade the Watchers, depending on their actions and the Watchers' findings during the investigation.

The Watchers will request a private meeting to inquire whether the characters are involved in the Cult's schemes. If the Watchers become suspicious of the characters, they will attack. If not, they will ask for the PCs to prove their intentions by eliminating a hidden enclave of Cultists in the Sloghood district.

Side Quest - The Watcher's Test. If the characters agree to the Watchers' test and undertake the task of eliminating the cultists, they will be informed by them of a hidden group of people who were converted to the faith of the Ungods in the Sloghood, and that they need to be eliminated. If they are successful, the Watchers will help them against the Cult.

What happened? Savath Hillbrand (CE **prophet of shadows**), a corrupt Evolutionist cleric who oversaw a concealed temple in the Grove of Hope, succumbed to deeper depravity. He had been richly compensated by the nobility for his efforts to counter the Celestianist conversion in Sloghood. With his conversion, as promised by the Ungods, he gained significant power and now has a mission: to convert others to his dark faith and spread madness, as he believes that now he sees the truth about reality.

As a servant of Z'ulvath, he has been slowly bringing people into a hidden gathering at his Evolutionist Temple for nightly rituals to worship the Ungods. Slowly, he is increasing his number of followers, bringing more people to madness.

Unbeknownst to him, he is being used as bait to attract the attention of the possible enemies of the Cult away from their real stronghold—a fact of which the Watchers are aware. They want to use this task to check how useful and committed the characters are to fight the Cult.

The problems the quest brings. Finding exactly who the cultists are, where they are getting together, and how they are converting people requires investigating Sloghood, but the people there are not open to talking with outsiders.

Savath Hillbrand is a powerful and insane adversary, and he turned many commoners into Shadow Wing initiates who are serving him. To protect his temple, he also used magic to summon some weaker penumbral creatures, such as **penumbral envies**, **disgusts**, and **miseries**.

If the characters successfully eliminate these cultists. The Watchers will consider the characters capable and aligned with their desire to destroy the Cultists, and can become temporary allies.

Upon gathering all the information the characters have obtained, the Watchers will return to the Penumbral Plane. They promise to come back soon with intelligence that will aid in locating the Cultist Fortress.

5 - Noble's Carriage Assault

As the characters are traveling through the city, they see a carriage speeding by, its horses pounding the cobblestones, as people scream and try to get out of the way. Behind the carriage, three horsemen can be seen attacking. One of them hits a horse pulling the carriage with a sword, and kills the animal, causing the carriage to lose control and topple over.

The characters are close to the scene of the accident, and they can see the three horsemen going in the direction of the carriage to find whoever is inside.

The carriage appears to belong to a wealthy individual and bears the crest of a noble family. The people around are running away, terrorized by such open violence, which is very rare in the streets of the capital.

Running the Encounter. The characters may choose to ignore the incident, but if they decide to intervene, they will have to confront the three men. In fact, they are a trio of lycanthropes: a wererat, a weretiger, and a werebear, all in humanoid form.

Once human knights, they were captured by the Cult and subjected to experiments involving rituals that were lost during the Celestianist reform and acquired by the Cult. Having been tortured and subjugated, they now serve the Cult, following orders to avoid further punishment.

If the characters do not intervene, the attackers will kill two women and a teenage boy inside the carriage, then mount their horses and attempt to leave the city *(ultimately, they will be captured and slain by the Ironhand).*

Side Quest - A Noble Vendetta. If the characters save the people in the carriage, they will be grateful and promise 100 pp as a reward. They will be invited to the woman's mansion in the Palacedomain district with many servants, finding that they helped a very wealthy and powerful noble family.

The characters will meet Duke George Genovia (LE human **assassin**), a seemingly pleasant elderly man with white hair and a face marked by age, his body appearing slim and frail. In reality, he is much stronger than he appears, concealing his abilities beneath a facade of frailty. He will commend the characters for saving his wife, daughter, and grandson and pay the 100 pp as promised.

The Duke will reveal to the PCs that he knows who is behind the assault: the Cult of Shadow Wing. He will disclose that they have been pressuring him and other influential nobles to stay out of their way, but his "club of gentlemen" is worried by the increase in Cult's activities. He believes the attempt against his family was a warning.

He will also request that the characters send a clear message to the Cult: they attacked the wrong person. While he takes his family away from the city for safety, he wants the characters to deal with some nobles that he knows to be involved with the Cult. He promises the PCs more rewards if they do. If they ask about the Cult's stronghold, the Duke will commit to helping find the location as soon as he gets back.

He warns that he is indifferent to the methods used. However, he insists that they must gather proof of the Cult's

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association before eliminating the nobles on his list to avoid issues with the authorities.

What happened? The Cult of Shadow Wing began to corrupt members of the nobility. While they were successful in many cases, they also crossed the Bloodbound Mafia, who retaliated by eliminating a few of the nobles who were working for the Cult.

The Cult wanted the Bloodbound to stay away and decided to send a warning to Duke George, the local leader of the Bloodbound, by killing his family members in daylight, to terrorize the other members of the Bloodbound. Duke George knows of a few nobles in the Arenarea region who are working for the Cult, and now he wants to use the characters to eliminate these individuals. They are:

- ***Lord Aric Silverveil (CE mage).*** Aric is a tall, slender man with raven-black hair and piercing blue eyes. He often wears silver adornments, hinting at his family name, and he is known for his exceptional alchemy skills. He has a secret alchemy lab beneath his mansion and is producing poisons and components for the Cult. The characters must infiltrate his home, gather evidence, and kill him.
- ***Lady Larini Thornridge (CE assassin).*** Larini is a middle-aged woman with a reputation for cruelty, especially towards her servants. She has an unmistakable scar running down her left cheek, rumored to be the result of a duel. She employs members of the Cult and gives them a cover to operate freely in the city. She hosts monthly masquerade balls, and one is due in a few days, which is a perfect opportunity to gather evidence against her.
- ***Baron Viktor Greystone (LE knight).*** Viktor is a stout man with a penchant for hunting. He owns vast lands where he and his family conduct private hunts, often using exotic and sometimes sentient creatures. They are slowly gathering a group of low nobles to join the Cult with promises of riches. The PCs must infiltrate one of his hunt gatherings with other nobles, gather evidence, and maybe survive becoming a potential prey, and eliminate the Greystone and the other nobles aligned with them. The PCs may get the help of Ariana Greystone, daughter of the Baron, who is against the depravity of her own family.

Duke George will denounce these individuals to the Ironhand and use his prestige to pressure them so the characters can rest assured that if they find any conclusive proof, the Ironhand will ignore the characters' actions against these nobles.

Problems the quest brings. While the nobles are forbidden to have personal guards, they often have Ironhand troops and mercenaries assigned to protect their residences. Each one requires a unique approach from the PCs to collect evidence and eliminate the person.

As they are nobles aligned with the Cult, they will also have assistance from cultists and might even have penumbral creatures guarding their secrets.

If the characters successfully eliminate these nobles. Duke George will reward them with 100 pp for each target eliminated.

If all three nobles are killed, the characters will be in good standing with the Bloodbound and able to request their assistance when necessary. Duke George will be away for some time to secure his family, but he promises to return soon and find information about the location of the Cultist Fortress.

6 - Young Thief

As the characters walk through the city streets, a young boy attempts to pickpocket one of them.

Running the Encounter. The character must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the attempt and prevent the theft. Other characters may also attempt to notice the pickpocket; however, they do so with disadvantage and will not be able to prevent the theft—only observe it, which would allow them to give chase.

If the characters fail to notice it, the target will lose its coin pouch or one small carried valuable item.

If they catch the boy, named Jerry (CN human **commoner**, proficient in Sleight of Hand), they will notice his desperation and ragged clothing. He pleads to be released, claiming his sister is ill and he needs to buy her medicine.

The characters may decide whether to turn him to the authorities or hear his story.

Side Quest - The Sick Rebel. The boy will tell the story of his sister, who is his only living family, how she got badly sick after an injury and now she requires expensive medicine.

If asked to go to the temple, the boy will refuse, saying that his sister told him that no cleric would help her as they are poor. If the PCs offer to help, they may convince the boy to bring them to the sick girl.

The girl is indeed in a dilapidated shed in the Boomburbs district. She will tell the characters she needs 500 gp to buy a herb sold by an unscrupulous merchant who lives in the district, as he is the only one that has the illegal herb she requires.

A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Medicine) check identifies symptoms consistent with a rare gaseous poison that causes lung necrosis.

A successful DC 14 Intelligence (History) check reveals that this poison is employed by the Ironhand to eliminate enemies entrenched in defensive positions.

The characters may decide to assist the girl by paying the gold or by confronting the merchant to acquire the illegal herb necessary to save her life.

What happened? Mirilian (CG **spy**) is a young and idealistic girl who joined a hidden rebel force that wants to fight against the oppression of Emperor Baleroth.

The rebels are a mix of people of all sorts, from good and idealistic ones, to individuals consumed by hatred against the Empire, to bandits and criminals who align with the rebels because of their shared enmity for the Imperial forces.

Mirilian took part in a plan to kill Captain Brook, the Ironhand leader, but they were discovered before their plan

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was even executed, and the Ironhand used bombs of necrosing gas to force the rebels to flee the house they were hidden in.

Mirilian was able to escape, while some rebels were killed and others were captured. She cannot seek healing at a temple, as she knows the Ironhands are looking for people with her symptoms, but the only cure is a potion that includes the original herb used to make it, which is highly controlled and illegal, except for Ironhand use.

The only merchant in possession of it is **Ablathur Sizzar** (NE **bandit captain**), a known bandit and merchant of the Boomburbs district, specializing as a moneylender and drug dealer. This middle-aged man, with pallid skin, red hair, and a well-groomed mustache, adorns himself with heavy gold chains and numerous rings. Despite his accessories, he avoids actions that might draw too much attention, paying some Ironhand officers to overlook his activities.

Ablathur demands 500 gp for the herb, though he is open to bargaining down to as low as 380 gp. He knows Mirilian is with the rebels and is trying to extort them to save her life.

The rebels, on the other side, are cautious of purchasing the herb from Ablathur, as they know the man has connections with some Ironhand officers. They are weighing their alternatives and considering letting Mirilian die, as trying to save her can expose everyone, including her.

The rebels are divided into two groups on this matter, **Roid** (NG human **champion**), an ex-Ironhand soldier, who was freed from psychosurgery, but lost all memories of his past and now fights to save others. He wishes to save Mirilian, as he feels guilty for allowing her to participate in the operation. On the other side is **Ramon Svenson** (CN human **bandit captain**, with Charisma 16, and Deception and Persuasion +5), a rough man born in the slums of the Empire who saw his father being transformed into an Ironhand soldier. With a tragic past, he is an 'urban survivor' who takes a practical view of things. He believes Mirilian was there because she desired to take part in it, and everyone shared the same risks.

Problems the quest brings. The characters may decide to help Mirilian simply by buying the herb, finding a way to get it from Ablathur, or investigating the situation and maybe searching for the rebels, which is no easy task.

If the characters successfully save Mirilian. They may earn sufficient trust from the rebels to engage in dialogue, or they could attempt to persuade Mirilian to abandon the rebels since they did not assist her (although she has nowhere else to turn).

Becoming acquainted with the rebels, the characters might ally with them and help their plots against the Empire in exchange for the help to find out more about the Cult's hideout, or the characters may decide to just keep the rebels as useful contacts, in which case they may send to the PCs all rumors that circulate in the poor areas of the city, which might eventually help them track down the Cult.

If the characters prove themselves to be reliable allies, they might even be invited to join the rebels to help dethrone Emperor Baleroth, an almost impossible task.

7 - The Soulborn Banker Poisoning

As the characters are walking through the city streets, they witness a soulborn individual dressed in formal clothing collapsing, with foam forming at his mouth. Onlookers panic; some scream for help, while others simply watch in horror. At this point, the characters may decide to help or ignore the man.

Running the Encounter. To save the man, the characters must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom (Medicine) check to stabilize him. In this case, the man can be carried to a temple and receive emergency treatment. On failure, he dies before he is able to reach the temple.

If he survives, upon regaining consciousness, he introduces himself as Velliard R. T. S. G. Greenson (LN soulborn **noble**), a bank manager at the Bank of Hajal. If questioned, he will say that he does not know what happened.

If he dies, the characters can find documents in his pocket that reveal his name and position. They must then wait for the authorities to arrive and examine the body.

Side Quest - The Blackmailed Banker. Before the characters can leave, another well-dressed soulborn man approaches them. He introduces himself as Heron J. D. D. G. Gaus (LN soulborn **spy**), an executive at the Bank of Hajal, and inquires whether the characters know anything about Velliard or witnessed anything unusual.

Heron will tell the characters that he believes the poisoning of Velliard was an attempt to silence him. He tells the characters that he believes that the Cult of Shadow Wing is behind it, and that he was investigating cases related to them.

If the characters show interest, he will tell them that he is looking for capable hands that can help dismantle a cult cell that may be trying to act against the interests of the Bank of Hajal. He is willing to pay a hefty sum for help.

What Happened? Velliard was approached by the Cult of Shadow Wing, who threatened his family and asked him to bring confidential information from the Bank.

He became their unwilling spy in the Bank of Hajal, giving them many documents and secret information in the last couple of weeks. The Cult aims to eliminate Mr. Tiwilade, the head of the Bank of Hajal and one of Tanares' most influential financiers. Their scheme involves assassinating Mr. Tiwilade and fabricating evidence to implicate the Republic, thereby escalating the conflict with the Empire. But the Bank has many **djinn** guards and numerous magical protections and securities, making an attempt on Tiwilade's life very difficult.

Problems the quest brings. To find the cultist cell that is trying to orchestrate the assassination of Tiwilade, the characters will need to investigate Velliard's life, find out more about the bank, and talk with different members of the organization.

If Velliard is alive, they might try to convince him to talk, or they might visit his house where some documents are still stored, as well as hints on the meeting points with the cultists, in a place called "Velvet Vogue."

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If the characters are able to uncover more about the cultists, they will be able to find a house where they are making their preparations to attack Tiwilade when he leaves the bank.

Alternatively, the characters might follow Tiwilade or persuade him to accept their protection, confronting the cultists during their assassination attempt. They will have the support of the djinn who protect Tiwilade, but they will have to deal with prepared cultists using summoned emoguns.

Finding the place they are using to make their plans will allow the characters to have the advantage of surprise, but they will need hard convincing if they want to bring any help from the bank guards to their attack.

If they successfully thwart the assassination attempt. Mr. Tiwilade will be grateful. He rewards them with 300 pp and begins using his immense resources to track the Cult's activities in the city. He orders his employees to screen merchant routes and track all resources that enter and leave the city. He promises the characters that he will alert them if he stumbles upon any hint of resource exchange that might point to the Cult of Shadow Wing's stronghold's location.

8 – Tenebrizon's Appearance

Tenebrizon will possess the body of an innocent commoner to seek out and converse with the characters.

His goal is to engage them in a long discussion, taunting them about their failures and using the commoner's life as leverage to compel their attention.

Example of how Tenebrizon can make attacks and leave clues: *(For these examples, it is necessary that you give access to the map of the capital to the characters, as the players will need to see the locations to make deductions.)*

On the first encounter, he can leave behind a book named "Shadow Wing", with all pages blank.

Hints: The book hits his next target, the Baleroth Library. In contrast, the name indicates that the answer to finding the hideout is in the organization's name.

1 - Location: Baleroth Library of the Capital

Scenario: Tenebrizon sets fire to all the sections related to the city's history, resulting in the demise of numerous scholars. He leaves meat impaled on spikes near the fire, accompanied by a note saying *'O'Myre, enjoy the barbecue!'*

Hints: The act of burning historical texts should subtly direct the characters towards Oldtown, the city's historical district. The mention of a "barbecue" serves as a veiled clue, suggesting that Tenebrizon's next target might be a source of meat. "O'Myre" will give the location away if the characters search the map.

2 - Location: O'Myre's Slaughterhouse

Scenario: Tenebrizon slaughters the workers and grotesquely adorns them with the faces of dead sheep, creating a gruesome scene of macabre sheep masks. A message is left behind *"My domain is the true house of horrors. I will be waiting for you there."*

Hints: The utilization of sheep heads is a cryptic pointer towards Sheep's End street. Furthermore, the bizarre and ghastly display hints at the next location being the Burlesque House of Horrors, a theater known for macabre performances.

3 - Location: Burlesque Theater of Horrors

Scenario: At the climactic end of a theatrical piece narrating a tale about the Cult of Shadow Wing, Tenebrizon destroys the stage floor. The artists plunge into a prearranged pool of boiling water below.

Hints: The timing of the carnage hints at "end", correlating with Sheep's End Street. Additionally, the presence of boiling water should allude to the subsequent target being the Imperial Thermal Springs. These are the most difficult hints.

4 - Location: Imperial Thermal Springs

Scenario: Tenebrizon encases the owner in an excessively heavy set of plated armor, complete with large metallic wings, seals the armor with molten metal, and consigns him to a watery grave in the springs. A message is left on the wall, written in blood:

"Ordinary lord drowned today,
Old wings don't fly on rust,
Galing echoes, wind's grave,
Eerie silence, words crave."

Hints: Deciphering the first letter of each world reveals a hidden message pointing to the Forge in Oldtown, the next target.

The elements of wings and wind connect to Shadow Wing and Hogaw's Wind. The wordplay and the references hint subtly at the anagram nature of Hogaw's Wind that can be rearranged into Shadow Wing.

5 - Location: Stonebreaker Forge

Scenario: Tenebrizon executes the workers and arranges them on the ground, as if sleeping, surrounded by blankets and pillows, with the word "Anagram" seared into the chest of the owner

Hints: This macabre scene unmistakably points towards an Inn, and the engraved word "Anagram " clarifies that unraveling the anagram will disclose the meaning of Hogaw's Wind as Shadow Wing, directing the characters towards the Shadow Wing Fortress.

You can create easier or more complex hints and charades for the characters to solve. Each time they prevent a Tenebrizon's attack, they may end up losing part of the clue, thus keeping the sinister game of the ancient penumbral dragon running for longer, to his enjoyment. You may create new attacks and hints, as necessary.

If they successfully solve the puzzle. The characters will uncover that the hidden location of the Shadow Wing's fortress is under the Hogaw's Wind Inn and will be able to proceed into Chapter 7 *(see Chapter Ending)*.

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He will suggest the characters stop to drink tea with him at a chosen location so they can calmly discuss their differences. This is merely a pretext to taunt and irritate the characters while maintaining his elegance and composure.

If questioned about his motives, he will declare that he is merely doing what the powerful do: exploit the weak for their gain. He will try at every turn to either mock the characters politely or show flaws in their reasoning, always using the idea that what matters is strength and intellect. The rule of nature is that the better individuals win, and the worse individuals lose. As a winner, he sees himself as merely highlighting this truth to the losers.

He will propose that the characters pledge loyalty to him and switch sides to assist in completing his plan, insisting that victory can only be achieved by accepting the scraps from the plates of their superiors.

If they accept, he will begin to send them to increasingly deadly quests until they die or betray him, at which time he will lure the PCs to eliminate them himself (or if enough time has passed, he will have finished the ritual with other souls and an Avatar of Z'ulvath will have taken Tanares, in which case the characters will be spared and rewarded for their efforts in serving their cause).

If they decline, Tenebrizon will introduce a new 'motivation' to demonstrate their weakness.

Side Quest - The Clock of Death. Tenebrizon will tell the characters that each day, he will possess someone new and cause a disaster in the city. He will only stop when the characters finally find the location of the Cult of Shadow Wing's hidden fortress in the city.

He explains that, "to make things more fair," he will deliver a small clue each day along with a disaster. He wants to see how many he will need to kill before they are able to piece together the puzzle.

Problems the quest brings. Each day, the insane Tenebrizon will possess someone and cause death somewhere in the city. With each incident, he leaves a hint about his next target and a subtle clue regarding the location of the Cult's hidden fortress.

The characters may attempt to stop his attacks; however, this proves challenging as he can assume any identity and recruit cultists and penumbral creatures to aid his schemes.

His only goal is to showcase his power, prove he is smarter than the characters, and cause as much suffering as he can on Tanares. Additionally, he desires the characters to reach the stronghold and uncover his lair. Anxious to confront them in true combat and prove his superiority, he intends to use their souls to open the way for Z'ulvath's conquest of Tanares.

Tanares Districts

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Sloghood District

Complexity: Simple

Core Concept: Misguided traditionalists are attempting to rekindle the old Evolutionist faith, but are secretly being manipulated by dark forces.

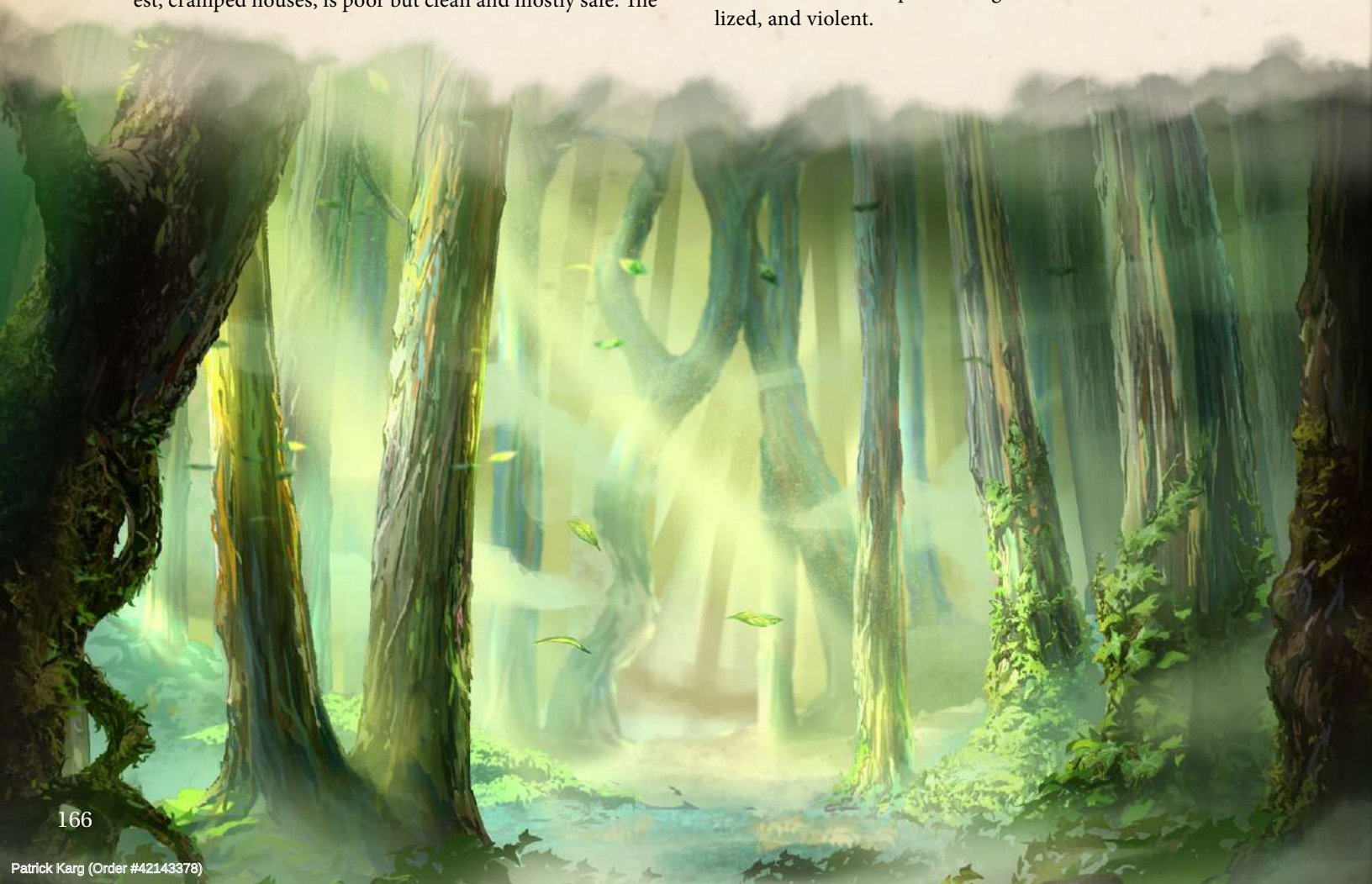
Side Quest: Assist a druid in protecting her sacred grove from dark rituals being performed in a hidden Evolutionist temple within it.

This is the "best" of the poor districts in the capital. Families here are simple and oriented towards old traditions, residing in a region favored by the Empire, where many lowly servants of nobility dwell. Here, the old Evolutionist faith still has roots, as many continue to believe in the old scriptures, disagreeing with the Celestianist Reform. The impoverished populace largely supports the Empire, which earns them occasional favors from nobles and fosters a sense of gratitude and loyalty among the residents. The Ironhand officers often favor this region, being more lenient with its dwellers. Some of the lowest-ranked officers have homes here and are often seen in the local taverns.

Whenever there are public parades of the Empire, the people of Sloghood take to the streets to show their support for Emperor Baleroth, who, in turn, uses this to demonstrate that the poor people of the Empire support his government.

Sloghood, with its narrow, cobbled streets lined with modest, cramped houses, is poor but clean and mostly safe. The structures are worn but well-kept, reflecting the resilience of the locals. Many homes display the colors of the noble houses their residents work for as a badge of honor (but never their crests). Old Evolutionist symbols are often on display, and the posts often carry wanted posters and imperial propaganda, which, in other poor regions, are removed, but here they are mostly kept intact. The streets are lively, with makeshift stalls selling cheap goods, and the air is filled with the scent of hearty meals from local eateries.

While people here are poor, they have a much better life than those living in the Bloomburbs district. They perceive the "Bloomburbers" as criminals, dangerous and dirty, harboring prejudice against them for being refugees from outside the Central Empire, seeing them as barbaric, uncivilized, and violent.



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Places of Interest

Beautiful Plume Tavern

A dimly lit, boisterous tavern known for its cheap beer and delectable chicken dishes, often filled with off-duty low-ranked Ironhand officers seeking reprieve. It serves as a hub for information exchange and a meeting place for those sympathetic with the Ironhand military. Recently, a strange group of men, donning heavy armor and clad in cloaks, have been visiting this place often *(they are the Watchers Scout group, see Random Encounters in this chapter)*.

Fair Deals Pawn Shop

A shop filled with an assortment of items from trinkets to weapons. Owned by the crafty **Mr. Slintersqueen** (CN goblin **spy**), an old goblin said to have been a rogue who even fought in the Illu Die Arena once. He is street smart and knows the prejudice against his kind, but he professes Evolutionist faith and uses his story as an arena fighter *(which he exaggerates, as he only fought three times)* to be accepted in the Sloghood. In reality, he is in the service of Bromeliad, the leader of the Emperor's court spies, always looking for transgressions that he can report to receive a bonus payment.

Grove of Hope

A serene grove that shelters a concealed Evolutionist Temple, where ceremonies and teachings are conducted. The place is the heart of the Evolutionist movement in Sloghood, striving to keep the old faith alive. The temple is small but receives donations from many dwellers, who come weekly to pray to Bauron as a god of Chaos, and Tamera as a Goddess of Order, as per the old religion.

It is led by an Evolutionist cleric named **Savath Hillbrand** (CE human **prophet of shadows**), who secretly converted to the faith of the Ungods. He is working to hinder the Celestianist reform, preaching Evolutionism, while secretly offering the most vulnerable the chance to join the Cult of Shadow Wing *(see Watchers Scout Quest - page 160)*.

Old Lira's Soup House

This humble establishment is renowned for its mouthwatering soups, with recipes passed down through generations. It is run by the enigmatic **Old Lira** (LE **succubus**), an old, curved woman believed to have lived for over two centuries. While there are rumors about her being a Purple Witch, a hag, or possessing a mystical way to extend her life, the reality is that she is a **succubus** who served Emperor Baleroth and gained her freedom. By day, she enjoys maintaining the facade of Old Lira; by night, she transforms into **Mistress Night**, a mysterious beauty of the capital, and attends the most lascivious parties to feed on human essence. As per her deal with Baleroth, she does not kill people, and she is content enough not to have to return to the hellish planes and be lorded over by the commanders of her past.

The Moonlit Herbarium

This discreet herbalist shop, run by the wise and mysterious **Madam Flora** (NG **spy**), offers remedies and potions crafted from rare plants found in the outskirts of the Empire. She is secretly an Awakened agent who infiltrated Sloghood to help dissuade the denizens from adopting Evolutionism.

The Redeemers Assembly

This grandiose structure, standing out amid the modest buildings, houses a temple dedicated to a cult created by a group of redeemers with a unique interpretation of Tamera and Bauron's will, distinct from Celestianism, Evolutionism, and even the Windspeaker faith. They teach evolution as a personal goal of prosperity and gather many faithful for the miracles they show to the people. While not well seen by the Church, they are tolerated by the Empire, as they have deep pockets and seem to so far have been benefiting public order while not opposing Baleroth.

The Iron Hammer Smithy

Owned by a retired Ironhand Sergeant, this blacksmith shop specializes in crafting and repairing tools and simple weapons. The owner, **Sergeant Wolt** (LE **guard**, with proficiency in blacksmith tools), is a strong believer in Evolutionism who gives discounts to those who share his faith. He secretly helps finance a hidden militia of Sloghood dwellers that often enforce "justice" with their own hands against supposed criminals of the Boomburbs.

Side Quest - A Natural Struggle

Jandira Liftsong (CG human **druid**) finds herself in conflict with the people of the district. She is the last protector of the Grove of Hope, her master having died under mysterious circumstances a few years ago. The Ironhand investigation into his death was inconclusive and archived.

Initially, Jandira didn't assign much importance to the cleric Savath Hillbrand building his temple hidden in the grove. However, she grew increasingly concerned as more people began to enter the grove, and she started to notice bizarre terrors skulking in the shadows of what was once a pocket of sacred natural beauty. She suspects that Savath is dealing with penumbral forces, but the citizens of Sloghood have grown increasingly critical and hostile towards her as she fights for the temple to be removed from her sacred land.

She is now seeking adventurers to investigate Savath and his temple.

Challenges. The characters will need to confront Savath, penumbral creatures, and other cultists who have become his disciples (also, see Watchers Scout and their quest in Random Encounters in this chapter).

Reward. If the characters manage to rid the grove of the temple, Jandira will gift them with a *staff of the woodlands* that once belonged to her master. While her resources are limited, she will also agree to help them track the Cult of Shadow Wing in the city and try to contact other druids for assistance, as eliminating the Cult is vital to protect nature.

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Uptown District

Complexity: Simple

Core Concept: Immersed in the social aspirations of the middle class, the district serves as the stage for a conflict between the rogue's guild (Third Eye) and the Cult of Shadow Wing.

Side Quest: Assist, either through diplomacy or force, an upstart Orc artist in overcoming a political boycott against Orcs, orchestrated by the Third Eye to expand their control over Uptown.

Uptown, nestled in the southwest of the capital, is a middle-class district abuzz with cultural richness and societal gatherings. It is home to many individuals of the lower nobility, as well as rising merchants, artists, lawyers, and low to mid-level bureaucrats. The district exudes glamour and status, often giving an impression of greater wealth and importance than its inhabitants truly possess. It frequently hosts numerous masquerade balls and grand parties in its mansions.

While Uptown serves as a showcase of Imperial art and culture, it remains under the watchful eyes of Imperial agents. The district is a hotbed of intrigue, manipulation, and small-scale politics, representing a stepping stone for those aspiring to climb the social ladder. Families here often celebrate their ascent to Uptown, while the lower nobility residing in the area aim for greater heights in Downtown or Palacedomain.

Architecturally and artistically innovative, Uptown's cobblestone streets are lined with unique mansions competing in grandeur. Art galleries and day-to-day commerce occupy the less prominent streets. At night, lanterns cast a golden glow, while Ironhand soldiers patrol the area. The district embodies the middle-class energy with masked figures dancing in ballrooms and scholars frequenting the expansive Baleroth Library. This is contrasted by Tsvetown, a unique enclave blending Orcish and Imperial aesthetics.

The Third Eye operates clandestinely, amassing secrets, trading information, and manipulating social dynamics. Their influence has been deeply entrenched for years. The Empire, aware of their presence, finds it challenging to pinpoint them, as their agents are skillfully integrated among the populace, ranging from simple gardeners to nobles.

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Places of Interest

Tsvetown

An enclave of Orcish culture, Tsvetown formed when Emperor Baleroth brought the Orcs to his side to control the Tsvetan region. Over generations, Orcs born here have become quite accustomed to the Imperial lifestyle. While retaining some shamanistic traditions, they are now typical Uptown citizens, flaunting wealth and influence, even without possessing it. After **Vharzog** betrayed the Empire and Tsvetan became independent, the orcs here lost political power and are now thirsty for influence. Led by Vharzog's brother, **Zarothan** (LN orc **knight**), they search for opportunities to gain political power and wealth. He despises the underhanded tactics his older brother always used, including against him. Never betraying his word or associating with those who lack honor, he has become an enemy of the Third Eye, much to Tsvetown's disadvantage. He is currently searching for a way to eliminate the Eyes from the district, believing he can be rewarded by the Emperor for this, thus recovering the respect his people deserve in the city.

Baleroth's Library of the Capital

Founded in partnership between the Empire and the Church, the Baleroth Library holds the most extensive collection of knowledge in the capital, second only to the Emperor's private collection. While it doesn't house books on magic, due to Empire restrictions, it draws members of the middle and upper echelons of society seeking various types of information. The entry fee, now 3 gp after a reduction from 6 gp by **High Cardinal Taram**, continues to deter lower-class citizens. The Church aims to eliminate the fee, but nobles resist, fearing damage or theft of books and a decline in safety. Additionally, some nobles believe granting knowledge to the poor is dangerous. **Bishop Jullia Erithad** (NG human **priest**), striving to fulfill her father's vision, leads the library to promote enlightenment for all. However, she faces opposition from some nobles, covertly supported by the Third Eye, who campaign against her with accusations of impropriety to remove her from her position.

Knights of The Tanarean Order Training Grounds

A crucible for aspiring knights. Those who complete the course here become Ironhand officials of low patent level, with some even becoming direct subordinates of important officers, offering a pathway to influence and wealth. It embodies the aspirations of the middle class and represents the expected path for many youngsters from low nobility *(as higher nobles study at Duke Wincar's War School)*. The entrance exams are challenging, and only a few dozen can join each year to become knights in training. The place was directed by Baron Elizeu Lindouff, but he died along with his family in a magical accident a few years ago, the cause was determined to be a faulty wand of fireball. In his place, his younger brother **Baltahzar Lindouff** (NE formerly **noble**, now a lesser penumbral greed) took the mantle of Baron. He is the real culprit behind the "accident," and in his quest for power, he is now allied with the Cult, having been transformed into a shapeshifting aberration *(see Third Eye Agent and his quest in Random Encounters in this chapter)*. Many young knights of the school despise Baltahzar for not being a real knight, and some rumors (spread by the Third Eye) even link him to his brother's death. Currently, a retired knight and arena fighter, and now teacher, **Sir Olivier Aurillium Belv** (LN half-elf **gladiator**) is investigating Baltahzar, as he believes he tarnishes the knights' reputation. He is looking for like-minded adventurers who can help him bring Baron Baltahzar down.

Aetherial Canvas Art Gallery

A kaleidoscope of artistic brilliance, this Art Gallery showcases avant-garde and classical masterpieces, reflecting Uptown's cultural vibrancy. Besides its normal displays, the gallery also hosts private auctions and expositions that are secretly encounters of the Third Eye organization. The man behind this gallery is none other than **Oraelus Marcella** himself, the leader of the Third Eye in the entire Empire, and one of the three great leaders behind the organization. Here he masquerades as a middle-level noble, with an interest in collecting and trading art. While he owns the place and visits it often, the curator of the gallery is one of his closest associates, **Bollarus Jasperin** (NE gnome **assassin**, with proficiency and expertise in all checks related to art), an art dealer and secretly an art smuggler and counterfeiter, who oversees the day-to-day operation of the Third Eye in Uptown, as Oraelus focuses his attention on bigger issues.

Cerulean Alchemist Lab

Hidden behind a facade of quaint apothecaries, the Cerulean Alchemist Lab delves into alchemical mysteries, creating potions and elixirs for the Uptown's elite. The Lab's concealed underground chambers harbor experiments on forbidden concoctions and the research and production of new poisons for Third Eye agents.

If the characters have proven their alliance with the Third Eye, they can buy almost any kind of poison they desire in this place. If not, they will only be able to see the normal wares.

This place is under heavy scrutiny by Baltahzar Lindouff (see Knights of The Tanarean Order Training Grounds above), who has caught a whiff of its connection to the Third Eye, and he is sending penumbral creatures to attack the place, scare the clients, and kill its owner. But so far, he has had no success. The owner, **Serene "Blondie" Basara** (CE human **assassin**, with proficiency and expertise in Alchemist's supplies), is increasingly worried about the bizarre incidents and strange creatures lurking in her shop, and she is looking for adventurers or mercenaries who can help her find out what is happening. She is a callous woman who had a tough life, but she is not willing to risk her wellbeing dealing with

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aberrations. She is offering 1,000 gp as a reward for solving the situation.

Eclipsed Moon Inn

This comfortable Inn offers the best cost-benefit in the Imperial Capital, with moderate prices, very good service, and good accommodations.

It is often used by wealthy traveling merchants, traveling Third Eye agents, and bureaucrats from other parts of the empire who are in the capital for work. It is also used by nobles and wealthy individuals for romantic encounters or secret meetings.

The Third Eye holds many spies here and keeps tabs on everything that happens within its walls, collecting many pieces of evidence for bribery and blackmail. If the characters end up here and have things to hide that can be uncovered, they may be blackmailed into helping against Baltahzar Lindouff *(see Knights of The Tanarean Order Training Grounds above)*.

Side Quest - The Boycotted Artist

A young orc painter named **Toragra Bloodfist** (NG orc **noble**, with proficiency in painter's supplies) is an up-and-coming artist who quickly gained fame through her powerful brush strokes and evocative paintings, with a style that mixed ancient orc shamanistic paintings with the landscape painting popular in art galleries and nobles' homes.

She was faring well, despite the orcs being socially ostracized in the current days in the Empire, but a few months ago, she began to be suddenly criticized and rumors about her began to spread, claiming she was arrogant, was seen dissing other artists' works, or even got violent when her art was criticized. Toragra was greatly ashamed and traumatized by these accusations, as she never did any of that. To make matters worse, part of her best works were burned down in what she believes was an act of arson, not an accidental fire.

Recently, she learned that it began with the Third Eye, as part of their attempt to push the orc community to despair for not choosing to side with them in Uptown.

Toragra is desperate and in search of people who can help prove she is innocent, find whoever is spreading the rumors, and restore her name and the value of her art.

Challenges. The one behind it is Bollarus Jasperin, as he is trying to subjugate the orcs and make them bow to the Third Eye *(see Aetherial Canvas Art Gallery)*. Uncovering the plot should require investigating the art gallery or art gatherings in noble houses. Confronting Bollarus may be a possibility, but he is open to a deal if he sees the advantage in it. His goal is to get the orcs to submit, but he may be tempted to accept giving patronage to Toragra's art if the characters are willing to deal with a current, worse thorn in his side, Baltahzar Lindouff *(see Knights of The Tanarean Order Training Grounds above)*.

If the characters decide to take a more direct or aggressive approach, they will have to deal with many Third Eye henchmen *(you can use **spies**, **guards**, **thugs**, and **bandit captains** to represent their usual agents, while assassins should only be their top tier ones such as Bollarus himself)*.

Reward. If the characters manage to solve the situation through diplomacy, a deal, or by dealing with the Third Eye, Toragra will reward them with an authentic orcish shamanistic tattoo. She has only one small flask of ink that was blessed by the late Red Mother, but she is willing to use it to bless one of the characters. The tattoo provides the same effects as a *ring of protection*, but will not consume any slot or require any attunement.

The tattoo cannot be removed or sold after being painted, requiring a *break enchantment* or stronger spell, and the character to be willing, for it to be erased permanently. Besides that, it works just like a normal *ring of protection*.

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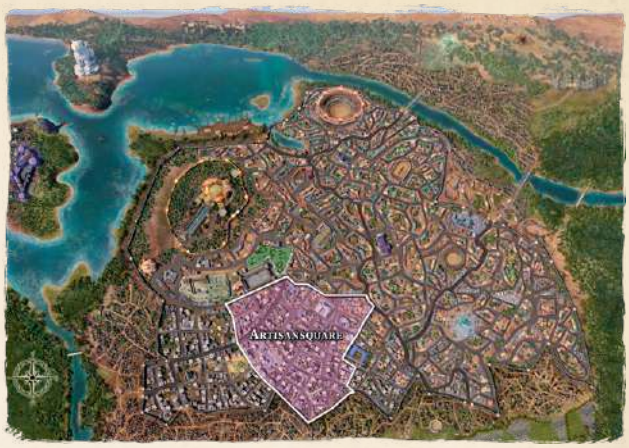
Artisansquare District

Complexity: Moderate
Core Concept: A district bustling with artisans finds itself ensnared in a conflict between guilds trying to undermine each other, all while the Cult operates in their midst.
Side Quest: A vampire doppelganger is abducting individuals from the guilds to carry out a sinister ritual. Locate and stop him, or form an alliance with him against the Cult.

Artisansquare is the beating heart of craftsmanship and artisan shops in the capital, renowned for its many stores selling various crafted goods. Although products here are expensive, they are also of high quality, with some shops being on the short list of places authorized to sell magical items in the Capital (but only to nobles and bureaucrats). The district displays the Empire's opulence and is where the middle-class dreams of ascending.

While there appears to be cooperation between artisans and shops, the reality is a dynamic market marked by tension between competing guilds, innovative artisans, and a battle for the favor of patrons and the Empire. Different groups dispute control over the market and trends. This district is economically vital to the city, contributing significantly to the nobles' luxury and the Empire's financial affluence through its high-quality goods.



The district is a blend of structured cobblestone streets lined with shops displaying exquisite goods and unique products. During the day, it is alive with the sounds of hammers and chisels, and the air is filled with the scent of wood, metal, and leather. The buildings are adorned with intricate carvings, reflecting the district's dedication to craftsmanship, with evident care for all buildings to harmonize with one another.

The district also hosts The Vault, one of the major branches of the Bank of Hajal, the largest financial institution on the continent. This makes it not only the financial nerve of the city but also a location heavily patrolled by the Ironhands, who closely monitor individuals from the lower classes wandering in the area.

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Places of Interest

Orphanage of the Sacred Seed

Run by a Tamerian sect of the Celestianist Church, this orphanage cares for many children who have lost their parents or were abandoned. It is managed by **Sister Amarilia Hemsfield** (CG human **priest**), a cousin of the High Cardinal. Spirited and courageous, she is a young woman with curly brown hair and sparkling green eyes, known for her adventurous nature and love for sports, especially running. Despite her busy schedule, she always makes time to play with the kids.

Sister Amarilia often struck deals with artisans for them to take the older children as apprentices so they could create a life of their own. However, she is concerned about the recent disappearances of some teenagers she helped raise and has reported seeing an undead creature near the orphanage, unaware it is an escaped vampire spawn seeking her help. She seeks assistance in investigating this matter, as the Ironhands have dismissed her reports.

The Vault, Capital's Bank of Hajal

As a prominent branch of Tanares' foremost bank, The Vault symbolizes wealth and security, protected by powerful djinns. Patronized by nobles and wealthy merchants, it's renowned as one of the safest places in the Capital. **Tiwilade**, the bank's president, has recently come to the city on covert business to investigate security breaches at this branch. Suspecting the involvement of the Cult, he seeks trustworthy adventurers from outside the Empire for discreet investigations. His goal is to scrutinize his employees and eliminate the Cult's influence, offering substantial payment for this service. *(See The Soulborn Banker Poisoning sidequest - page 163).*

Harmony of Strings Music Emporium

Run by maestro **Leonicus Melodius Augustus** (CG gnome **noble**, with proficiency and expertise in performance and all tools related to crafting musical instruments), the emporium is a haven for music enthusiasts, offering instruments that produce clear and melodious sounds. Leonicus is a voting member of the Chisels and Hammers guild council and was a close friend of the late Master Springsworth Greenthumbs. Currently, he is mourning his friend's unexpected passing and is frustrated with the inaction of the Ironhand investigators. He firmly believes the death was unnatural, but many dismiss his concerns as paranoia.

The Gilded Chisel

A sculpture workshop headed by master carver **Gian Golvey** (CG human **mage**, with proficiency and expertise in all tools related to sculpting). He's the brother of the Chisels and Hammers guild master, Jenesse. Gian specializes in creating lifelike statues. However, unbeknownst to most, he secretly imbues these statues with mystical cores that can gather and relay information back to him. He utilizes this to spy on various nobles within the city and relay information to the Republic of Freelands. This secret remains hidden within the Empire, and not even his sister Jenesse is aware of it. He is very loyal to Archmage Avelum and the Republic.

Herbarium Emporium and Flower Shop

This expansive shop brims with living plants and flowers of numerous varieties, as well as treated and preserved herbs for medicinal, alchemical, or mystical purposes. However, mystical herbs are exclusively sold to nobles or those with permits from the Empire. Originally managed by Master **Springsworth Greenthumbs** (NG gnome **mage**, with proficiency and expertise in Nature, Persuasion, and all tools related to herbs and alchemy), the shop is now overseen by his widow, **Merrylince Springsworth** (CG gnome **noble**), after his sudden death from a heart attack.

Unknown to everyone, Springsworth was actually poisoned by Bezzeus after the gnome started probing into the disappearances and uncovered vampire's activities. Bezzeus acted to buy time for his schemes. A thorough examination of Springsworth's possessions might reveal documents and notes hinting at a vampire's presence in the area, though concrete proof is lacking.

Velvet Vogue

This premier boutique belongs to the famed designer **Serana Silkweave** (NE human **noble**, with proficiency and expertise in Insight, Persuasion, and all tools related to tailoring and makeup). Velvet Vogue epitomizes luxury, producing attire that perfectly marries elegance with cutting-edge style. The store is particularly known for its Ethereal Threads — fabrics that gleam and shift colors based on the weather and seasons. Catering to the elite of society, Velvet Vogue entangles Serana in the intricate web of social and political dynamics. Many nobles seek her services, hoping her creations will enhance their standing in the Empire's court. Serana is one of the pawns under the influence of **Madam Vistro,** who personally mentored her. While she is aware of her mentor's dubious activities, Serana has never delved deeply into trying to figure them out, knowing well that Madam Vistro is enigmatic and can be vindictive.

Springseed Leathery Goods

Owned by **Aevas Springseed** (CG elf **scout**, with proficiency and expertise in Insight, Persuasion, and all tools related to leatherworking), this establishment purchases leather and fur and offers high-quality leather accessories, footwear, hats, and even armor. Aevas sources raw materials from across Tanares, notably the Sindile Forest and Yama, where he maintains connections with fellow elves who provide him with premium materials. He often finds himself juggling his responsibilities at the shop, mentoring novice leatherworkers, and leading The Leather and Fur Association. His wife, **Allieli Springseed** (CG elf **archmage**, with proficiency and expertise in Insight and Persuasion), serves as the Sindile

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diplomat to the Empire and is currently in the city of Hajal resolving a disagreement. Aevas eagerly anticipates her return to address the ongoing issues.

Diamond Dust Jewelry

Owned by the twin dwarves named Allana (LN dwarf **noble**) and Gerda Brightstone (CG dwarf **noble**, both with proficiency and expertise in all tools related to gems and jewelcrafting), who bear a striking physical resemblance, but are distinguished by their starkly different personalities. Allana is serious, industrious, and unwaveringly focused on the business' growth and success. In contrast, Gerda, the public face of the business, is well-liked and adored by the community. She tends to be less dedicated, often procrastinating and being somewhat frivolous with money. However, her genuine affection for her sister and her kind-hearted nature are evident, even when facing her sister's regular critiques.

As members of the Stones and Metals guild, Allana frequently voices her grievances about Freizzer, the burdensome taxes, and his increasing wealth built on the hard work of others. While Gerda shares the general disdain for Freizzer, she pities him, viewing him as a cowardly and feeble individual. If quizzed about the mysterious disappearances, Allana suspects either Freizzer or Seraphina from Velvet Vogue — commenting that Serana "gives her the chills". In contrast, Gerda believes neither would resort to such extreme measures.

Side Quest - The Guild Pact

The five major artisan guilds historically maintained a pact delineating power distribution in this district. While disagreements have always existed, the current tension is unprecedented. The five guilds are as follows:

- **Chisels and Hammers.** Responsible for overseeing all types of sculpting, they are directed by the acclaimed master sculptor **Jenesse Golvey** (CG human **noble**, with proficiency and expertise in Insight, Persuasion, and all tools related to sculpting). Recently, she has observed the mysterious disappearances of apprentices from various shops and artisans affiliated with her guild. Consequently, she's pressuring the Ironhand to intervene.
- **Herbcrafters.** They supervise alchemists, herbalists, and florists, and are currently leaderless and immersed in internal conflict. Their last leader, Master Springsworth Greenthumbs *(see Herbarium Emporium and Flower Shop)*, tragically passed away from a heart attack. However, several of his close associates are convinced he was poisoned.
- **Stones and Metals.** They unite smiths, jewelers, and goldsmiths, and are overseen by **Freizzer "Goldhands" Billwaters** (LE human **noble**, with proficiency and expertise in Insight, Persuasion, and all tools related to jewelcrafting). Though a **greedy** and astute individual, he is fundamentally a coward. Aware of the recent deaths, many suspect his involvement. However, in truth, he fears he might be the next victim and is searching for bodyguards and investigators.
- ***The Leather and Fur Association.*** It oversees all leatherworkers and is led by **Aevas Springseed** *(see Springseed Leathery Goods)*. Aevas has a longstanding dispute with Freizzer, who once caused him significant financial losses through crafty manipulation of contracts. He believes this deceitful noble is the cause of the recent disturbances in the district and suspects he might be affiliated with either the Cult of Shadow Wing or the Third Eye.
- ***Silks, Threads, and Needles.*** This guild governs cloth shops, tailors, shoemakers, and weavers. It is headed by **Madam Vistro** (CE human **Purple Witch sorcerer**, with proficiency and expertise in Insight, Persuasion, and all tools related to tailoring and makeup), who is known for being discreet and reserved, interacting primarily with high-status individuals. As one of the principal benefactors of the orphanage, high society regards her as the epitome of elegance. However, in truth, Madam Vistro has been a Purple Witch infiltrating the capital for over two decades. She has forged deep ties and amassed concealed political influence by cultivating allies and securing compromising information. She's not responsible for the recent disappearances, and is frustrated, suspecting that either cultists from the Hidden Cult or The Spawners — two sub-sects of the Cult of Shadow Wing — are causing disruptions in her domain. This can potentially jeopardize the intricate power network she has carefully built over the years. Although Madam Vistro isn't averse to a bit of chaos and death, she doesn't want her long-term strategy to be undermined. She is not aware of Tenebrizon's plan, as the Cult is vast and decentralized, so she wants those she believes are "stupid cultists doing minor random destruction" to leave her area and cause chaos elsewhere.

Who Is Behind It All. The guilds have started pointing fingers at each other. Jenesse and Aevas are convinced that Freizzer is the culprit, while both Freizzer and Madam Vistro think the Cult of Shadow Wing is to blame. Meanwhile, the council of the Herbcrafters suspects Madam Vistro. The situation is chaotic.

In reality, things are even more sinister. A doppelganger, once a servant of Count Gazini —a formidable vampire who died decades ago — was liberated from his master's command. Drawing from Gazini's magical and alchemical knowledge, the doppelganger became a full-fledged vampire, unlocking the dormant power within his own blood.

Becoming engrossed with Count Gazini's mystical knowledge, he discovered a necromantic ritual that would allow him to tap into his blood connection with Gazini, summoning his soul to steal his memories.

While he acquired a vial of blood from another of Gazini's spawns, Count Blake, the ritual demands a meticulously crafted magic circle, the blood and souls of numerous individuals, and a mix of rare herbs and immaculately cut gemstones. Artisansquare provided the ideal place to find all of these items.

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Harnessing his abilities, he began abducting gifted apprentices from the artisans. He then relocated them to a mansion he had claimed after murdering its previous owner, **Marquee Sebastian Krois**. Posing as the Marquee (using his shapeshifting power), he's been gathering all that he requires for his scheme.

He has no allegiance with the Cult of Shadow Wing. If approached, he could even utilize his capabilities to help track down the cultists, especially if the characters can convince the guilds to halt their investigations into the disappearances *(notably if they confront Madam Vistro)*. Alternatively, the characters can challenge him and earn the gratitude of the Artisansquare guilds.

Challenges. The characters will need to wade through a web of accusations and piece together the mystery, deciding with whom to ally and whom to oppose.

Investigating Bezzeus will prove challenging. Possessing his doppelganger abilities, he could be anyone, anywhere. If the characters unravel Bezzeus' scheme, they'll have to face a potent vampire and his vampire spawns, confronting the grim reality that numerous promising artisans were transformed. These transformed beings might need to be eradicated or, at the very least, sent to the Celestianist temple for potential aid.

Bezzeus will likely be aware of the characters' intent to find the Cult of Shadow Wing if they've been inquiring openly, and could propose an alliance if threatened. Should the characters choose to align with Bezzeus, they would then have to stop the guilds from investigating further, secure the required apprentices and materials for Bezzeus, and take down Madam Vistro.

Rewards. If the characters resolve the situation with Bezzeus, the guilds will be in their debt. They'll be granted a 20% discount on products in Artisansquare and an additional 1,000 gp for each guild they directly assisted during their quest.

The guilds will aid the characters in gathering information on the Cult of Shadow Wing. However, Madam Vistro will either provide them with misleading information or hamper the efforts of the other guilds to assist the characters. If the characters uncover this deceit, they might attempt to expose Madam Vistro. This endeavor would demand significant effort and detective work, given her entrenched political influence within the city.

Should they choose to assist Bezzeus, the characters will secure a vampire doppelganger as an ally. He will be absent for a while as he finalizes his ritual. Once complete, he'll utilize his diverse skills to scour the city for the Cult's location. Although he's reluctant to confront them directly, he will do his utmost to pinpoint their location and notify the characters.

Bezzeus, the Doppelganger Vampire

Medium undead (shapechanger), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural)
Hit Points 144 (17d8 + 68)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +7, Cha +9
Skills Perception +7, Stealth +9
Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks, necrotic
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive perception 17
Languages Common, telepathy 60 ft.
Challenge 14 (13,500 XP)

Ambusher. Bezzeus has advantage on attack rolls against any creature he has surprised.

Telepathy. Bezzeus can communicate telepathically with any creature he can see within 60 ft. of it. The creature doesn't need to understand any particular language, but it must be able to understand at least one language.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Bezzeus fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Vampire Weaknesses. Bezzeus has the following flaws:

Forbiddance. It can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.

Harmed by Running Water. It takes 20 acid damage if he ends his turn in running water.

Stake to the Heart. Bezzeus is destroyed if a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into his heart while he's incapacitated in his resting place.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. He takes 20 radiant damage when he starts his turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Regeneration. Bezzeus regains 20 hit points at the start of his turn if he has at least 1 hit point and isn't in sunlight or running water. If Bezzeus takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of his next turn.

Misty Escape. When he drops to 0 hit points outside his resting place, Bezzeus transforms into a cloud of mist (as in the Shapechanger trait) instead of falling unconscious.

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Actions

Multiattack (Vampire Form Only). Bezzeus makes two attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

Unarmed Strike (Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. Instead of dealing damage, Bezzeus can grapple the target (escape DC 18).

Bite (Bat or Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by Bezzeus, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and the doppelganger vampire regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Charm. Bezzeus targets one humanoid he can see within 30 ft. of himself. If the target can see the doppelganger vampire, the target must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or be charmed by Bezzeus. The charmed target regards Bezzeus as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected.

Read Thoughts. Bezzeus can magically read the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 ft. of himself. Wisdom save against is of DC 17.

Shapechanger. Bezzeus can use his action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid he has seen or into a bat or a wolf (retaining his alignment and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores), or back into his true form. His statistics, other than his size, are the same in each form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. He reverts to its true form if he dies.

Children of the Night (1/Day). Bezzeus magically calls 2d4 swarms of bats or rats, provided that the sun isn't up. While outdoors, the vampire can call 3d6 wolves instead. The called creatures arrive in 1d4 rounds, acting as allies of the vampire and obeying his spoken commands. The beasts remain for 1 hour, until the vampire dies, or until the vampire dismisses them as a bonus action.

Legendary Actions

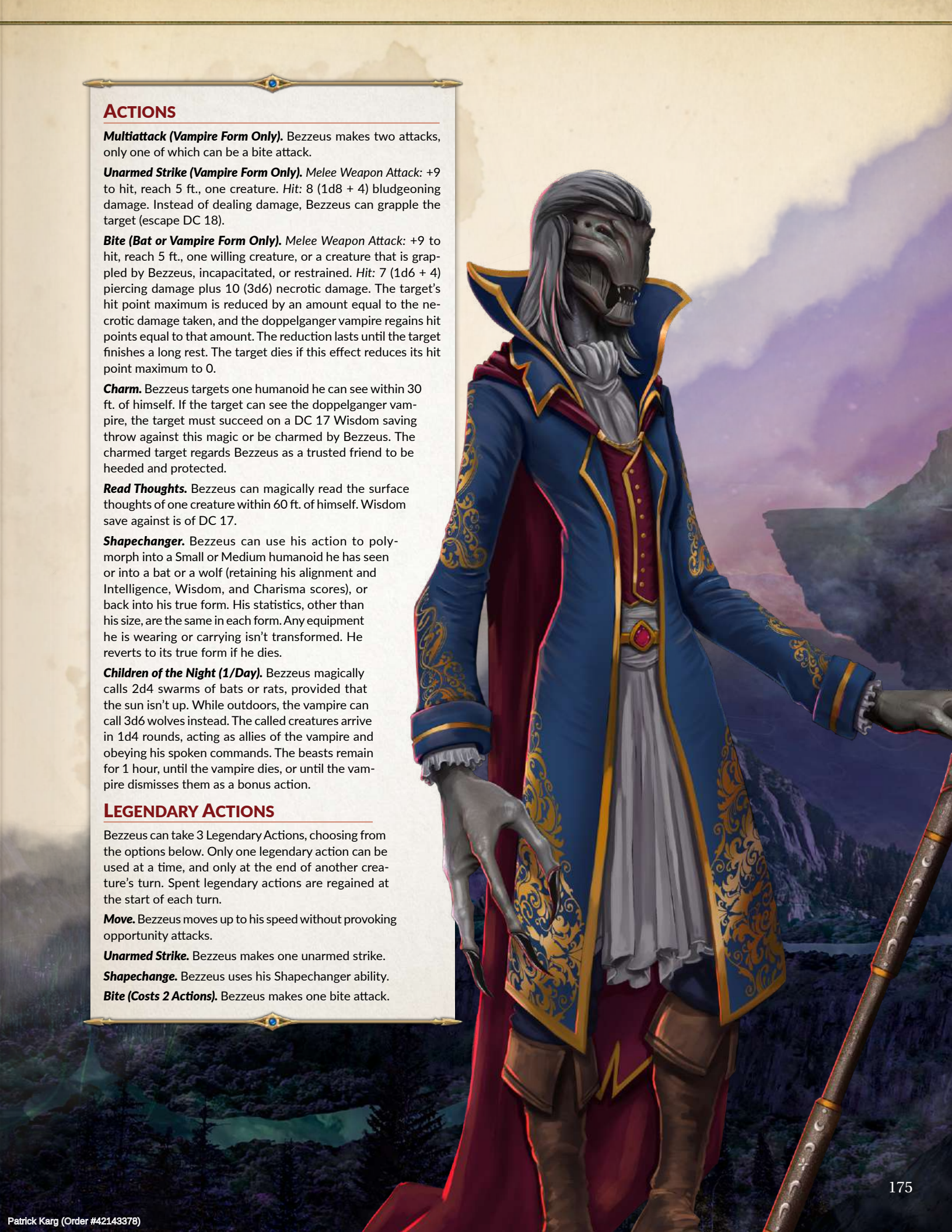
Bezzeus can take 3 Legendary Actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time, and only at the end of another creature's turn. Spent legendary actions are regained at the start of each turn.

Move. Bezzeus moves up to his speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Unarmed Strike. Bezzeus makes one unarmed strike.

Shapechange. Bezzeus uses his Shapechanger ability.

Bite (Costs 2 Actions). Bezzeus makes one bite attack.



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Scholarnest District

Complexity: Moderate

Core Concept: A region steeped in studies and arts, embroiled in an ideological dispute between freedom of speech and government control.

Side Quest: A scholar is penning books that criticize the Empire. Choose to aid the scholar by siding with the rebels, or align with the Empire to maintain order in the Capital.

Scholarnest, the intellectual center of the Capital, is a district marked by both intellectual elitism and genuine academic dedication. The district is characterized by the tension between Empire-sanctioned ideologies and the bubbling undercurrent of innovative, occasionally even revolutionary, ideas. Thoughts that often must be expressed discreetly to evade the scrutiny of the Imperial Officers.

In this district, one's status is more tightly tied to academic significance rather than wealth or nobility. Although owning a home here typically requires a middle-class standing, outstanding poor students may be granted free lodging and exemption from fees, making Scholarnest the most socially diverse area in the Capital.

Scholarnest boasts white marble edifices and statues honoring esteemed thinkers from both the past and present, such as Archmage Torygg, Emperor Baleroth, the taii'maku genius U'Tibam, Archmage Kelanyah, among others. Its streets are perpetually alive with students engrossed in lively debates.

Home to numerous theaters, the Imperial University of Light, and monuments dedicated to profound thinkers, Scholarnest thrives on intellectual engagement and the continual clash of ideas. It serves as a nexus for both Imperial propaganda and insurgent ideas, sheltering covert agents from diverse factions. Many concepts that have molded the perspectives of the entire continent's population were first propagated and gained momentum here. As such, everyone, including Emperor Baleroth, recognizes the importance of overseeing the discourse in this district.

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Places of Interest

The Imperial University of Light

This academy is the finest in the Empire and ranks among the most prestigious on the continent. Here, scholars receive instruction in philosophy, history, and literature.

Graduation from this institution signifies academic prowess. Although its halls resonate with spirited debates, these discussions are frequently monitored by the Imperial Censors. Consequently, any ideas that could be perceived as revolutionary, even if not intended as direct critiques of the Empire, are shared covertly.

The current rector, **Abalum Grizzlebelt** (N gnome **priest** of Lumina, with Intelligence 20 and proficiency and expertise in all Intelligence skills), is an accomplished scholar recognized for his achievements across various domains. He maintains the University of Light as a primary temple to the Goddess Lumina through an agreement with the Empire. Under this arrangement, courses can offer optional lessons on the faith of Lumina, but these cannot be made mandatory or provide any advantages for graduation.

Presently, Abalum faces a dilemma. A small faction of professors, those who share the Empire's philosophical leanings, press for the University to publicly reject the ideas and works of Charles Revaxi (see Side Quest) and to brand him as a subversive figure. Most professors oppose this, fearing they might be the next targets if they voice sentiments the Imperial Censors disapprove of. Meanwhile, a handful of pro-revolutionary faculty members discreetly urge Abalum to assist Charles in fleeing the Capital.

At the moment, Abalum is reluctant to jeopardize his position or well-being. However, his deep faith in Lumina teachings prevents him from turning a blind eye to the unfolding situation. In secret, he seeks individuals willing to aid Professor Charles Revaxi without revealing the Rector's involvement. Abalum is prepared to offer 500 gp upfront to those who take on this mission, but he will only divulge this to individuals he is confident are not loyalists to the Empire.

"Burlesque" Theater of Horrors

This avant-garde theater serves as a sanctuary for the audacious and the unorthodox. It showcases radical artistic performances, often centered on horror and shocking content. Each piece is imbued with profound philosophical undertones that question the confines of conventional thinking and societal standards, making it a magnet for both the crème de la crème of the arts and clandestine revolutionaries.

The theater is owned by a madwalker named **Aristid Sinclair** (CE human **assassin**, with the madwalker feature Blades of Madness, and the Mutations: Shadow Control, Aberrant Spines, and Psychic Weapon, which he can use without limitation - for simplicity, he does not have a mutated form). Aristid is an enigmatic figure who personally directs many of the productions. He possesses a keen ability to subtly adjust the content of the performances to sidestep any overt censure from the Empire's overseers. What remains a secret to all is that Aristid is actually a member of Baleroth's court. While he genuinely admires the artistic and even the subversive works presented at his theater, occasionally even poking fun at the Emperor himself, he leverages his position to monitor the intellectual currents of the city.

Aristid has a penchant for horror and death. He relishes handling disruptive subversive figures personally. Many scholars who vanish from Scholarnest are not apprehended by the censors but are instead silenced in the dead of night by Aristid. Due to his avant-garde reputation, he gains the trust of numerous scholars who harbor revolutionary inclinations.

If the characters reveal themselves to be individuals aligned with the Republic and capable of posing a threat, they might become targets for Aristid.

Imperial Department of Truth

The Department of Truth is a vital arm of the Empire where bureaucrats, handpicked by Baleroth's court, review all books, lyrics, and papers for subversive content. They are also responsible for approving festivals and any businesses that involve public art displays. Moreover, they actively search for undisclosed teachings on arcane magic hidden in artistic displays, as instruction in magic is restricted within the Empire.

Led by the **High Censor Epamion Chellinger** (NE human **mage**), this department employs numerous bureaucrats (most LE **nobles**). Additionally, a few **Ironhand soldiers** and officers operate under his direction.

The Department building consists of a ground floor housing standard bureaucratic operations. The more secure second floor, safeguarded with magical alarms, holds an archive containing all the materials submitted for review, as well as those denied approval and not yet destroyed, often due to ongoing investigations.

A concealed passage on the ground floor leads to an underground section, featuring a prison and a torture chamber. Here, they detain "subversive" individuals, extracting information to locate other rebels and their associates.

Currently, the High Censor and his subordinates are on the lookout for information regarding **Professor Charles Revaxi** *(see Side Quest)*. They're offering a generous reward of 2,000 gp for his capture and 250 gp for any information that leads to him.

Public Discussion Hall

This venue hosts public intellectual debates. While the Empire often sponsors the most skilled debaters and public speakers to influence popular opinion, occasionally new ideologies begin taking root in society right here.

While anyone can register to debate, there is a lengthy wait list, with prestigious individuals given priority.

A scholar named **Amadeus Bast** (NG human **noble**, proficient in History) aims to publicly denounce the persecution of Professor Charles Revaxi (see Side Quest - The Censored Scholar). A young recruit at the University this year, Professor Revaxi was his favored instructor.

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His friends have been trying to deter him but to no avail. If the characters arrive at this scene, they might hear the group in a heated discussion. The friends fear that such an outburst might attract the attention of the Ironhand, landing them in serious trouble.

Should the characters aid the friends in persuading Amadeus against his reckless plan, they will be treated to a round of drinks at the nearest tavern, during which they'll be told the tale of the professor Charles.

However, if the characters choose to support Amadeus, assisting him in securing a spot on the debate roster, he will later confide in them privately. He'll express a desire to join the rebels and inquire if the characters have any connections. Amadeus will detail the situation with Professor Charles, adding that he heard the Ironhand even deployed a toxic bomb against rebels recently, underscoring the limitless lengths the Empire goes to keep its power.

Imperial Museum

This venue, maintained by the Empire, showcases select pieces of art and historical artifacts from Tanares. Each exhibit is meticulously curated to tell an epic narrative about the battle against the terrors of the Malrokian Curse, the efforts to unify the continent, and the aspiration for peace through the establishment of Arenas, emphasizing law and discipline. The space is a masterful embodiment of imperial propaganda, and entry is free to the public to reinforce this message.

The Museum's curator is **Major Heresson** (LE human **knight**, with Intelligence 8 and Wisdom 8). He is a retired Ironhand officer assigned to this post to shift him away from active duty without causing a rift with House Heresson. Lacking appreciation for art, he defers to his underlings' decisions related to it. His primary interests are drawing his salary, maintaining authority over the establishment, and, if possible, diverting some of the Museum's funds for his personal use.

Heresson harbors a strong resentment towards the Republic, especially Minister Sedura, under whom he served during the Kemet Invasion. He seizes every opportunity to denounce the government of Freelands. Furthermore, he disseminates false information about Charles Revaxi and the revolutionaries, often fabricating ludicrous lies due to his limited intellect. He is quick to label those he dislikes as Empire traitors. Major Heresson also shares a personal feud with High Censor **Epamion Chellinger,** as Epamion has publicly refuted his false claims and even called him out for being stupid in front of his underlings.

Should the characters inquire about Chellinger, Heresson will spin tales, alleging that Chellinger is a traitor that manipulates the superiors in the Palace to side with him. While he somewhat believes this, most of his claims stem from his hatred for Chellinger. He might hint to the characters about a secret underground chamber beneath the Department of Truth, where he suspects the High Censor is concealing his treacheries against the Empire.

Drunken Sage Tavern and Inn

It is a favorite gathering spot for scholars to convene, drink, and discuss their work. It's always bustling, with its tables filled with lively debates. Unlike other taverns where card games and singing bards are common, here you'll find larger tables dominated by animated discussions. Occasionally, a disagreement might escalate, but most customers here rarely know how to throw a punch.

The tavern offers good beverages and serves tasty food. While the prices lean towards the higher side, they're still accessible for middle-class residents. However, poor students typically opt to just drink the cheapest beer and not eat.

The establishment also houses an inn on the second and third floors, providing comfortable accommodations. Due to its unassuming presence and the safety of the surrounding district, some merchants choose to stay here.

The proprietor, **Ericka Lillyngton** (LG human **veteran**), is a former arena fighter. Although she didn't compete in the renowned Arena of Fate, she made a name for herself in the Illu Die and Braves Arenas. After many victories, she retired with sufficient funds to purchase this tavern and refurbish it, adding the inn. Ericka often reflects on her missed opportunity to move to the Republic, which was caused by the fact that her only son successfully enlisted in the Knights of Tanarean Order, aspiring to become an Ironhand officer. He is currently nearing the end of his training.

If the characters build a good relationship with Ericka, they can learn about her son's association with the Knightly Order in Uptown. He is under the tutelage of Sir Olivier Aurillium Belv, and through this connection, Ericka can arrange a meeting between the characters and Sir Olivier if they want to know more about the Knightly Order or the Uptown.

Side Quest - The Censored Scholar

A professor from the Imperial University named **Charles Revaxi** (CG human **noble**, with proficiency and expertise in History, Insight, Persuasion, and Religion), renowned for his philosophical work, has become a fugitive of the Ironhand and is now missing. He has been indicted by the Empire's censors for producing revolutionary propaganda against the government and collaborating with the Republic to destabilize the social order. Both charges are accurate, as he has published a series of books in recent years that have profoundly challenged the Empire and galvanized the intellectual community.

Initially, Charles' work championed the idea that the quest for knowledge should be unfettered, fostering a plethora of diverse thoughts, concepts, and innovations. This viewpoint resonated with the residents of Scholarnest. However, as his work evolved, he began emphasizing the ethics of personal sovereignty, advocating that every individual possesses an intrinsic right to their

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thoughts, feelings, and decision-making abilities, free from external coercion. This stance offered a stark critique of the Empire's oppressive measures, its censorship regime, and, most provocatively, the indoctrination of the Ironhand soldiers. His meticulous and compelling arguments caused significant upheaval within academic circles.

Currently, Charles is in hiding, penning another book that takes a more overtly political stance. He's weaving together testimonies from families of those converted into Ironhand soldiers, former Ironhand officers who defected to the Republic, and heroes of the Kemet Invasion who oppose the Ironhand's practices. His mission is to disseminate his philosophy in layman's terms, mobilizing the populace against Baleroth's tyranny.

The Ironhand and the **Imperial Department of Truth** have placed a bounty on information leading to Charles' capture. The **High Censor, Epamion Chellinger** (NE human **mage**), personally spearheads the manhunt. He recognizes the threat Charles poses to the Empire, and more pertinently, to Epamion himself. Epamion suspects that Charles is delving too deep into the Department of Truth's operations, which might expose his own corrupt actions and acceptance of bribes.

Charles aims to document more instances of imperial corruption and oppression to finalize his book. He's on the lookout for adventurers aligned with the Republic to assist in investigating the Department of Truth and, if possible, to retrieve the writings of other vanished authors. This would establish the Empire's culpability in silencing and potentially assassinating these innocent thinkers.

Challenges. Characters might side with the Empire and aid in tracking down Charles, which would pit them against local resistance fighters, some Republic **spies**, and a few **mages** supporting Charles' investigations and planned escape.

Alternatively, characters could opt to assist Charles, working to unearth the secrets of the Department of Truth. They might discover a clandestine detention center and torture room beneath the Department, as well as books and documents slated for destruction. Engaging in such activities would inevitably pit them against the Empire's **Ironhand soldiers**, the High Censor, and the Imperial bureaucracy, requiring them to act with discretion to avoid becoming enemies of the state.

Rewards. If the characters assist the High Censor in apprehending Charles, they can expect him to arrange the support from the Imperial Wizards in locating the hidden Cult base in the Capital. They would also receive a reward of 2,000 gp.

However, if they choose to help Charles secure the needed documents from the Department, he will provide them with 500 gp and a *headband of intellect.* He'll also direct them to the rebels in the Bloomburbs district, where they will be seen as trustworthy allies. Charles will suggest that by aiding the rebels, they might help in pinpointing the Cult's location.

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Dweomer District

Complexity: High
Core Concept: An arcane aristocracy district entangled in a web of power struggles among ancient noble houses, clandestine organizations, and the influence of the Imperial Wizards.
Side Quest: Ally with and assist one of three powerful factions — the noble House Omathyr, the Imperial Wizards, or the secretive Eldritch Hand — all embroiled in a power dispute and pursuing their own clandestine agendas.

Dweomer is a high-class noble district dedicated to arcane magic. Formed by the Empire's decision to centralize and monitor all magic users, it houses the arcane aristocracy. These powerful noble families, vested with overseeing magic, are registered with the Imperial Wizards Department and are the only ones sanctioned to use or research arcane magic freely. However, they are kept under constant watch to ensure they remain loyal.

At the heart of Dweomer stands the Torygg's Magic Tower, a beacon of a magical academia second in grandeur only to the Imperial Palace. It remains the sole institution where arcane magic can be studied within the Empire, and entry is granted only to those with exceptional prowess, proven loyalty, and a background that withstands rigorous scrutiny.

The district itself exudes a palpable sense of mystique and grandeur. Luminescent runes shine on its cobblestone streets, complemented by floating lanterns that light the way. Majestic mansions and fortified estates line its pathways, with a few statues, which are in fact stone golems, stationed in public spaces. These golems, who obey only the commands given by the Imperial Wizards, are used to ensure the district's safety and deal with any unlawful magic users. Seamlessly fusing traditional architectural styles with magical elements, the district is crowned by the imposing silhouette of its Magic Tower dominating its skyline.

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Places of Interest

Omathyr Manor

The Omathyr noble house estate is where one can find Archduke **Gregory Orsal Omathyr** *(see Side Quest)* and his family. This luxurious manor, a symbol of power and magical mastery, frequently hosts gatherings of the arcane elite of the Empire.

Securing an appointment with the Archduke is no easy task, but one can gather his attention by presenting a topic that must be addressed to prevent harm to numerous citizens.

The gatherings and balls here typically have select invitations, though they can often be extended to any trusted company of the invited. Most of the Dweomer's elite wizards and even influential merchants can be found at these events.

Elven Plaza

This vibrant market was constructed by the Summer Elves during the first expansion of the Capital, coinciding with the construction of the magic tower. It specializes in selling spell components, herbs, and all implements necessary for the many wizards dwelling in this district.

Each stand and shop here must be approved by the Imperial Wizards and the locale is heavily regulated. Common components can be sold to anyone, but any magic item or component worth 25 gp or more can only be sold to nobles or to individuals with specific permits from the Imperial Wizards.

Many merchants work here, being careful not to antagonize the Imperial Wizards. A few stalls are operated by members of the Eldritch Hand, who infiltrated the city long ago, thriving on goods received at lower prices from all over Tanares, thanks to the secret organization connections. These merchants have received orders to cooperate with Archmage Sundrias (see Sidequest). They are discreetly seeking unaffiliated mercenaries and adventurers willing to work for Sundries.

Mystique Keg Tavern

This spacious and beautiful tavern is the jewel of the Dweomer, offering a unique dining experience. Its cuisine is crafted using special herbs and spices that only those sensitive to magic can perceive. While all patrons enjoy the expertly crafted dishes, only those attuned to the Tanarean Magic Field experience the true depth of the flavors.

Prices are steep, and patrons are primarily nobles and wizards, though students from the tower occasionally dine here to commemorate special occasions, such as advancing a grade in their journey to become wizards—often marked by progressing to cast a new level of spells.

The proprietor of this establishment is **Billgstain Shortstaff** (N gnome **mage**), a proud chef who trained in the culinary arts in Mustardseed and later became a mage by studying at the Torygg Mage Tower. He could have progressed further in magical studies but chose to focus on blending magic and cooking.

Billgstain is friendly with most individuals in the Dweomer and is well-versed in most of the local gossip.

- He's aware that the Archduke is pressuring the Imperial Wizards regarding their abuses.
- He knows that Thidexius claims he is acting to curb the infiltration of a secret organization called the Eldritch Hand.
- Initially, he believed the strange individuals arriving in the district were linked to the Cult of Shadow Wing. However, he now questions if they are part of the Eldritch Hand, the group Thidexius claims to be trying to curb.

Torygg's Magic Tower

As the most important magical center in the Empire and one of the three most prestigious arcane towers in Tanares, this majestic building, brimming with mystical energies, serves as the Empire's exclusive school of wizardry. Overseen by the Imperial Wizards, its courses are reserved for those who pledge loyalty to the Emperor.

Though its external appearance is already impressive, the internal space of the tower is even more expansive thanks to potent spatial magic creating a far larger interior. Hundreds of students reside within, only allowed to utilize magic with proper supervision until graduation. At this point, they assume a role within the Empire and receive a magic-use permit.

While the Imperial Wizards maintain control, the tower's internal affairs are determined by a rector, elected by the council of professors, and approved by Thidexius for a 10-year tenure. The current rector is **Baroness Jessys Wincar** (LE human **archmage**), a middle-aged, accomplished wizard and Duke Wincar's niece. Her position results from her competency in navigating the tower's political ladders and her powerful family's support.

The Wincar house has a long-standing political dispute with the Omathyr, and Jessys is no exception, opposing Archduke Gregory at every opportunity, thus gaining the alliance of Thidexius. Currently, she is conducting investigations among the tower's students for potential infiltrators from the Eldritch Hand. Indeed, one of the students, a young man named **Belliard Moonroot** (NE half-elf **mage**), is masquerading as a less adept wizard while scouting for new members for the Hand. He currently leads a group of academically struggling students, providing them with secret magic lessons, teaching dangerous methods for rapidly increasing one's magical ability, and recruiting the most promising among them.

If the characters assist in finding Belliard and dismantling his group, Baroness Jessys will reward them with three scrolls of their choice, each containing any common wizard spell of up to 5th level. Additionally, she will speak highly of the characters to Thidexius.

Little Yama

This district houses the embassy of Yama, a Tenshikin temple, a martial arts dojo, and residences for several Yama descendants living in the Capital. It is a location rich in culture, featuring a small inn and a restaurant, all constructed in

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Yama's architectural style. Visitors can find unique, mundane Yama products here.

The ambassador, **Okoro Sakamatsu** (LN human **elite warrior**, with Charisma and Wisdom 16, and proficiency and expertise in Insight and Persuasion), is a samurai and astute diplomat tasked with overseeing Baleroth's schemes and negotiating on Yama's behalf. He secretly leads a group of ninjas (LN human **assassins**) tasked with spying across the city.

Currently, Ambassador Sakamatsu is concerned about the movements of the Cult of Shadow Wing. However, the conflict between the Allied Forces and the Empire, particularly concerning Vang's assassination and the lost documents, presents him with substantial difficulties. He relies on Archduke Omathyr to avert an open conflict between the Allied Forces and the Empire. However, Yama demands the Empire cease all efforts to defame Minister Sedura, requiring her to be recognized as a war heroine and defender of Tanares. These demands have been challenging to incorporate into a treaty in Baleroth's court. The attention of Archduke Omathyr has been diverted to resolving issues in the Dweomer, prompting Ambassador Sakamatsu to seek individuals who could help him to indirectly intervene in the district situation without implicating himself, as such intervention could further complicate the current political situation.

If the characters arrive with Yama diplomats, Ambassador Sakamatsu will be exceptionally courteous, offering free accommodations at the Little Yama Inn.

Water Management Center

This facility checks water purity and determines the plans and details for water distribution and sewer maintenance.

The current Manager, **U'Sebas Kokudo** (LN taii'maku **noble**, with Intelligence 18, proficiency in alchemy and tinker tools, and expertise in checks related to water quality, distribution, and infrastructure), has been living in the Empire for decades as an engineer and architect of the water distribution system. A taii'maku dedicated to executing his job with utmost care and dedication, he refrains from engaging in politics or corruption.

U'Sebas is currently distraught because his nephew, O'Kero Kokudo (LN taii'maku **commoner** with Intelligence 18 and the cantrips for *mage hand* and *fire bolt*), a teenager who arrived in the city months ago to study at Torygg's Tower, disappeared. O'Kero is at a loss regarding what to do and sometimes searches taverns and other locations at night, as he cannot bear to tell his brother—who he convinced to let O'Kero come to the Empire—that his son has vanished. Unknown to U'Sebas, O'Kero is imprisoned in the Imperial Wizards Headquarters, under investigation for conspiring with the Eldritch Hand. This is partially true, as he was friendly with Belliard Moonroot (see Torygg Magic Tower). However, he naively believed they were simply a study group, and he was imprisoned when, in a tavern, he was talking with what he thought to be powerful wizards—friends, Belliard—who could teach him more advanced spells.

Imperial Wizards Headquarters

One of the most vital institutions in the Empire, the Imperial Wizards, oversees all arcane research and the use of magic throughout the Empire

Led by **Archmage Thidexius** (LE human **archmage** - see Tanares Sourcebook page 102), this callous and emotionless archmage has recently focused his efforts on addressing the sudden increase in activity from the Eldritch Hand.

Unbeknownst to him, one of his closest advisors, **Adassa Thinsew** (LE human **mage**), has been killed and replaced by a highly skilled Purple Witch, **Garrida Violetsong** (CE **Purple Witch sorcerer**), a disciple of Seraphina Shadowblaze *(see Chapter 7)*. She is slyly weaving evidence against the Eldritch Hand, subtly redirecting the Imperial Wizards away from the Cult. Garrida knows the location of the Shadow Wing fortress but is bound by a powerful Curse that will kill her if she attempts to reveal the information or if anyone tries to extract it from her mind.

Thidexius is not entirely oblivious that something is wrong, but he has yet to determine the traitor. He is permitting this diversion to continue as he secretly investigates the Cult of Shadow Wing. He aims to grant the Cult a false sense of security, hoping they will slip up and expose their plans. Meanwhile, he's willing to play into the Cult's hands and hunt down the Eldritch Hand. He is open to allying with adventurers to assist in locating the Eldritch Hand. Thidexius is open to forming alliances with adventurers to assist in tracking down the Eldritch Hand. If they demonstrate potential, he may share his findings about the Cult and offer a reward for confronting this organization.

Customs House

This is where imports must go to be taxed by the Imperial Bureaucracy, and it is known to be rife with corruption, extortion, smugglers, and pleading merchants.

Two of the workers here were indoctrinated into the Cult of Shadow Wing with promises of great wealth and power and have now become **Shadow Wing initiates**. They have been assisting the Cult by smuggling necessary mystical components into the city hidden in shipping crates, including tameranium and bauronite ores.

The Customs and Imperial Revenue High Inspector is currently on leave, receiving treatment for a complex disease, and has been away from the Customs House for several months, leaving the operation to his second in command, Inspector Farles Troid (LE human **noble**). An ex-lawyer and a corrupt individual, Farles attained this position through his connections in the Emperor's Court and primarily uses it for his own gain. He is not inclined to probe too deeply into the workers' deeds, except to blackmail merchants when they try to pass unlawful merchandise or when he finds a way to extort extra payment from them, citing specific regulations in the import law – which, despite Farles' general negligence at his job, he knows very well.

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Side Quest - An Arcane Situation

Three disparate forces currently compete for influence in the Dweomer district.

- ***The House Omathyr.*** Led by **Archduke Gregory Orsal Omathyr** (LG human **archmage**), the House Omathyr is the mightiest noble house of the Empire. It played a key role in the Empire's creation through a crucial deal with Emperor Baleroth. Known for their honor and self-sacrifice, the Omathyrs consistently defend the populace, often challenging the Emperor's decisions. This dynamic exemplifies Baleroth's approach as a ruler, not merely a despot, but one who skillfully balances control and alliances. Archduke Omathyr, in particular, strongly opposes Thidexius, leader of the Imperial Wizards, considering him an honorless man driven by self-interest. He vigilantly monitors the Imperial Wizards, seeking to curb their excesses in the Capital.
- ***The Imperial Wizards.*** Under the leadership of the notorious Archmage Thidexius, an apprentice and advisor to Emperor Baleroth, they operate without moral restraint, focusing on the Empire's interests. Despite Thidexius' intelligence, his lack of empathy often obscures the societal impact of his drastic measures. Although widely accused of corruption, Thidexius remains loyal to Emperor Baleroth. Rumors suggest Baleroth may have used a singular method of psychosurgery or a controlling artifact to ensure Thidexius' allegiance, but the truth is unknown. Thidexius' current focus is on exposing the Eldritch Hand within the Dweomer, employing tactics like mystical drugs, mind-reading, and torture to extract information. He is also secretly investigating the Cult of Shadow Wing. Aware of a powerful Archmage behind the Eldritch Hand and its growing influence, Thidexius is determined to uncover its goals and eliminate its presence in the Empire.
- ***The Eldritch Hand.*** This covert organization bows to a concealed master, **Archmage Vaeraunt** *(see Tanares Sourcebook page 143)*, who manipulates events from the shadows. Archmage **Sundrias Bellowing** (N human **archmage**) supervises the organization's operations within the Empire. Sundrias aims to uncover the Cult of Shadow Wing's schemes, seizing opportunities to advance the Eldritch Hand's interests. Despite his high position, even Sundrias is unaware of Vaeraunt's true leadership motives or the organization's ultimate goals. Members of the Eldritch Hand believe they are serving a powerful mastermind in exchange for magical knowledge, wealth, and political influence. Sundrias, promised a mystical artifact to restore his sister Ginnize Bellowing, who was transformed into a Watcher aberration, has been loyal to the Hand for years, hoping that his success will earn him the artifact. He has served the Hand for several years, aspiring that success in this mission will finally secure his promised reward. He is recruiting individuals to the Hand and bringing members from beyond the Empire (predominantly from the Magocracy) to infiltrate the city and investigate the Cult's plot.

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However, the Imperial Wizards have been closely monitoring the Eldritch Hand's activities, leading to widespread anxiety in the Dweomer district as citizens face interrogations and some are forcibly taken to the Imperial Wizards' Headquarters based on minimal evidence.

These circumstances have made Archmage Sundrias' recruitment efforts for the Eldritch Hand increasingly challenging. Despite offering wealth and power, many mages, even those unhappy with the Empire, are apprehensive about persecution by the Imperial Wizards. In response, Sundrias is fostering public discontent against the Imperial Wizards' aggressive tactics and seeking evidence of their corruption, occasionally even fabricating such evidence, to weaken their influence.

Sundrias is actively looking for mercenaries, adventurers, or anyone interested in joining the Eldritch Hand to help expose corruption within the Imperial Wizards. He tells local adventurers that his associates and employees have been harassed and unjustly imprisoned by the Imperial Wizards, accusing them of waging a crusade against anyone who resists their control.

Archduke Omathyr is attempting to rein in the excesses of the Imperial Wizards and is striving to protect and pacify the citizens of Dweomer. He seeks heroes, good-aligned adventurers, or honorable mercenaries to assist him in protecting the people by investigating the disappearances and finding proof of the excesses committed by the Imperial Wizards.

The Imperial Wizards are confronted with a dilemma: they are grappling with a surge in Cult of Shadow Wing activity within the city while attempting to ascertain who is directing the operations of the Eldritch Hand. Concurrently, they are being pressured by Archduke Omathyr and the citizens of Dweomer. To circumvent this problem, Thidexius has opted to secretly hire mercenaries or adventurers willing to investigate the Eldritch Hand, eradicate them from the city, and attribute the conflict to a dispute between the Eldritch Hand and the Cult of Shadow Wing.

Challenges. The characters can capture the attention of any of the three groups and decide to investigate or ally with any of them.

- If they decide to assist the Eldritch Hand, they must investigate the Imperial Wizards, uncover proof of corruption or fabricate false evidence thereof, and expose them to the public. Infiltration of the Imperial Wizards Headquarters may be required, confronting numerous magical protections, Ironhand soldiers, and Imperial Wizards defending the location — all while maintaining secrecy to evade becoming enemies pursued by the Empire.
- Should they assist Archduke Omathyr, they will need to investigate the identities of those arrested by the Imperial Wizards and discern their fates. They'll unveil incidents of imprisonment with scant evidence of crimes and the employment of brutal information-gathering methods, including torture. However, they will also discover the existence of the Eldritch Hand, a malevolent organization with an inscrutable goal, and that the true objective of the Imperial Wizards is to reveal their intentions, whatever the cost. At this point, the characters will be tasked by Duke Omathyr to help infiltrate the Imperial Wizards Headquarters and free the innocent prisoners, while he will keep them distracted.
- If aiding the Imperial Wizards, they must investigate and assist in eradicating the Eldritch Hand from Dweomer, all while managing the scrutiny of Duke Omathyr, who will begin to investigate the characters and seek illicit actions taken by them if his informants perceive alignment with Thidexius.

Rewards.

- If they assist the Eldritch Hand, Archmage Sundrias will also express keen interest in learning more about the Cult of Shadow Wing and will share any discovered information with the characters. He will also reward the characters with a *staff of charming* and two *potions of speed*.
- If they assist Archduke Omathyr, he will take the responsibility of stopping the Eldritch Hand and getting the Imperial Wizards to stop their extreme actions against the citizens, while asking the characters to delve further into uncovering the actions of the Cult of Shadow Wing.

  He will promise the characters to deliver any information he gets that might lead to the Cult's hideout and will reward the characters with a *mantle of spell resistance* and a *flametongue weapon* of the characters' desired type *(he will personally transfer the enchantment)*.
- If they assist the Imperial Wizards, Thidexius will thank the characters and show his worry about the necessity of tracking the location from where the Cult is orchestrating their current attacks. He will reward the characters with 1,000 gp and four *potions of superior healing*, and will also inform the characters of any developments in searching for the Cult.

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Martpart District

Complexity: Medium
Core Concept: A bustling mercantile area teeming with vibrant nightlife, steeped in intrigue and disputes over profit.
Side Quest: A merchant woman, unjustly killed due to the schemes of a rival merchant, has returned by interference of the Cult as a powerful banshee seeking vengeance.

Martpart is the mercantile heart of the Imperial Capital, alive with many different cultures, colors, smells, and sounds. The marketplaces brim with vitality, featuring colorful stalls vying for customers' attention. Under the vigilant gaze of the Ironhand Army, the district remains lively both day and night, illuminated by lanterns along the stone streets amidst the incessant din of haggling.

In the alleys, secret doors lead to hidden locales where illegal trades and clandestine meetings occur. Despite the vibrant atmosphere, Martpart's darker side is shrouded in secrecy. Behind closed doors, merchant groups plot to control the market and fix prices. Mercenaries and adventurers are covertly hired for protection or to intimidate rivals. The district also hosts secret auctions selling forbidden items, including magic components, poisons, and rare or banned books.

If the Municipal Market is Martpart's heart, then the Illu Die Arena is its soul. It serves as an entertainment hub for the lower and middle classes, a stepping stone for fighters aiming to reach the famous Arena of Fate. It is where citizens' disputes are resolved in battle, attracting daily and nightly crowds. The arena, magically lit, offers a range of unique fighting grounds thanks to hidden taii'maku mechanisms. These allow for various arena setups, making each battle unique and exhilarating.

Beyond the arena and markets, numerous businesses stay open late, providing food, drinks, and entertainment for all budgets. Collectively, Martpart earns its moniker as the 'district that never sleeps'.

Places of Interest

Municipal Market

Nestled in the pulsating heart of the Imperial Capital, the Municipal Market stands as a vast mixture of different goods, from fragrances and spices, to freshly picked vegetables, to newly baked bread, all stalls bustling with the murmur of haggling voices. Frequented by citizens from various socio-economic strata, it acts as the lifeline supplying everyday essentials, from vegetables, wheat, and eggs to an exotic array of spices and from commonplace utensils to vibrant clothing.

Maelia Fairwing (NE human **spy**), a cunning merchant with an astute ear for secrets, navigates through the lively stalls, her eyes ever-watchful for information that flutters through the air, hidden amidst mundane chatter. She owns

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more than one shop and stall in the market and has been one of the most influential and well-known individuals here. She only has eyes for profit, and while she never crosses the line to bring attention to her actions, she is always searching for ways to weed out the competition in the market.

Currently, Maelia is having problems in her shops with some of her workers disappearing. She believes another merchant is daring to cross her, and she wants to uncover who it is *(see Side Quest)*.

Illu Die Arena

The Illu Die Arena, an iconic edifice where steel clashes and disputes dissolve amidst the resonating cheers of the spectating masses, adheres strictly to Imperial laws, providing a legitimate, albeit brutal, stage to settle civil disputes and personal vendettas. Common folk and nobles alike engage champions - often mercenaries or adventurers - to represent their quarrels in non-lethal combat within its walls.

The uniqueness of the Illu Die Arena lies in the intricate mechanisms and massive cogwheels beneath its surface that can utterly transform the battle landscape between each match. From spiked pits to elevations, and from mystical portals to pits of molten lava, every dynamic change is brought to life by the pinnacle of taii'maku engineering and magic.

Sir Aribaraug (LN human **knight**) is the current administrator of this arena, and the one who acts as the judge for the fights, a position that was vested in him by Baleroth's court. He is impartial and believes in the divine providence of the battles, knowing that the gods Tamera and Bauron will favor the righteous.

The arena has had a sudden increase in cancellations of matches, with champions dropping and appearing terrorized. They claim to have been attacked by ghosts during the night, and are causing a great problem to the Ironhand, clogging the Arena queue and also creating problems for Aribaraug *(see Side Quest)*.

Halfling Barrows

Enveloped by the protective arms of nature just beyond the city walls, Halfling Barrows exist in a serene bubble, untouched by the capital's bustling life. Fertile orchards, tended by gentle halfling hands and protected by tiny pixies, all under the benevolent gaze of their goddess Fruitful, provide uniquely oversized vegetables that are the best one can find in the capital. They supply the best restaurants and inns and a few more expensive stalls in the Martpart.

Poppy Willowwhisper (CG halfling **commoner**), is the current sensation of the Barrows. She won the prize for the best cook and dancer at the last halfling festival and has been showered with attention. She is friendly with everyone, and her good energy and empathy often make people believe they are closer to her than they really are. Because she can often be a pushover, it is easy for people to sometimes use her to their favor, but Poppy has a pixie friend named Whimsy who has been guiding her.

Whimsy has been insisting that Poppy get out of the city, as she claims that something scary is happening. Poppy refuses to leave, but the faerie is trying to find someone that can convince Poppy or find the source of the chills and nightmares she is having *(see Side Quest)*.

Akoto's Engineering Shop and School

Precision and logic cement themselves in every brick of the Akoto Engineering Shop and School, under the austere leadership of Master Engineer **A'Haru Akoto** (LG taii'maku **mage**, with proficiency and expertise in engineering and alchemy tools). With a mind governed by order and methodical reasoning, A'Haru molds young minds, accepted strictly on merit, into the future torchbearers of engineering and mathematical prowess. Here, social status is rendered irrelevant, dwarfed by knowledge and innovation.

This shop is the best in the city for mechanical parts and it is one of the few places where one can buy bauronite legally in the capital, albeit at a very high price.

A'Haru is the one who does maintenance of the Illu Die Arena's internal mechanisms, and he is the only one who truly knows how it works and how it was built.

Currently, A'Haru is occupied trying to help a fellow taii'maku, U'Sebas Kokudo *(see Water Distribution Management in the Dweomer District)* and is unaware of what is happening in Martpart.

The Late Night Tavern

In the dimly lit confines of The Late Night Tavern, emotions drenched in strong spirits weave tales of ephemeral connections and forgotten inhibitions. The establishment blossoms under the veil of night, its patrons often seeking to drown sorrows or find companionship for the night.

The place is mostly ignored by the Ironhand, as many of the Officers and other bureaucrats of the Empire are patrons of the locale.

Madame Selene Warmwind (N summer elf **noble**), dresses elegantly in the night. Shrouded in mystery, she oversees this place, receives patrons, arranges meetings, and cares for her staff. She is always ready to find the proper liquor or the right company for those in need, all while gathering secrets and knowledge from her patrons' hushed whispers and drunken braggings.

She knows about the death of Myriad, and that it was a plot by Maelia Fairwing. As a fellow elf, she is willing to offer help with information to anyone who seeks to help uncover the case. She knows that Poppy was Myriad's closest friend, and that Maelia sold the prized recipe to Chef Gordano. She also knows that Bessie refused to help Myriad when she became unable to pay for a group of champions to fight for her.

Little Miss Cloth Shop

A shop with a simple exterior, with an old fashioned but heartwarming appearance, including a handcrafted wooden sign hanging at its front carrying its name. Once inside, one can

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find a symphony of vibrant colors greeting every visitor at the Little Miss Cloth Shop. Under Matriarch **Bessie Bumblefoot's** (NG halfling **commoner** with proficiency and expertise in tailor tools) tender watch, the shop is adorned with generations of halfling craftsmanship. The place is known for its great variety of pieces, all colorful, durable, and affordable. Known as great tailors, the Bumblefoot family has run this shop for generations.

Recently, the place almost caught fire twice, with many pieces of clothing being destroyed. Luckily the family was close at the time, and they were able to prevent it from spreading. They believe someone must be behind this, but the Ironhands found nothing so far *(Myriad is doing it by taking advantage of her ability to cross walls and using mage hand to move lit candles and start fires - See Side Quest)*.

The Food and Drink Block

Tantalizing aromas wind their way through the vibrant chaos of the Food and Drink Block, where street cuisine shows its finest in the capital, offering patrons the best finger food to accompany their drinks, granting them an escape from the daily grind. Positioned strategically before the Illu Die Arena, it caters to diverse palates, presenting an array of eateries from humble stalls to famous dining establishments. All are united in a single block where one can find chairs and tables inside the establishments or in the streets encircling the block, and where one can eat in the open on hot nights.

The most well-known place of the block is Gordano's Cheese and Potatoes, a cozy place right in front of the entrance to the Arena. Chef **Gordano** (CN human **commoner**, with proficiency and expertise in all cooking-related checks) is the owner of the place. He is very creative with his dishes, but also known to be aloft and forgetful.

Currently, the Block has been facing an invasion of rats that are creating huge problems with the clients *(they are penumbral miseries under command of the Cult of Shadow Wing agents that are aiding Myriad - See Side Quest)*.

Side Quest - A Banshee of Problems

Myriad Glaid, an elf woman (previously CG, elf **mage**, now CE, page 295) who used to be an owner of a small stall that began to make success some years ago in the Municipal Market. She was killed during an arena fight in the Illu Die Arena, after falling into a series of manipulations to remove her from business that included false rumors, lies, and extortion, which ended with her being poisoned on the day of her match to defend her honor in the Illu Die Arena. Without

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money to pay for adventurers, she and her brother were forced to fight for themselves, and they died an "accidental" death at the Arena.

Her spirit, seeking vengeance against the residents of Martpart, returned as a banshee. The Cult of Shadow Wing, seizing the opportunity to create more chaos in the city and divert attention from their hidden location, decided to help her in searching and eliminating her victims, after she agreed that upon her vengeance being completed, she would serve the Cult for a hundred years.

GM Note: The individual responsible for Myriad's return as a banshee is a Kemet necromancer named Atilas Jinasael, who betrayed his people and is working for the Cult *(see more in Downtown Side Quest - The Missing Acolytes)*. He is hiding in the sewers of the Downtown District, where he is carrying out other plans. If you wish, you can link this quest to the one in Downtown by introducing the characters to some of the undead under Atilas' command who are roaming the sewers.

Myriad is not aware of this fact, as when she gained consciousness, she was alone in the sewers.

The Banshee's targets

Maelia Fairwing. Being a merchant with an uncanny ability to gather secrets, she discovered Myriad's unique recipe that allowed her stall to garner success and fame in the Municipal Market and began selling it to spread the secret. Hungry for control over the market, Maelia also spread false rumors about Myriad's character and created lies and false testimonies of food poisoning from those who consumed her products, which ultimately led to her financial ruin.

It was against Maelia's champions that Myriad fought, as both had a dispute about the recipe, defamation, and destruction of property.

Sir Aribaraug. She blames him for not canceling the fight on the day when she was not feeling well. He used magic to detect a poison or disease and found none, but what was used on her was custom-made to pass the detection, and Aribaraug decided to follow the rules and ignored her plight.

Bessie. She was one of Myriad's best clients whom the elf even aided more than once by helping take care of her family's youngsters on more than one occasion. But when she most needed it, Bessie believed the rumors and not her, and did not lend her money to pay for champions to fight for her instead of her and her brother.

Bessie did have enough money, but it was not an amount she could easily part with, and she was swayed by the rumors.

Chef Gordano. He unknowingly purchased the recipes of Myriad that were stolen by Maelia and began to produce her dishes. To make matters worse, he even helped spread the news about the Myriad's fight and offered great discounts on the day to bring many patrons to his restaurant. Myriad saw people eating her recipe at his shop before she entered the Arena that day.

He did not know what he was doing and is not even aware that Myriad has anything against him.

Poppy Willowwhisper. The halfling was a close friend of Myriad, who treated her as a younger sister she never had. Myriad believed Poppy when she encouraged her not to run and to face things head on. Her optimism caused Myriad's death, as she should have closed her shop instead of fighting against Maelia's champions. Now, Poppy continues to live happily while Myriad is dead.

Unknown to Myriad, Poppy was fooled by some people paid by Maelia. They told her that the temple had seen great luck in her friend's future. They told her stories of heroism and overcoming obstacles, and gullible as she was, she urged her friend to fight for what she believed in. Poppy still misses her dear friend, and she blames herself for her death. She decided to change and began to listen to Whimsy's advice, trying not to be fooled ever again.

Challenges. The characters will have to investigate the current happenings in Martpart, finding the strange pattern of problems, to finally find what can link it all, the death of Myriad.

Myriad and the Shadow Wing cultists who are helping her (**Shadow Wing initiates**, **mages**, and **masters of pain**), will try to eliminate the NPCs she seeks vengeance against.

It will be up to the characters to try avoid these murders and to stop the ghost either by destroying her, or by somehow convincing her to let go of her grudges, which can be done by accomplishing the following:

- Getting Maelia to face justice for her crimes.
- Convincing Myriad that Sir Aribaraug just followed the law, or making him repent for his actions and withdraw from his position.
- Destroying Bessie's shop, or making Bessie know what she did, which will prompt her to pass the shop to her offspring and reopen Myriad's stall in her honor.
- Make Chef Gordano go bankrupt, or let Gordano know the story, which will prompt him to never make Myriad's recipe again, and find a way to show Myriad that he never knew about the situation nor intended her any harm.

Rewards. The rewards will depend on whoever they end up helping.

- Sir Aribaraug will give the characters one *+2 weapon* of any kind of their choice if he gets to know of the situation and receives aid from the characters.
- Bessie will give the characters a Handy Haversack, a family heirloom, if she gets to know about the situation and receives help from the characters to solve the problem.
- Chef Gordano will give the characters 1,000 gp if he gets to know the situation and receives help.
- The Food and Drink Block is offering 500 gp to whoever frees it from the plague of rats.

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Arenarea District

Complexity: High

Core Concept: Teeming with opulence, political intrigue, and gambling, it is under the covert influence of the Bloodbound Mafia. Housing the Arena of Fate, it is a grand stage for imperial power plays.

Side Quest: A supposedly accidental murder has ignited a conflict between the leader of the Bloodbound Mafia and a baron secretly aligned with the Cult. This conflict must be resolved before it escalates further.

Arenarea stands as a vivid testament to the grandeur and power of the Tanarean Empire. It is the district that houses the legendary Arena of Fate, the venue for pivotal battles that shape the empire's politics. Highly prized for its proximity to both the Palacedomain and key attractions like the Arena, the Hippodrome, and the city's most important markets, Arenarea boasts some of the finest and most expensive shops. It is a residential haven for the loftiest of nobles, eclipsed in opulence only by the immense mansions within the Palacedomain itself.

The district is secretly overseen by the Bloodbound, a secret mafia led by influential nobles. This organization maintains a rigid internal hierarchy, exerting control over the criminal underworld and serving as the de facto lords of organized crime on Tanares. Their only true competitors are their arch-rivals, the decentralized Third Eye, who manage to elude their dominion in the underworld.

Famed for its expansive cobblestone avenues adorned with statues and monuments to legendary heroes, the district's grandeur culminates in the towering Arena of Fate. Arenarea's architecture is a sumptuous blend of styles from various regions of the empire. Elegant buildings feature intricate carvings that narrate historical epics, showcase mythical creatures, and pay homage to the gods Tamera and Bauron. Stately mansions with expansive front gardens, resplendent white columns, and elegant fountains are a common sight.

Within these gilded boundaries, a complex dance of power and influence unfolds. Arenarea is home to numerous high-ranking officials and key figures within the empire's bureaucracy. Their opulent residences often serve as clandestine venues for pivotal negotiations and critical alliances. The Arena of Fate is more than a battleground — it is a political theater. Here, decisions that shape the empire are either

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whispered over glasses of exquisite wine or sealed amid the resonant roars of arena combat, as dictated by imperial law.

On the outskirts of Arenarea, the Inlet's Bazaar epitomizes luxury. Frequented by the empire's wealthy elite, the marketplace offers imported wares from across the continent, as well as a select number of shops specializing in magic items. These magical purveyors cater exclusively to high nobility, in accordance with the empire's stringent regulations on magical wares. The district is also a hub for gambling, with the Golden Chalice Casino, the Hippodrome, and the Dusk of Justice betting house standing as the most prominent venues for wagering in the entire capital.

Places of Interest

Arena of Fate

This esteemed arena symbolizes political influence, entertainment, and societal structure, drawing in skilled combatants pursuing fame and fortune. Currently, the arena is promoting a major event set to occur in a few days: a clash between the champions of **Don Bartollo Basco** (LE human **noble**) and the heroes of **Baron Viktor Greystone** (LE human **knight**). This battle aims to resolve both a land dispute and the untimely death of a servant from Don Bartollo's household (see the "A Don Takes Care of His Own" side quest). Posters heralding this grand spectacle are prominently displayed throughout the Arenarea district. Some advertisements imply that both sides are seeking adventurers and mercenaries, worthy of joining their team of champions for the great honor of fighting in Tanares' most prestigious arena.

Arena Bureau

This establishment is the official bureau for all matters of arena combat. Here, individuals can request an arena battle, solicit a trial by combat, or register to become a champion. No fight can begin without prior registration and vetting. Presiding over this establishment is **Sargat Wiindwill** (N human **priest**), a cleric of Bauron who has served the Empire for decades. Well-known within the city's bureaucracy, he has vocally criticized the Celestianist Reform. Consequently, he has distanced himself from the church, continuing his role as a judge and serving as the Secretary of Arenas and Trials in the Capital. He oversees all bureaucratic procedures concerning judgment by combat and arena fights. He is growing close to the Greystone family, who secretly support the Evolutionist counter-reform against the Celestianists. He is trying to persuade capable combatants to fight for the Greystone family in the next arena battle, claiming that Bauron will favor them with victory, as he believes they are in the right.

Dusk of Justice Betting House

This establishment holds the exclusive privilege, granted by imperial decree, to operate wagers on the Arena of Fate. Managed by House Thornridge, the family boasts intimate connections with Emperor Baleroth's court. They enjoy high standing in the Empire's elite circles thanks to their elegance, luxury, and exclusive social events. Although the Dusk of Justice is just one of their many ventures, it is a focal point of internal dispute within the family. House Thornridge is not a monolithic entity; internal branches of the family are in constant competition for control.

Currently, two key figures compete for ascendancy within the family. One is **Lady Larini Thornridge** (CE human **assassin**), a cunning woman celebrated for her charismatic social presence among society's elite. Opposite her is **Lord Vincar Thornridge** (LN human **mage**), a young but astute wizard who assumed administrative duties over the Dusk of Justice following his father's mysterious demise. He is eager to prove his worthiness as the family's future patriarch to his grandfather, **Marquis Baston Thornridge** (LE human **archmage**). The old Marquis is renowned for his keen sense of justice, albeit with a ruthless reputation. He is known to reward subordinates highly for success but also punishes defiance or failure with exemplary cruelty.

Lord Vincar is secretly seeking aid from competent investigators to uncover dirt on Lady Larini so he can get the upper hand.

Golden Chalice Casino

As the Imperial Capital's only legal casino, established by decree of Emperor Baleroth, this establishment has been the downfall of many family fortunes. Operated by the Ducal Genovia family, the casino prides itself on its stringent stance against cheating and staunchly maintains that the house never manipulates the odds. Their cut from all games, combined with the exclusivity of their operation, generates immense profits.

However, behind the Genovia name's luster lies a darker reality: they secretly rule the Bloodbound Mafia within the Imperial Capital. The casino functions as a facade for an array of illegal activities. Although suspicions from Imperial authorities occasionally cast shadows upon their reputation, the Genovia family's considerable wealth and influence within Baleroth's court typically persuade these authorities to turn a blind eye. When boundaries are overstepped, the lower and mid-ranking members of the mafia absorb the blame, thus protecting the bosses. Those who fail to exhibit loyalty to their godfathers often vanish without a trace, a fate that sometimes extends to their families.

The daily operations of the casino are currently overseen by **Lord Vinicius Genovia** (LE human **spy**) and his brother **Lord Girtolo Genovia** (LE human **thug**), both grandsons of Duke George Genovia.

They are actively seeking formidable combatants to bolster Don Bartollo Basco's ranks in the upcoming arena match. Alternatively, they are searching for discreet assassins to eliminate some of the opposition's fighters. This search comes from the realization that their own men are not capable of assassinating warriors fit for the Arena of Fate.

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Cloaked Brewer Pub

Exuding sophistication, the Cloaked Brewer is a haven where elegance and secrecy intertwine. Crystal chandeliers dangle from gilded ceilings, and dimly lit interiors are dotted with intricately carved breithwood tables. Here, patrons in fine attire discuss crucial matters over refined brews served in valuable goblets, each worth more than an average villager's yearly earnings.

Yet behind this refinement lies the meeting point for the local leaders of the Bloodbound Mafia. Agreements are made and sealed in hushed tones, accompanied by covert nods and cryptic handshakes. Hidden chambers, secured by elegantly dressed enforcers, provide sanctuaries for private discussions. The main floor caters to wealthy merchants and high-ranking officials, while the establishment's hidden underbelly doubles as an armory and a storehouse for smuggled goods.

The pub is under the vigilant oversight of **Rodrigo Cappa** (LE human **gladiator**), a mafia lieutenant. Though past his prime, this middle-aged, bald man, wearing a black eye patch and clad in a tailored black suit and matching hat, commands the loyalty of a cadre of "gentlemen" ready to address any "issues" that may arise. Typically, six to twelve guards (all LE human **thugs**) maintain a watchful presence within the pub.

While the ambiance here is often relaxed, it has become tense as power struggles have strengthened in Arenarea. Rodrigo has been cautious with who frequents the pub, while trying to amass extra "workforce" for the current conflicts happening in their district.

Hippodrome

Second only to the thrilling arena battles in the affections of the Capital's elite, horse racing has carved out its niche of excitement and investment. Many nobles delight in the sport, often investing in rare horse breeds and promising jockeys to compete in the races held here.

Owned by **Duke Wincar's** family through an Imperial concession, the Hippodrome is a place where few dare to challenge the authority of one of the Empire's most formidable nobles. Because of this, the venue maintains a stance of neutrality toward all factions competing for power in the Arenarea. Tradition dictates that meetings between political rivals often occur here, adhering to the rule that no disruptions will be caused within Duke Wincar's domain. On the rare occasions when this rule has been breached, the consequences for the offenders have been dire.

Oak & Stone Hotel

The most renowned and opulent hotel in the Capital, this establishment is owned by **Don Bartollo Bosco** (LE human **noble**), a fat man distinguished by his expansive mustache and loud voice, as well as his inclination to surround himself with young women. The hotel has been a family heirloom for generations, and the Boscos have carefully updated it to reflect contemporary tastes, earning it acclaim throughout the Empire. Contrary to what one might expect from his flamboyant demeanor and lack of etiquette, Don Bartollo is a masterful administrator. He knows how to cultivate a content workforce, so exceptional service is one of this location's distinguishing features.

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He is concerned with the conflict with Viktor Greystone, seeking adventurers to aid his cause (see Side Quest).

The "Usual" Tavern

The most prestigious tavern in the whole Empire, known for its high prices but also for being one of the places with the most outstanding dishes and brews on the whole continent.

As the first one to establish itself in the Arenarea, it gained its name long in the past, as it was the sole one to serve the nobility, who always went to the "Usual" Tavern for a meeting. It was once called The Dragon Tavern, but this name was long ago substituted by what people decided to call it.

The tavern has been owned by the Silverveil family for generations. However, the latest generation, having been raised amidst the wealth and prominence their house acquired, has lost interest in running what they consider to be a lesser enterprise. Following the death of their patriarch at the end of the Kemet Invasion, the family entered into a stewardship agreement with the renowned gnome chef **Gearot Michelline** (CG gnome **mage**, with proficiency and expertise in all checks related to culinary arts and beverages). Gearot is an esteemed figure in the world of gnome haute cuisine, having honed his skills in the upscale restaurants of Mustardseed in the Seashores. Such is his culinary prowess that he is praised as one of the best on Tanares, said to never misjudge a pairing between a dish and its complementary wine.

Of late, Gearot finds himself troubled by unsettling rumors concerning the Silverveil family. Their current lord has been pressuring him for additional payments and has been spotted consorting with mysterious individuals in the tavern's basement *(see a Noble Vendetta Side Quest - page 161)*.

Inlet's Bazaar Block

This bazaar is known as the market for the wealthy in the capital, where prices are high, but where one can find rare goods from the entire continent. One can find here the best spices from the Seashores and Tsvetan, the finest silk from Yama, and even rare gems and metals from the dwarves of Stravian. The shops and stalls here are all dedicated to goods of the highest quality, as one must pay great sums to sell their products at this bazaar. The fees are paid to the Empire, and administered by **Lord Frenzuck** (LE human **noble**, with proficiency and expertise in all Charisma-related checks), the Lord Mayor of the Capital.

This is one of the few locations where one can find magic items and spell components, but their selling is restricted to registered noble houses, as per Imperial laws.

The most important merchant in this Bazaar is **Brava Lustrillia** (CN summer elf **mage**, with proficiency and expertise in all checks related to negotiating, accounting, and trading), an elven woman who often wins bargaining sessions with her bright smile. Her good-humored and charismatic personality conceals the skills of a master merchant. She is said to know everyone at the Bazaar, and how to acquire any good, legal or not, depending on the payment, but she denies that part. She is friends with the mother of Thiago Monteserra, who died in a strange "hunting accident" caused by Baron Greystone. She is secretly seeking people to investigate the case, as she is not one to not repay her debts to her friends, and Thiago's mother has aided Brava's daughter in hiding from the Ironhand and fleeing the city when she was accused of smuggling magic items to the rebels.

Side Quest - A Don Takes Care of His Own

Conflict brews between House Basco and House Greystone, ignited by territorial disputes and a fatal hunting incident. **Thiago Monteserra**, a servant of Don Bartollo Bosco (LE human **noble** - see Oak & Stone Hotel), was killed by an arrow loosed by the son of Baron Viktor Greystone (see a Noble Vendetta Side Quest in Random Encounter section). The incident escalated from a tragic accident to a heated confrontation, as Thiago was found dead on land claimed by his employer, Don Bartollo, suggesting a Greystone trespass.

Days after the accusations flew, the Greystones produced evidence claiming the disputed land as their own, acquired decades prior. The situation escalated further when Greystone employees were found on the banks of the Rubicund River, an act perceived as retaliation. Several of Don Bartollo's henchmen have since mysteriously vanished.

Now, Don Bartollo has initiated formal proceedings against the Greystones, challenging them in the Arena of Fate. Unbeknownst to most, this feud also conceals a power struggle between the Bloodbound Mafia and the Cult of Shadow Wing. Don Bartollo is a secret member of the Mafia, while Baron Viktor Greystone has been enticing low-ranking nobles into the Cult with promises of power.

Both parties are recruiting adventurers for the upcoming arena duel, as well as mercenaries and assassins willing to eliminate the opposition.

Challenges. PCs can choose to side with either Don Bartollo or Baron Viktor Greystone, knowing full well that both parties are prepared to escalate the conflict to bloody proportions. Should the adventurers opt to champion one side in the arena, they must be prepared for assassination attempts and blackmail from the rival faction. Alternatively, the characters could engage in darker deeds, either by partaking in assassination attempts or by thwarting those of the opposition.

Rewards. Besides financial rewards, aiding either Don Bartollo or Baron Viktor could lead to further revelations.

Helping Don Bartollo may expose the characters to Baron Viktor's Cult connections, whether directly or indirectly. He may also enlist their help to protect other Bloodbound members and introduce them to Duke George for collaborative action against their common foe.

Aiding Baron Viktor may also yield crucial intelligence. The characters might unearth his alliance with the Cult and his plot against the family of Duke George Genovia, leading them to the side quest "A Noble Vendetta", or they can choose to infiltrate deeper into the cult's ranks by gaining Viktor's trust and ascending the hierarchy until they uncover the secret location of the Cult's stronghold in the capital.

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Oldtown District

Complexity: High

Core Concept: A historical district featuring labyrinthine streets, ancient traditions, and old families who control the economy, while rebels pose as common workers.

Side Quest: The Council of Traditions, composed of the oldest families, is investigating a series of disappearances among workers in Oldtown. Internal conflicts within the council are set to erupt if nothing is done.

Oldtown serves as the historical heart of the capital city, originally a small village west of the Rubicund River within the Kingdom of Orsal. Emperor Baleroth chose this site for its strategic military significance and mystical attributes of the land, initiating construction that eventually expanded into today's Imperial Capital. The area is rich in history and heritage, its narrow streets preserving ancient traditions and remnants of Orsal's architectural style, as well as family businesses that have endured for generations. Known for housing primary resource processors like lumber mills, slaughterhouses, forges, brickworks, and looms, Oldtown plays a vital role in the city's economy.

Although the government tightly controls the narrative surrounding the Empire's history, Oldtown is also a hub for subversive activities. While crime rates are low, many residents are disillusioned with the Empire's corruption and oppression, making this district both a gathering place for rebels and a heavily patrolled area by the Ironhand forces.

Architecturally, Oldtown is a labyrinth of narrow cobblestone lanes winding through buildings rich in historical design. These structures, adorned with ornate carvings and murals dulled by time stand in contrast to the Empire's modern opulence. Old shops, bakeries, and large manufacturing operations occupy this district, some having been established before the city even expanded beyond the Rubicund River.

Often referred to as the "cemetery of the capital," Oldtown is known both for hosting the Cemetery of Sacred Remembrance, and as a derogatory term for the district's traditionalism and old architecture. The population here skews older and outsiders are generally met with suspicion. The Moon Tower, the principal temple of Bauron, stands as the district's most prominent structure, providing comfort to the grieving and the promise of Bauron's justice in the afterlife. Meanwhile,

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the Gravekeeper's Guild handles the administration of the cemetery and practical matters related to the deceased.

Oldtown also highlights the Empire's economic and societal disparities. While long-established businesses flourish, new ventures frequently find it difficult to gain a foothold. Generations of families often work in the same industries, typically for the few families that own businesses in the area, earning just enough to sustain themselves but rarely enough to provide the next generation with opportunities for social mobility. Employment options outside these dominant families are scarce, making most workers feel the need to be subservient to their employers. Angering the wrong people in Oldtown can swiftly lead to an entire family of workers falling into ruin.

Places of Interest

Hogaw's Wind Inn

This is the location of the main entrance to the Cult of Shadow Wing's fortress, a secret closely guarded by cultists who infiltrated the capital during its initial expansion under Emperor Baleroth. These cultists have operated under secrecy, their activities shielded by a set of powerful orbs — artifacts created by the Ungods that protect the subterranean temple-fortress from any magical divination. The Inn is overseen by **Zalrik Kasmar** (CE human **master of pain**) and is used by the Cult to disguise the temple entrance as an old, run-down inn situated at the end of Sheep's End Street.

The inn has steep prices designed to discourage non-cultists from staying, while simultaneously avoiding suspicion. Most locals believe the establishment is funded by the dwindling wealth of the owner's family, descendants of Hogaw, a successful novelist known for his popular horror books. As a result, many think the inn is on the verge of closing, given its scant patronage.

In reality, the majority of guests are either criminals seeking a secluded place to stay, or cultists of the Ungods who have traveled from other regions to conduct activities in the capital. If the characters stumble upon this location unaware of its true nature, they will find it difficult to uncover any useful information. The cultists exercise extreme caution and secrecy when dealing with guests who are not part of their organization. For more information on this location, see Chapter 7 - The Shadow Wing Lair.

O'Myre Slaughterhouse

This expansive slaughterhouse serves as the city's primary source of meat. It distributes affordable cuts to The Boom Market, shops in Sloghood, and to commoners in Oldtown, while reserving premium cuts for the Martpart Market and businesses within the capital's walls. Managed by the O'Myre family for generations, they take great pride in their expertise in meat quality, disease recognition in livestock, and the rigorous cleanliness of their processing methods that supply the city.

Currently helmed by Grivus O'Myre (LN human **veteran**, with proficiency and expertise in all checks related to

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meat processing) and his wife **Sahrene O'Myre** (LN half-elf **scout**, with proficiency and expertise in all checks related to business administration, market strategy, and negotiation), the facility maintains its crucial role in the city's food supply. Grivus oversees the meat processing, while Sahrene manages the business operations. Sahrene has proven to be more than just supportive; she is the real force behind the slaughterhouse's recent ascension. She successfully secured an Imperial edict requiring businesses to disclose whether they are using O'Myre's meat or sourcing from elsewhere. By highlighting the risks of using uninspected meat, she has made it increasingly difficult for businesses to not rely on O'Myre's products. Capitalizing on their solid reputation and best practices, Sahrene has been able to raise prices and even determine which businesses survive in the city; lack of access to O'Myre's meat can quickly lead to a restaurant's or tavern's downfall.

While Sahrene is motivated by her family's upward mobility, Grivus focuses on preserving the long-standing traditions and high-quality meat that, in his view, honor his late father. Grivus' father was killed during his teenage years by a rogue cultist who had infiltrated the city — a traumatic experience that left a lasting impression on him. He witnessed his father heroically fend off the attacker to protect him, ultimately sacrificing his own life. This event has fueled Grivus' commitment to maintaining the integrity and quality of their family business.

Stonebreaker Forge

What began as a single forge owned by a dwarf has now become a block dedicated to smelting various types of metals. Stonebreaker Forge is more than just a local blacksmith shop; it is the central hub where all metals used in the capital are melted down and processed into bars. These bars are then utilized by artisans, blacksmiths, jewelers, and even the Ironhand. While the forge does produce its own high-quality utensils, armor, and weapons, the bulk of its profits come from processing ore into metal bars. Fine craftsmanship is generally left to the artisans in Artisansquare or the Downtown shops.

Still owned by the Stonebreaker family, this traditional dwarven clan has resided in this region since the fall of the Kingdom of Arheirmar. The current patriarch is **Borgulin Stonebreaker** (LN dwarf **veteran**, with proficiency and expertise in all checks related to minerals, metals, and blacksmithing). Borgulin is a man of great honor who avoids the corruption and power plays that often plague the city. He believes in protecting his clan and prefers to conduct their business in an honest and straightforward manner. However, his strict parenting style has led his children to view him as something of a tyrant.

Sink and Net Fishing

This establishment serves as both a guild for fishermen and a shop selling fishing products and fresh fish. Founded through the union of two families long ago — the Elglaia family of elves and the Norstrell family of humans — the guild welcomes anyone willing to contribute to the capital's daily supply of fresh fish, provided they pay the requisite fees.

Though they hold no official control over fishing in the capital, the guild has a reputation for pressuring independent fishermen to join their ranks. They employ various tactics, including defamation and market manipulation, to discourage unaffiliated professional fishing in the vicinity of the capital.

The guild is currently managed by **Elaine Elglaia** (NE elf **scout**, with proficiency and expertise in all checks related to fishing) and her niece, **Yida Elglaia Norstrell** (LE half-elf **spy**), who have maintained their leadership positions by consistently winning the guild's annual elections for decades. Unbeknownst to the rest of the guild, both are actually agents of Baleroth, working covertly to place infiltrators within the upper echelons of Oldtown's traditional community to monitor their activities.

Moon Tower

This sacred site serves as a Celestianist temple dedicated to Bauron. It supervises burial rituals and bestows Bauron's blessings, ensuring that the souls of the deceased transition peacefully to the afterlife and safeguarding their bodies from necromantic practices.

Unbeknownst to many, a secretive Bauronian sect known as The Awakened uses this location as one of their primary headquarters within the Empire. From here, they initiate new members and coordinate their efforts to hunt monsters, aberrations, and members of the Cult of Shadow Wing.

The temple is overseen by **Cardinal Fordak** (LN human **assassin**, with proficiency and expertise in all checks related to Stealth, as well as the tracking and investigation of aberrations and cultists). A seasoned member of The Awakened, Fordak has battled the Cult of Shadow Wing in secret for decades. Not one for administrative tasks, he relies on his cadre of priests to handle paperwork. With a penchant for dark humor, Fordak is known for his blunt, often sarcastic or ironic truths. While many find his company entertaining, being the target of his barbs is less enjoyable. He is prone to making digs at various targets, from the Emperor and his own clerics to local residents and even other cardinals. Occasionally, he even pokes fun at himself, albeit always in the third person, without ever losing his sharp, skillful blend of sarcasm and irony.

Cemetery of Sacred Remembrance

The capital's cemetery serves as the final resting place for most of the city's inhabitants. Except for the very wealthy, who may have private mausoleums on their estate grounds, individuals from all walks of life are interred here. One reason for this is the magical protection provided by the temple of Bauron, the Moon Tower, which wards against the use of necromancy to disturb the deceased.

The Gravekeeper's Guild maintains its headquarters at this location, offering funeral services, handling the necessary paperwork in accordance with the Empire's bureaucracy,

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and registering every death and corresponding grave. They also provide security against tomb robbers.

Fees are calculated based on the wealth of the deceased and the scale of the funeral services, including the location of the burial and any special rites requested, such as services conducted by priests of deities other than Bauron. These often incur additional charges compared to standard Bauronian rites.

For those without the means to pay, simple coffins are provided, and burials take place in more remote areas of the cemetery. Regardless of legal status, no one in the capital goes without a proper burial, a benefit funded by the Empire's treasury as one of the many perks provided by Emperor Baleroth.

The current Guild Master and official caretaker of the cemetery is **High Gravekeeper Sorento** (LG human **priest**, with proficiency in History and all checks related to philosophy). Starting as a gravedigger, Sorento spent his spare work hours studying sacred scriptures with the goal of becoming a cleric of Bauron. Eventually, he joined the Moon Tower as an initiate, later returning to the Gravekeeper's Guild and rising through its ranks to become the Guild Master. Tall and slender, Sorento is reserved and speaks little, valuing listening over talking. Though he's often seen reading books on various topics, he is considered a rather sinister figure by many in the district because of his introverted nature.

Unbeknownst to anyone, Sorento is a great admirer of High Cardinal Erithad's writings and sermons and has a secret affection for Erithad's daughter, whom he often observes at Baleroth's Library in Uptown. Currently, he is deeply troubled by the negative false rumors circulating about her and is contemplating ways to offer his support, although he is hesitant to approach her directly with his concerns.

Sturdylog Lumbermill

One of the key pillars of Oldtown's economy, the lumber mill has been a reliable source of timber for generations. Operated by the diligent Uktena family, the mill fulfills the city's constant demand for lumber, which is used in construction, shipbuilding, and various crafts. What distinguishes this mill is its use of taii'maku technology, which harnesses bauronite to power highly efficient saws capable of processing various types of wood.

The current owner, **Eamon Uktena** (NG human **scout**, with proficiency and expertise in all checks related to woodworking and lumber processing), oversees a well-run operation that supplies top-quality lumber to the entire capital. His wife, Elara Uktena (CG human **bandit captain**), is clandestinely one of the key figures leading the rebellion against the Baleroth regime in Oldtown. Although both Eamon and Elara are committed rebels, they exercise extreme caution in their activities, particularly since they have two young children to protect.

Eamon is highly respected for his work ethic and fair business practices, providing the essential lumber that enables the Capital's artisans, masons, and shipbuilders to use plywood for their trades. When Eamon is in the forest, it's Elara who ensures that the mill's operations run smoothly and that no issues arise.

Some rebels and impoverished families from Oldtown find employment at the mill, provided they stay out of trouble. The Uktena couple is keen to avoid drawing the attention of the Ironhand, as it could put many lives at risk. Occasionally, more radical members of the resistance criticize them for being too cautious or self-interested, rather than taking bolder actions against the Empire. Such tensions have occasionally led to complications, especially when captured rebels have spoken too freely about the Lumbermill and its owners. However, Eamon and Elara have so far managed to maintain their reputations and social standing in Oldtown, successfully avoiding imprisonment.

Yorehof Forest

It is also known as the West Forest, serves as the Capital's primary source of timber and game. However, the forest is more than just a resource; it hosts secret meeting points for rebels and shelters a few hidden refugees, safely out of sight of the Ironhand.

The forest's dense foliage makes it difficult for search parties to locate fugitives who seek refuge there. Consequently, many criminals also escape to the forest to evade capture, usually planning to flee via the western cliffs under the cover of night. However, this journey is fraught with difficulty. Those hiding in the forest find themselves caught between the Imperium's Tigris Lair, the city, and the barren cliffs, which offer no cover for extended distances.

An elderly gnome druid named **Frezzelin Jillywood** (NG gnome **druid**) regularly patrols the forest. Though not explicitly aligned with the rebels, Frezzelin views himself as a servant of nature and is willing to lend a hand to those in need. He assists the rebels and helps maintain their hideouts in the forest. The Empire tolerates his existence because they know he has deep connections with the druids of the Bak Forest and see no advantage in escalating conflict with them over Frezzelin's relatively inconsequential actions.

Unknown to anyone, Frezzelin is actually an angelic being sent by Tamera herself to observe mortal actions in recent times. While he is not permitted to display his full power, he possesses abilities similar to those of a **solar**. He will not directly intervene, except to guide mortals in their own struggles. The exact reasons why he can't actively intervene are known only to him and to Tamera's will. If anyone discovers the true extent of his powers and questions why he can't take action, his only response is that it's a necessary step in the long battle against the Ungods. He will not elaborate further, only hinting that he is awaiting a particular event.

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Side Quest - The Council of Traditions

Every week, a meeting of the leaders of the most important families in Oldtown takes place in a hall near the Arching Bridge. The last meeting ended in conflict, and the next one promises to have families at each other's throats. The issue at hand is an increase in disappearances in the district, which robbed some families of important workers. Some leaders blame rebels, others blame criminals, some point fingers at business rivals, while others suspect a sinister cult is behind it all.

Current members and their positions are as follows

- **Grivus O'Myre** *(see O'Myre's Slaughterhouse)* believes that the same cult that killed his father long ago has returned. He speaks of seeing strange people in the district and claims that other citizens have also noticed strange, cloaked individuals walking at night.
- **Borgulin Stonebreaker** *(see Stonebreaker Forge)* blames the rise in crime on the lack of patrols. He thinks this is a problem for the Ironhand to solve, not their council. He also believes that the O'Myres are bringing up this topic and creating melodrama about it to cover their aggressive business practices and their desire for quick ascension.
- **High Gravekeeper Sorento** *(see Cemetery of Sacred Remembrance)* usually remains quiet and is viewed with suspicion by the others since he's not from a traditional family. Yet his status makes his presence on the council necessary. When directly asked, he doesn't believe the disappearances are the work of rebels, as those who have gone missing don't all have deep ties to the Empire. He also questions what criminals would gain from this.
- **Eamon Uktena** *(see Sturdylog Lumbermill)* blames the Ironhand's lack of patrolling and leans toward believing it's the work of criminals. While he doesn't completely discount Grivus' account, he suspects a new criminal organization may be trying to take over Oldtown. He argues that any supposed rebel group would gain nothing from these disappearances.
- **Elaine Elglaia** *(see Sink and Net Fishing)* believes the rebels and those disloyal to the Empire are behind the disappearances. She equates all rebels to criminals, believing they are behind the situation to stir conflict in the Empire. She is highly adversarial toward Eamon.
- **Borges Mattus** (LE human **noble**, with proficiency in Insight and all checks related to real estate) is part of the Mattus family, who have owned many buildings and lands in Oldtown for a long time. They specialize in renting real state as well as purchasing more properties from those in desperate financial situations, only to renovate and either rent or sell them at higher prices. Borges is a short, balding, portly man dedicated to increasing his family's wealth and securing his descendants' future. He believes the current situation is caused by criminals, but is skeptical that it's just a simple criminal organization. He thinks Grivus may be onto something — perhaps some kind of religious fanatics are at work in Oldtown.

All council members are seeking evidence to prove they are correct and may offer rewards to those willing to help investigate the situation. The council as a whole is also offering a reward for anyone who can present concrete proof of what is happening in Oldtown at the next meeting, set to occur in a few days.

Tensions are expected to run high at the next meeting because Borges and Grivus have been casting suspicions on Sorento. In trying to defend himself, Sorento inadvertently sparked a conflict between Elaine and Eamon over whether the culprits are a criminal organization or a group of rebels. Elaine accused Eamon of defending rebels, while Eamon retorted that Elaine is like the Emperor's lapdog, sniffing around for something to fetch back and earn a reward, even if she has to fabricate the evidence herself.

Challenges. The characters can speak with various council members and investigate each claim to determine who the missing individuals are.

The list of those who have disappeared currently numbers in the dozens in the last few months. The reality is that some have been abducted by cultists at night to serve as sacrifices, secretly taken to Hogaw's Wind Inn, while others have been killed by penumbral creatures. These creatures were summoned by the cultists in their underground lair and then released to wreak havoc on the city.

This investigation shouldn't lead the characters directly to Hogaw's Wind Inn, but it may hint that Oldtown is the epicenter of disappearances in the entire capital, suggesting a stronger cultist presence here.

If the characters manage to uncover evidence of cultist or penumbral activity, or if they convince the council about the truth of the situation — requiring thorough investigation and evidence collection — they may earn the council's respect.

Rewards. The Council is offering 500 gp for credible information and up to 1,500 gp for concrete proof concerning the disappearances.

Furthermore, if the characters can prove that an evil cult is behind the situation — rather than a random rift summoning creatures or the actions of mere criminals — the council will commit the resources and influence of Oldtown's core families to aid the characters in locating the cultists. The council will also demand intervention from the Ironhand and secure their assistance in the investigation.

After a few days of this intervention, the council should be able to provide additional clues and useful information to the characters. This may guide them on the right path to discovering the hidden temple of the cultists located beneath Hogaw's Wind Inn.

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Neckoffoods District

Complexity: Low

Core Concept: A pastoral haven, home to peasants, retired heroes, and wise farmers. It is also a breeding ground for adventurers seeking mentorship in the small Braves Arena.

Side Quest: An old farmer is organizing a tournament in the Braves Arena to find suitable adventurers for a quest with great rewards. Unknown to all, he is a retired hero who seeks assistance against the Cult.

Neckoffoods is the breadbasket of the city, serving as the life-giving artery of the capital. It pulsates with the verdant energy of flourishing farms and the dedicated hands that toil under the sun. The district's agricultural abundance keeps the capital's market stalls brimming with produce. With the rhythmic sound of hoes and the chants of workers engaged in daily farming chores, the district resonates with the promise of simple, honest living.

To the east, a sweeping vista of fertile fields stretches as far as the eye can see, punctuated by golden expanses of wheat and maize and a patchwork of plots of fruits and vegetables. Earthy aromas permeate the air as farmers in homespun attire cultivate the land that feeds the capital. Contrasting this idyllic landscape is the Braves Arena, its stoic stone facade serving as a beacon for aspiring adventurers and heroes who seek to make a name for themselves.

Yet beneath its pastoral simplicity, Neckoffoods is rife with complexities that challenge the Empire's iron grip. Farmers wield more influence than one might initially expect, unified by the essential nature of their work to the capital's sustenance. Interspersed within this community are venerable elders — some farmers turned sages through lifetimes of dedicated labor, others retired heroes who were once champions of arenas or intrepid adventurers who retired after a life facing monsters throughout Tanares. Unbeknownst to most, even Emperor Baleroth holds these individuals in high regard for their past contributions and the influence and power they still wield. This prompts the Emperor to treat Neckoffoods with greater caution, tempering the weight of imperial authority to avoid open conflict with these respected figures.

Another layer of complexity arises from the fact that many of these retired heroes are secret leaders of the rebellion against Baleroth's oppression. Neckoffoods thus serves as a hub for clandestine rebel meetings, often held in the secluded corners of barns and farmhouses, led in part by these retired

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heroes who have traded their swords for plowshares without sacrificing their resolve for justice.

While most of these retired adventurers are not keen on taking up arms again, many choose to mentor a younger generation of heroes. This transforms the Braves Arena from a mere venue for settling civic disputes, as dictated by Empire's law, into a crucible where young adventurers are forged, often under the guidance of these elder masters.

The Braves Arena, both quaint and robust, functions as a focal point for community entertainment and a nurturing ground for emerging talents who may one day grace grander arenas in the capital. It stands as the heart of aspiration for the common folk and the first proving ground for those daring to challenge their destiny.

Places of Interest

Elder John's House

This modest shed is home to one of the most powerful heroes of the past century, who retired from his adventuring days and now goes by the name "Elder John." Sporting an unkempt white beard, his wizened face and a change of clothes have rendered him mostly unrecognizable to those who did not know him well.

Elder John (NG human **elite warrior**, but with a +6 Proficiency Bonus instead of +4, and proficiency in History and Insight) is a man who has dedicated his life to fighting for the causes he believes in. Over the years, he has gained wisdom, learning that one cannot save everyone and that not all well-intentioned actions yield positive results. Despite these hard lessons, he has never lost his good nature or his desire to stand up for what is right.

For instance, Elder John considers Baleroth a necessary evil at the moment, as overthrowing him would result in a significant loss of lives in a bloody battle. Although he aids the rebels on occasion, he is not directly involved with them.

His true name is Sir Aron Bellanus Omathyr, an older cousin of Archduke Omathyr — a connection he concealed even during his adventuring days when he was known only as Sir Aron Bellanus. He still maintains a deep connection with House Omathyr and is in good standing with them, as his values have always stemmed from his honorable upbringing.

When characters visit his home for the first time, he will pose as a wise old farmer and inform them that he is organizing a tournament in the arena. A gracious host, Elder John always serves fresh coffee to his guests. While he lives alone, he frequently receives visits from people he has helped in the past or those seeking his counsel — be they budding adventurers or farmers grappling with everyday issues, such as a lost pig or a family dispute. He is known to be a good listener and always offers sound advice.

Braves Arena

This modest arena serves multiple purposes: it is used for settling common civic disputes in accordance with the Empire's laws, and it is also the initial proving ground where beginning teams face off in combat to demonstrate their ability to defend more pressing causes.

Many wealthy and influential individuals maintain servants who observe the fights here, scouting for promising groups or individuals they can sponsor and later use as champions in matters of importance to themselves.

As a result, numerous young adventurers try their luck in this arena. Consequently, many trainers — both reputable ones and scammers — have taken up residence near the arena to offer training to aspiring adventures or arena fighters.

The arena is preparing to host a tournament sponsored by an old and wealthy farmer, Elder John (see Side Quest).

Farmer's Market

This small market primarily sells local products such as vegetables, live animals, and fruits, along with basic utensils and farming necessities like fertilizers and tools. Simple prepared foods are also available at various stalls. For more refined goods, one would need to visit Martpart.

The market operates as a free association of local stalls; anyone living in the district is welcome to set up shop here.

The market's organization is overseen by **Ol' Magaya** (CG half-elf **commoner**, with proficiency and expertise in Deception, Insight, and Persuasion). She ensures that no rules are broken and that no issues with theft or other problems arise. Although the market doesn't have official guards, Magaya can quickly summon the aid of local farmers, who will readily leap into action at her command. Thanks to her half-elf longevity, she has watched most of the district's farmers grow from babies to adults, and even knew the mothers and grandmothers of today's older residents. A beloved figure in the district, she aims to keep everyone safe and ensure they have an enjoyable time.

Her children are all well-regarded farmers in the district. Currently, she is concerned because one of her grandsons, Emyion from Team Zephyr Seagull *(see Side Quest)*, is trying to join the arena fights. She hopes to find someone who can persuade him to seek a safer, more tranquil lifestyle, as she is genuinely worried about his well-being.

Magaya is also seeking information about two missing farmers, Jarzen and Janny Mercet, a newlywed couple. She has known them since they were infants and doesn't believe they would leave without notice. If the characters decide to investigate this matter, they will discover signs of **penumbral miseries** and **penumbral envy** haunting the newlyweds' farm. Though their families are unaware of their fate, careful investigation will likely lead to clues suggesting that the couple has been abducted by the Cult. While the characters may not be able to discover more than this at the moment, the truth

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is that Jarzen and Janny are imprisoned on the Penumbral Plane and can be rescued in Chapter 8.

Old Goat Tavern

This inn is the most famous in the district, serving homemade food and beer crafted from ingredients harvested daily from local farms. Because of this, the menu changes weekly to feature the freshest produce available.

During the day, the inn is a gathering spot for adventurers and mercenaries. They trade information on quests and jobs, discuss upcoming matches in the Braves Arena, and enjoy the reasonably priced meals and drinks on offer.

At night, the inn is primarily frequented by local farmers. The atmosphere becomes lively with loud music, and the venue stays busy for hours. Tables are set up both inside and outside to accommodate everyone, from young people to elders.

The inn is operated by **Nedson Brownster** (LN human **commoner**, proficient in playing the lute) and **Agailia Brownster** (NG half-elf **commoner**, proficient in all cooking and brewing checks). Agailia, the daughter of Magaya *(see Farmer's Market)*, handles the cooking and brewing, while Nedson tends to the guests and plays the lute to keep the atmosphere lively at night. His performances often inspire others to join in with their own instruments, creating a musical experience that lasts into the evening.

During the day, characters can overhear gossip from adventurers, learn about fights in the Braves Arena (see Braves Arena), hear about mysterious disappearances in Oldtown *(see Oldtown Side Quest)*, and catch wind of a high-stakes arena match in Arenarea that involves two noble families and a murder case *(see Arenarea Side Quest)*.

In the evening, characters might have the chance to meet Ol' Magaya if they haven't already encountered her at the market, or even Elder John, who occasionally visits to enjoy the vibrant atmosphere.

The Northwoods

This extensive forest, stretching north of the capital, is home to a small community of druids and rangers. They generally maintain a harmonious relationship with the local farmers, although conflicts have arisen occasionally. The forest also serves as a refuge for rebel members, who receive support from the druid circles that oppose Emperor Baleroth's rule.

Although the Emperor could launch a campaign against the druids, he has refrained from doing so. This is partly because the druids have successfully fought in the Arena to win the right to preserve the Northwood Forest. Baleroth

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sees a greater advantage in upholding the Empire's end of the bargain, allowing the druids to retain control over their lands, rather than attempting to dismiss them. Although the druids can sometimes pose minor problems, the Emperor has found that a few well-placed assassinations effectively keep them in line.

The forest is overseen by **Garmid Scentleaf** (NG half-elf **druid** who can cast spells of up to 5th level and has twice the hit dice), a follower of the Nature Spirits religion, striving to maintain the forest's balance. He is the eldest son of Ol' Magaya and visits his mother weekly.

Garmid is a supporter of the rebels and opposes the Ironhand. He's aware that some rebels were recently attacked, with the Empire deploying a rare, lethal toxic gas. Garmid knows the antidote and possesses it, but the afflicted rebels are in hiding. Displaying symptoms of the gas would lead to their arrest, as it would reveal their involvement in the rebel activities *(see Random Encounters Side Quest 6 - Young Thief)*.

Side Quest - The Arena Tournament.

A new arena tournament is set to begin in the next few days. Sponsored by Elder John *(see Elder John's House)*, this tournament aims not to settle disputes, but to identify the most heroic group of adventurers. Winners will receive a magic item for each member and a task directly from Elder John. He claims that completing this task will bring great glory and riches.

Opinions on Elder John's motivations are divided. Some believe the rewards won't be as significant as promised, while others think he's simply fostering competition among new adventurers. Yet a few, who are aware of his past as a hero, adventurer, and champion in the Arena of Fate, suspect he has ulterior motives for the sudden offering.

In truth, Elder John is aware of the Cult of Shadow Wing's activities in the city and is working to uncover their hideout. His goal is to find a formidable group of adventurers to help him dismantle the Cult. He knows that success will bring untold fame and riches to those who accomplish it. As a result, he's skewing the odds in favor of good-aligned adventurers, but his primary concern is to assemble the most capable party to thwart the Cult's plans.

Challenges. Each team of adventurers will engage in a single-elimination, team-vs-team battle in the Braves Arena. A day of rest will separate each bout. The fights are non-lethal, and magic is used to prevent accidents, allowing everyone to fight at full strength.

If the characters decide to enter the tournament, they will need to best four teams of adventurers to claim the tournament victory.

Team Zephyr Seagull

A group of rookie adventurers who specialize in hunting monsters. They believe in the righteousness of the Empire but disapprove of its corruption.

Jazzah (N human **scout** - leader): A young woman with a keen eye, she always carries a locket containing a feather.

Emyion (NG half-elf **spy** - rogue): Quiet and introspective, he rarely speaks.

Gobrus (CN orc **thug** - barbarian): Boisterous and loud, he wears a necklace of animal teeth.

Jomus (CG human **acolyte** - cleric of the Glorious One): Kind-hearted, he always tries to lift the spirits of his group.

Team Silver Wolf

A seasoned team of mercenaries who work for the highest bidder, but avoid criminal endeavors.

Selena (LN dwarf **gladiator** - leader): Battle-scarred, she has a penchant for drinking rare ales.

Horace (N human **spy** - rogue): Cynical and dry-witted, he always wears gray.

Volga (CN half-orc **berserker** - their warrior): Heavily tattooed and superstitious.

Ylma (CG elf **priest** - cleric of Aibidh): Intellectual, she is always seen carrying a staff adorned with elven wind symbols.

Team Moonstrike

A covert special ops team that undertakes sensitive, morally gray missions for both the Empire and the Ironhand.

Kael (LE tiefling **gladiator** - leader): Ruthless and focused, he bears a mysterious branded mark on his arm.

Nira (N human **spy** - rogue): Trained from youth to be unflappable, she's a master of disguise.

Gruff (CE red dragonborn **veteran** - fighter): Grumpy and quick-tempered, he breathes smoke when angry.

Bellis (LN gnome **mage** - wizard): Cheerful yet manipulative, he carries an intricately carved wand.

Team Star Serpent

An elite force of adventurers committed to exterminating evil and competing in arenas for the greater good.

Orion (LG human **elite warrior** - leader): Noble and charismatic, he wears a signet ring bearing his family crest.

Lyra (NG elf **mage** - wizard): Elegant but aloof, her staff is carved with images of nymphs and serpents.

Draco (CG half-elf **spy** - rogue): Cunning and fearless, he wields a weapon passed down through generations in his elven family.

Vela (LG dwarf **priest** - cleric of Dorsi): A calm and reserved dwarf, her armor is inscribed with prayers.

Rewards. If the PCs win, Elder John will reward each with a magic item (GM's choice, as Elder John owns many items). He will also reveal the threat of the Cult of Shadow Wing and offer assistance in locating them. Though still capable of fighting, Elder John considers himself past his prime and a mentor to heroes, so he will not join the combat against the Cult. While he may not know the Cult's hiding place, Elder John can use his extensive connections to gather information and provide valuable insights within a few days.

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Boomburbs District

Complexity: High

Core Concept: The slums of the capital, where resilience and defiance blend with desperation and lawlessness, creating a clandestine hotbed of rebellion, unlawful spread of arcane magic, and morally gray vigilantism.

Side Quest: Three members of a local arena team have disappeared, and their leader is trying to find out what happened to them. An investigation will lead to a plot involving the kidnapping of people by a noble linked to the Cult.

Boomburbs stands in stark contrast to the more affluent districts of the capital, blending poverty, desperation, and crime with unyielding spirit, resilience, and defiance. The area is home to an eclectic populace — from the dispossessed to the disillusioned — all united in resistance against the Empire's oppressive rule. Far removed from the glitz and glamor of the city's inner-wall districts, Boomburbs thrive on their own unique, albeit grittier, form of commerce and community.

The district unfolds as a labyrinthine sprawl of narrow alleys flanked by ramshackle huts. These makeshift dwellings huddle closely, as if seeking warmth from each other in the face of an uncaring world. Flickering lanterns punctuate the shadows at night, as bandits and thugs move about unseen. Far from the structured beauty of cobblestone streets, these alleys serve as a canvas for whispers of rebellion and a bustling black market that includes both stolen and illegal items such as poisons, prohibited alchemical products, and even some magical weapons.

Yet beneath its unassuming exterior, Boomburbs is more than just a den for the disenchanted; it serves as a haven for forbidden knowledge and clandestine enterprises. Hidden doors tucked into dim corners lead to makeshift schools where wizards teach magic, a dangerous and illegal act of defiance against the Imperial Wizards. From the nooks and

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crannies of these crowded streets, masked vigilantes — known as Slum Saviors — emerge, dispensing their own brand of justice. Some fight to bring hope to Boomburbs, while others use justice as a cover for their own personal agendas.

Some areas within the district have become smaller districts unto themselves, particularly as refugees from the Kemet Invasion have gathered here for sanctuary. These communities maintain the traditions of their homelands. The Ubelian Area, with its tents of durable hide and terraced cliff dwellings, symbolizes the resilience and unity of the southern barbarian tribes. Conversely, the Kjörners Area represents a pocket of Kolbjörner northern tradition, its wooden houses with high-angled roofs symbolizing a stubborn refusal to abandon their homeland. Yet it is perhaps "The Worst" Area that epitomizes Boomburbs' struggle — unpatrolled, unsanitary, but unbroken, where the drunks, the criminals, and the homeless gather to avoid the Ironhand patrols.

Within its cramped quarters and winding pathways, the seeds of rebellion find fertile ground, nurtured by hidden magic schools and empowered by both crime and vigilantism. Amid the struggles and strife, the district serves as a testament to the indomitable spirit of its inhabitants, challenging the very notion of what it means to be powerless. Boomburbs may not be the heart or soul of the capital, but it is undeniably its untamed will — a will that refuses to be silenced or subdued, despite its oppressive ambient.

Places of Interest

Ubelian Area

This area consists of blocks where refugees from the Ubel region have settled in the capital. Most were members of barbarian tribes attacked during the Kemet Invasion. Most residents here do not follow Celestianism but instead adhere to the Nature Spirits religion.

Unconcerned with etiquette or laws, these refugees value resilience and the ability to endure hardships. They see themselves as survivors and view the Ironhand as the problem. They don't seek fairness but look for opportunities to live well, raise their children, and age without succumbing to hunger or disease — easier said than done within the Boomburbs.

The area is characterized by a mix of tents made from durable hide or woven textiles, each adorned with ornamentation reflecting the owner's original tribe. Interspersed among these are terraced, cliffside residences built from bricks. These structures promote communal spaces, fostering a strong sense of unity among the closely-knit clans.

Mother Sarrana (CG half-orc **elite warrior**) is the most respected figure in the Ubelian Area. As one of the rebels' leaders, she wisely avoids drawing the attention of the Ironhand and is well-protected by the Ubelian community. She is seen as a strong and wise leader dedicated to protecting the Ubelians.

Her oldest son, **Bruks** (CG half-orc **gladiator**, with proficiency and expertise in Disguise and Stealth), is one of the vigilantes maintaining order in the Boomburbs. Known as "Nightwatcher," he protects the innocent from criminals and the oppressive Ironhand, often aiding the rebels. The Ironhand has placed a bounty of 600 gp on his head.

Mother Sarrana is currently trying to find a way to save a girl who ended up gravely poisoned after a failed operation by the rebels. However, she fears that taking action might expose the entire rebel network. She finds herself torn between the other two rebel leaders in the Boomburbs, Roid and Ramon (see Random Encounters Side Quest 6 - The Sick Rebel).

She knows that the girl's younger brother, Jerry, is now desperately trying to save his sister, risking imprisonment himself. Mother Sarrana is willing to pay 25 gp to whoever can find and bring the boy to her so that she can take care of him.

The Boom Market

The Boom Market is not a traditional market; it is set within the ruins of an ancient fort. These remains have been repurposed into an open marketplace where vendors and customers can trade freely. Many products of dubious origin are sold here, including illegal goods like prohibited poisons, alchemical components, and even magic items. Merchants like Ablathur Sizzar **Ablathur Sizzar** (NE human **bandit captain** - *see Random Encounter Table 6: Young Thief Side Quest*) regularly peddle their wares here. To evade occasional raids by the Ironhand, they keep their products hidden. These raids are infrequent, as the authorities have largely given up on shutting down the market since they've realized it's more practical to let it exist in a single, known location where they can intervene when necessary rather than attempting to eradicate it and force its transactions to disperse, becoming harder to trace. Two important figures in the Boom Market are:

Mortimer Bazzaia (NE human **archmage**), who is a powerful spellcaster and a member of the secret organization known as The Eldritch Hand. Mortimer sells components in the market and offers to teach magic in secret, recruiting the most cunning students into the Hand and using others as pawns or scapegoats in his schemes. Consumed by a fascination with the study of souls, their cycles, and their various afterlife forms — such as penumbral aberrations or ghosts — he seeks to transcend these categories through magic. Highly skilled in necromancy and soul manipulation, Mortimer masquerades as a mere mage sympathetic to the rebels. He maintains this cover with a fabricated backstory about a wife killed by the Ironhand, citing it as his motivation for teaching magic in defiance of Imperial law.

Sillas "Whiteman" Vollis (NE human **assassin**), who portrays himself as a vigilante safeguarding the Boom Market and its surrounding areas in Boomburbs. While he postures as a defender of the weak, he is actually a key operator in the Boom Market, eager to eliminate competition. When not in his vigilant guise, Sillas is recognized as one of the leaders of the "Slummers" criminal group *(see "The Worst" Area)*. However, he maintains "Whiteman" as a secret identity, feigning to be a bringer of justice. He manipulates the

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goodwill of Boomburbs' desperate populace, eliminating anyone who stands in the way of his criminal enterprise. Many of the small stalls and peddlers that visit the Boom Market pay a tax to Sillas, unaware that he is the "Whiteman".

Zafara's Tears Temple

A group of cirrus priests founded a temple in the Boomburbs about ten years ago, aiming to bring hope and spiritual guidance to the local populace. The temple was warmly welcomed by many, as it offers magical healing and medical care for the sick. While the priests have not converted as many people as they had hoped, they have successfully established a foothold for the Windspeaker faith in the capital.

The Empire, which once persecuted the cirrus, is now allowing the temple to operate as an experiment. The goal is to see if the cirrus can weaken the Celestianist Church sufficiently to pave the way for a counter-reformation in favor of Evolutionism, a belief system that would give Emperor Baleroth greater control over the population.

The temple is led by **Exarch Bassaru Windswept** (NG cirrus **priest**, with expertise and proficiency in Medicine) and his alternate persona, **Exarch Nanao Windswept** (LN cirrus **mage**, with expertise and proficiency in Insight and Persuasion). They maintain the temple, train acolytes, and teach the tenets of the Windspeaker religion. When Bassaru is awake, he focuses on healing the wounded and prescribing medicine. He is a caring and kind-hearted man with a gentle nature, unable to raise his voice. When Nanao takes over, he acts as a preacher and secretly teaches magic to a select few apprentices. Nanao believes that by doing so, he is sharing the greatest gift the gods have given to mortals: access to magic.

Kjörners Area

This neighborhood consists of several blocks where refugees from the Kolbjörn region have settled in the capital. Most of these settlers were members of northern clans attacked by the Kemets during the Kemet invasion. Many here do not follow Tamera and Bauron, opting instead for the Nature Spirits religion.

The community members are honorable and largely adhere to traditional Kolbjörn codes of conduct. While they view the Empire as corrupt, they acknowledge the need for laws and vigilance. Their grievance lies not with the Empire's principles, but with the corruption and lack of honor among many of its leaders. They often feel wronged by the authorities and believe they deserve better lives than they currently have, especially since they have long considered themselves citizens of the Empire; after all, Kolbjörn was part of the Empire long before the Kemet invasion.

Architecturally, the area mimics traditional Kolbjörn styles, featuring wooden houses with high-angled, edged roofs and floors that are elevated a few steps above the ground. Although they refuse to alter their architectural traditions, they've had to improvise due to differences in available wood and limited space compared to their homeland.

The most well-known leader among the Kjörners is **Jarl Koldrick Jarmung** (LN human **gladiator**). Although he is no longer actually a Jarl, as his family lost their lands long ago, he is still referred to as such by the Kjörners. Having arrived in the Empire as a teenage boy, he has now lived here for twenty years. Koldrick is a proud and serious man, committed to securing a better life for his people. He became an arena fighter, and his greatest dream is to win enough

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battles in the Arena of Fate to reclaim his ancestral lands in Kolbjörn and bring his fellow Kjörners to live there with him. Currently, he is worried about his missing allies and is searching for clues to their whereabouts (see Side Quest).

"The Worst" Area

This part of the city is governed by criminals and filled with beggars. It's the only area where sewage runs openly in the streets, creating a significant sanitation issue. The land was never intended for habitation, as its terrain is swampy and unsuitable for sturdy construction. However, as refugees flooded the Capital, they cleared the trees that once covered this region to make room for living spaces. Over time, this area attracted the worst elements the Capital has to offer. Low-level criminals, drunkards, and the most needy reside here. The Ironhands rarely patrol this place, partly because even the officers find the stench unbearable. They venture in occasionally to apprehend someone or conduct investigations, but it remains the least patrolled area in the city.

Two criminal factions dominate this area: the "Slummers" and the "Wreckers." The Slummers specialize in smuggling prohibited substances such as restricted alchemical and magical products. Secretly linked to the Third Eye, they are led in the Boomburbs by four key figures:

- **Sillas "Whiteman" Vollis**, who oversees product sales (see The Boom Market).
- **Brag One-Eyed** (LE half-orc **gladiator**), who handles conflicts with rival criminals.
- **Z'kulle Tuntoto** (LE taii'maku **mage**), who focuses on creating new products and inspecting alchemical and magic item cargoes that arrive through smuggling.
- **Azezeros Glittertree** (NE gnome **spy**, with proficiency and expertise in all rolls related to smuggling goods), who manages methods for acquiring illegal products without drawing the Ironhands' attention.

While the Slummers are dangerous, they prefer to keep the Boomburbs stable and free of Ironhands' interference. They profit when the Boom Market thrives and when they can distribute their illegal products to wealthy nobles and business owners.

They are currently in a pinch; a shipment of a particular poison — one that works even against penumbral creatures — has disappeared. Prepared for Oraelus, a Third Eye boss, for use against a special individual, the carrier of the vial was brutally killed at the entrance to the Boomburbs. The Slummers believe the Wreckers have the vial. They are willing to pay 500 gp for it and may recommend useful mercenaries to the Third Eye, as they are experiencing issues in Uptown and are seeking help *(see Random Encounter 3, Side Quest Alliance with the Third Eye)*.

The second faction, the "Wreckers," is a more chaotic group with no formal leadership, comprised of assorted bandits and lowlifes. They engage in theft, robbery, home invasions, and even kidnapping for ransom. Operating under a peculiar code of honor — avoiding internal betrayal, theft within "The Worst," and harm to children — they are otherwise lawless and resistant to any form of authority. These criminals form groups, always looking for their next illicit money-making plan, whether it's a scam, a target to rob, or a person to kidnap. More often than not, the only language they understand is that of money and violence.

Side Quest - The Lost Team

Jarl Koldrick Jarmung *(see Kjörners Area)* is a member of the "Northwind" team of arena fighters. This team has enjoyed significant success over the last few years, having fought twice in the Arena of Fate.

Koldrick's team was preparing to represent Don Bartollo Bosco *(see Arenarea Side Quest - A Don Takes Care of His Own)*, but he has lost contact with his companions for the past few days. He is seeking anyone who can help investigate the Arenarea region to find out what happened to them.

What Happened? His three comrades — **Bellina Azzaia** (CG human **gladiator**), **Sigmus Azoris** (LN autumn elf **mage**), and **Lazzia Soulfire** (CG summer elf **spy**, but with double the hit points and the ability to use spells and divine eminence as a **priest**) — were captured by servants of Baron Viktor Greystone *(see A Noble Vendetta Side Quest in the Random Encounter section)*.

They were invited to the "Usual" Tavern, an expensive establishment rare for those not of high status (in Arenarea). Believing they were meeting servants of Don Bartollo, they were deceived by Baron Viktor's assassins. They ate and drank with them and were poisoned by a debilitating substance in their drinks. As they were leaving at night, believing that it was only the alcohol's effects, they were attacked and rendered defenseless. They were then taken to an old barn on Viktor's lands, about two hours by horse southeast of the capital.

The captives are set to be used in Baron Viktor's next "hunt." Bound and stripped of all their possessions, they will be hunted like animals for sport by Baron Viktor and his family as part of a ritual to worship Droggath, the Ungod of Beasts, Savagery, and Blood.

Challenges. The characters will need to investigate the fighters' disappearance, find clues to their whereabouts, apprehend some of Duke Viktor's servants (mostly **thugs**, **spies**, and one **assassin**), and locate the old barn where they can rescue the captured fighters. If they take too long, the "hunt" might have begun, and they will need to track and find the victims before they are killed. They may also need to find a way to deal with Baron Viktor without attracting the attention of the Ironhand.

Rewards. Jarl Koldrick will promise to repay his debt and will uphold it by aiding the characters in whatever way he can, leveraging the strength of the Kjörners on behalf of the characters. While he cannot offer much gold, he will gladly provide a reward of 200 gp. If the characters inquire about the Cult of Shadow Wing, Jarl may not know much, but will start using his influence in the Boomburbs to gather as much information as he can for the characters within a few days.

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Downtown District

Complexity: Medium

Core Concept: An aristocratic district where nobility and clergy converge, steeped in traditions and the Celestianist faith, while grappling with rising tensions due to mysterious disappearances and political machinations.

Side Quest: A few acolytes of the church are among those who have disappeared in the district. The Ironhand has found clues suggesting that the culprit is hiding in the sewers. The church is offering a generous bounty to anyone willing to help find and stop the perpetrator.

The Downtown District serves as both the spiritual and administrative heart of the Imperial Capital, a harmonious blend of aristocratic elegance and Celestianist faith. The district is most renowned for the Sacred Celestianist Cathedral of the Eight, where daily miracles of divine magic captivate the faithful. It also houses the Municipal Palace, where Lord Mayor Frenzuck and the city's bureaucratic apparatus oversee municipal affairs.

Although the streets are bustling with commoners visiting the cathedral and the highly-regarded Pious Sara Sonata Hospital and Sanatorium — which provides free treatment for life-threatening conditions — the district retains its status as an enclave for the elite. Patrolled regularly by the Ironhand, Downtown is one of the safest areas in the capital.

Architecturally, the district is a marvel of sophistication. Its wide, pristine streets lead to grand mansions adorned with symbolic motifs that honor the gods Tamera and Bauron. These insignias often appear alongside the banners of noble houses, lending an air of ceremonial dignity. While Downtown may lack the arcane power that characterizes Palacedomain, it is indisputably the nexus of divine magic in the capital.

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Land ownership in the district is an exclusive privilege of the nobility, thanks to a longstanding imperial decree. This exclusivity drives up property prices and limits the market. Even when properties do become available — usually due to a noble house falling into debt — only other nobles are allowed to make purchases. Such constraints have deterred speculative investors like the Bloodbound from expanding their interests into Downtown.

Apart from nobles, the only residents permitted in the district are clerics, acolytes, and priests. However, they may only take residence in the temple grounds. Given the Cathedral's role as a training center for new adherents to Celestianism, it's fairly common to encounter many clerics, from young acolytes to venerable priests, in Downtown's streets.

Although the district is sparse in terms of entertainment and nightlife — any prospective ventures of this sort are quickly vetoed by the nobility — it boasts high-end shops catering to a wealthy clientele. A select few even possess Imperial permits to sell magic items, though such wares are exclusively available to noble patrons.

Places of Interest

Imperial Coat of Arms and Heraldry

This location serves as both a repository of noble heritage and an archive for bloodlines and family trees. It contains essential information such as names, appearances, dates of birth and death, and land ownership details for each noble house in the Empire. Only information registered here is legally recognized. All life events — births, deaths, marriages — as well as land and title transfers, even changes in appearance or scars, must be reported to maintain accurate records.

Nobles are not required to make personal appearances for most updates; they can simply send documents bearing their house seal. However, personal attendance is mandatory for significant events like the transfer of titles or major changes in land ownership.

Failure to provide accurate information, such as neglecting to register a newborn or update a noble's appearance, results in substantial fines. Additionally, the archive maintains a record of the magical abilities of each noble spellcaster, along with any significant magic items in their possession *(typically those categorized as "very rare" or above)*.

The Heraldry is overseen by High Archivist **Donello Frazzato** (LE human **mage**), the second son in his family and thus not the holder of the Baron title. Donello is a meticulous

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yet spiteful individual with a penchant for organization and cleanliness. With a thin, nasal voice, he is considered by some to be small-minded. Donello harbors envy for higher-ranking nobles and takes petty revenge by imposing the maximum fines allowed under imperial law for even minor registration errors. While this approach has won him few friends among the nobility, his efficiency has not gone unnoticed by the Empire's bureaucracy. This effectiveness led to his appointment as High Archivist, a position that the Imperial Court believes he is uniquely qualified to execute.

Sara Sonata's Memorial Hospital and Sanatorium

Run by the Celestianist Church and partially funded by the Empire, this institution serves as the primary healing center for the wounded and sick. Depending on the case and need, patients receive either magical or medicinal treatment, albeit often needing to wait in long queues.

Magical healing is in limited supply, as only a select number of clerics can provide it. As such, it is reserved for those in critical condition. Wealthier individuals often choose to go directly to the Cathedral, where they can receive healing in exchange for donations to the Church. However, most residents opt for this hospital, where they can receive free medical care and magical healing services.

Those suffering from various forms of madness — whether caused by natural or social circumstances, magical influence, or exposure to penumbral creatures — are also treated here. They are typically confined to cells within the sanatorium, where they receive treatment, while being prevented from harming themselves or others. Although some families have been known to exploit the sanatorium to confine unwanted members, such practices require bribing the right people and are relatively uncommon. Most of the staff at the Pious Sara Sonata Hospital and Sanatorium are committed to their mission and operate in good faith.

However, it's worth noting that many confined to the sanatorium claim to be wrongfully imprisoned. Visitors are advised to be cautious and refrain from entertaining pleas for freedom, as some detainees can be dangerous. Within the Church, a movement is growing to end the practice of isolation for those who have fallen into madness, but it faces strong opposition from those who see no viable alternative.

The facility is managed by **Bishop Fadmund Trasg** (LG human **priest**, with proficiency and expertise in Medicine and all checks for treating diseases, poisonings, curses, and insanity — whether magical or mundane). Bishop Trasg is a man wholly dedicated to the art of medicine and healing. Politically neutral, he runs the hospital with full devotion to its mission and is a devoted cleric of Tamera. He personally

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conducts classes to train new priests in the art of medicine, often taking charge of the most challenging cases while also managing the hospital's administrative bureaucracy. Despite his demanding schedule, his commitment never wavers, although signs of overwork often show on his face.

Entering his later years, Bishop Trasg is a distinctive figure in the district. His small frame, neatly trimmed gray hair, and a white coat worn over his priestly robes give him a unique appearance. Further complemented by a well-maintained white mustache, he is always in a rush, but never inattentive to a patient. However, he spends little time on matters unrelated to the immediate needs of healing and alleviating suffering.

Municipal Palace

This location serves as the administrative hub for the city's daily operations. While Baleroth's Palace is home to the Empire's court and handles legislative matters and significant issues, the tasks handled here concern the day-to-day functioning of the capital city. Staffed primarily by mid-level bureaucrats, this administrative center oversees a range of municipal responsibilities such as sanitation, water supply, public festivals, and the issuance of various permits for cleaning, repairs, and shops.

The individual overseeing all these activities is **Lord Mayor Kardok Frenzuck** (LN human **knight**, with Charisma 18, proficiency and expertise in Deception, History, Insight, and Persuasion, as well as any checks related to politics). As the Baron of the prestigious House Frenzuck, he is both a master politician and a member of Baleroth's court. Over nearly two decades, he has successfully navigated the Empire's intricate political landscape to maintain his position as the Lord Mayor of the Capital. A traditionalist at heart, he follows the old Evolutionist faith and seeks the prosperity of both his family and the Empire.

Contrary to the expectations of many, Lord Mayor Frenzuck is neither ruthless nor callous. Rather, he tends to be more considerate than one might anticipate from a politician of the Empire. His knack for balancing necessity with justice and a measure of empathy has not only preserved his favorable public standing, but has also earned him numerous allies within the nobility. Always clad in elegantly tailored formal attire, rather than opulent garments, and armed with a black cane, he exudes a composed and charming charisma. This demeanor enables him to win over many to his side after just a brief conversation.

Heartmountain Jewelry

This opulent shop is the most prestigious and expensive jewelry store in the capital. Frequented solely by the truly wealthy, some of its gems cost more than a commoner could earn in decades of hard work.

The establishment is managed by **Jesiel Heartmountain** (N human **noble**, with proficiency and expertise in all checks related to jewelry and jewelry-making). A middle-aged woman with long brown hair, Jesiel oversees the business attentively and ensures that her clients receive exceptional service. She supervises a team of half-a-dozen workers, all of whom are dressed in uniforms and trained to treat the shop's esteemed patrons with the utmost respect.

If the characters arrive at the shop before encountering Random Encounter 2 - Ironhand Patrol. You may decide to have the mage thief Turmalind, using great invisibility, attempting to steal the black diamond just as the characters enter *(see Random Encounter 2 - Ironhand Patrol, Side Quest: The Stolen Jewel)*.

If the characters are already aware of this situation in Random Encounter 2. An Ironhand Officer will be inside the shop conducting an investigation, with two Ironhand soldiers standing guard outside.

Conversations with the staff will reveal that a very important and rare black diamond was stolen from the store. A reward of 5,000 gp in gems is being offered for its recovery.

All Jessiel and her workers know is that the theft occurred under mysterious circumstances. While opening her safe to retrieve an emerald for a ring, Jessiel felt something bump into her and fell to the ground. When she got back up, the diamond had vanished. Footsteps were heard but no one was seen, leading them to suspect the use of powerful invisibility magic. They followed the sound of the footsteps until they heard magical chanting, after which the noise vanished near a closed window. Despite checking outside, they found no clues *(*Turmalind used *greater invisibility,* stole the gem, dashed to a window, and employed a *dimensional door* spell to escape unseen*)*.

Sacred Celestianist Cathedral of the Eight

The most important religious center in the entire Empire, the Cathedral of the Eight is home to bishops from all eight orders of the Celestianist Church, overseeing the Church's diverse operations within the Empire. They are all working under the guidance of **Cardinal Erithad** (page 211), a figure of great integrity known for his gentle demeanor and articulate, low voice that often defuses conflicts. Cautious about change, Erithad is tasked with managing the turbulence of the Celestianist reform within the Empire. Although aware of the looming threat posed by the Cult of Shadow Wing, he remains uninformed about their specific plans and hideouts. Erithad operates in a delicate balance, striving to protect the populace without inciting mass panic.

The cathedral offers a range of divine spellcasting services, but high donations are expected in return, given the limited number of individuals capable of providing such services and the high demand in the capital.

If the characters disclose they are adventurers here they may be informed about the search for disappeared acolytes and the surge of undead in the sewers of Downtown *(see Side Quest - The Missing Acolytes)*. The Church is offering 500 gp for concrete information about who is behind this problem, or 2,000 gp for anyone who can eliminate whoever is causing it.

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The Bishops

The six bishops present each oversee one of the Celestianist Orders in the Empire, acting under the guidance of the Cardinals scattered throughout Tanares.

Miranda Songwell (CG human **priest**). Bishop of the Seeds of Life Order, Miranda is committed to assisting the farmers of the Neckoffoods. She finds harmony in the balance of life and nature and aims to bring a touch of earthiness to the lofty cathedral. Stern yet compassionate, she exudes unwavering commitment and dresses in garb dyed with natural brownish pigments.

- She is concerned about a newlywed couple, Jarzen and Janny Mecert, who lived in the Neckoffoods District and have also recently disappeared. She believes there is a connection between their disappearance and that of the acolytes *(see Side Quest Jarzen and Janny Mercet)*. She will suggest that the adventurers can learn more from Magaya at the Neckoffoods Farmer's Market.

Lucius Wyrmsun (NG human **priest**). Bishop of the Sons of Tamera Order, Lucius was a student of Bishop Fadmund Trasg and dedicates his time to navigating the Church's internal bureaucracy to meet the hospital's needs. Warm-eyed and smiling, he inspires trust and wears pristine white robes with minimal ornamentation.

- Lucius is swamped with work as two acolytes who usually assisted him have disappeared. He has very little time to talk, except to urge people to find his missing aides.

Eleanor Safrazza (LG human **priest**). Bishop of the Scribes Order, Eleanor is a prominent student of Cardinal Erithad and is expected to succeed him. Her scholarly pursuits demonstrate a profound commitment to learning. Always perceptive, she approaches each text with analytical rigor. She is often clad in simple, sometimes untidy attire, as she frequently spends days locked in the library studying.

- Her studies show that there are some similarities between Kemet necromancy and what was used on the acolytes that were found. She is trying to find more about it to be sure.

Selena Dawnstar (LG human **priest**). Bishop of the Enlightened Order, Seraphina is dedicated to training new priests and paladins. She continuously prepares students to confront darkness, both external and internal. Driven and resolute, she exemplifies the paladin's code in action and speech. Her armor shines radiantly, and her sword —both a weapon and a symbol — rests beside her.

- She is devastated by the loss of reliable acolytes who were good students. She can use a sacred altar of the temple to bless the characters' weapons for 6 hours, causing them to deal an additional 1d6 radiant damage against undead, if they inform her that they will help with the situation.

Vaelen Nightstrider (CG human **spy**, with all spellcasting abilities of a priest). Bishop of the Awakened Order, Vaelen is a friend of Cardinal Fordak and handles much of the bureaucratic Church work related to the Awakened. Cunning and unassuming, Vaelen is always prepared to show that his blade is as sharp as ever, especially against the entities that haunt the city's nights. Normally in simple priestly attire, he dons a black cloak and leather armor only when hunting aberrations.

- If asked for help to deal with the undead in the sewers, Vaelen will instead offer a set of *goggles of night* for each character to be used and delivered back after they are done with the task. That is the best he can do at the time.

Marcus Gregorius (LN human **priest**). Bishop of the Heralds Order, Marcus serves as a mediator of truth and justice, exerting influence over the Empire's legal institutions. Staunch and regal, he is dedicated to improving lawmaking, overseeing the exposure of corruption, and organizing legal strategies in Baleroth's court to protect the innocent.

- Marcus is currently concerned about rising tension in the Arenarea district, due to a legal conflict involving a deceased man that has now escalated into a fight in the Arena of Fate *(see Arenarea Side Quest - A Don Takes Care of His Own)*. He is looking for someone to investigate the situation.

Veronica Sallenas (N human **priest**). Bishop of the Inquisition Order, Veronica leads the zealous effort to expel corruption from Tanares, both inside and outside Church's walls. Unyielding and steely, her uniform is austere and adorned with an insignia symbolizing her formidable authority.

- Veronica suspects that someone within the Church is colluding with whoever is responsible for the missing acolytes. She is currently investigating the matter and is not willing to disclose any information at this time.

Thalos Shadowveil (NG human **priest**). Bishop of the Spiritual Guides Order, Thalos serves as a sentinel between the living and the spirits of the beyond. Tasked with overseeing the Cemetery of Sacred Remembrance and the Gravekeeper's Guild, he operates in accordance with the wishes of Cardinal Fordak, who oversees the Moon Tower. Contemplative and deeply knowledgeable in protective rituals, he wears a cloak adorned with symbols of spiritualism and wields a staff topped with a glowing gem filled with swirling mist — serving as both a tool and a talisman.

- Thalos is on good terms with High Gravekeeper Sorento *(see Oldtown - Cemetery of Sacred Remembrance)* and has been asked by him to assist Julia Erithad, the daughter of High Cardinal Erithad. Julia is the target of false rumors being spread by an unknown source *(see Uptown – Baleroth's Library of the Capital)*. Aware that Sorento is facing problems in Oldtown, where disappearances are also occurring, Thalos is seeking someone who can look into both Julia Erithad's situation and the issues plaguing Oldtown and Uptown.

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Cardinal Erithad

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

Armor Class 14 (+3 Magic Robes)
Hit Points 143 (22d8 + 44)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	20 (+5)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Int +10 Wis +10
Skills Arcana +10, Insight +15, History +15, Nature +15, Persuasion +7, Religion +15
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Celestial, Draconic, and two other ancient languages
Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Greater Divine Eminence. As a bonus action, Cardinal Erithad can cause his next spell that deals damage to deal maximum damage.

Master Philosopher. Cardinal Erithad can add his proficiency bonus on all untrainted checks that are related to theoretical knowledge or information, as his great memory and vast time spent reading gave him unparalleled knowledge. This great knowledge also increases all his spell save DCs and attack rolls by 1 (already applied below).

Divine Resilience (1/Day). When reduced to 0 hit points, Cardinal Erithad can use his reaction to regain 70 hit points. This ability can be used again after he takes a long rest.

Actions

Mace of Enlightenment (+2 Weapon). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage, plus 10 (3d6) radiant damage.

Spellcasting. Cardinal Erithad is an 18th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 21, +13 to hit with spell attacks). Cardinal Erithad has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, sacred flame, mending, thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, shield of faith, detect magic*
2nd level (3 slots): *aid, lesser restoration, zone of truth*
3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, sending, spirit guardians*
4th level (3 slots): *banishment, death ward, divination*
5th level (2 slots): *commune, flame strike, legend and lore*
6th level (1 slot): *blade barrier, word of recall*
7th level (1 slot): *divine word*
8th level (1 slot): *holy aura*

Reactions

Counterspell. Cardinal Erithad can use his reaction to cast Counterspell when another creature he can see within 60 feet of him casts a spell. This ability has no limit of uses and stems from his vast knowledge on the fine theories of magic and how the gods weaved it into the world.

Items

+3 magic robe (added to AC), +2 mage of enlightenment (added to attack, this unique weapon also gives +2 to the DC of his spells and to hit with them.)

Side Quest - The Missing Acolytes

In recent weeks, several young acolytes from the temple have gone missing. While some believe this could be the work of a serial killer, others speculate it might be due to desertion from the rigorous studies demanded of them. Yet another group thinks something more sinister is at play. Cardinal Erithad suspects a cult is involved, but the situation is complicated by the Ironhand's discovery of undead in the district's sewers — some of whose remains suggest they were once some of the missing acolytes.

The Church understands that while it's not impossible for the Cult to employ undead, it's not their usual modus

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operandi. Examination of the bodies revealed no signs of corruption from Ungods' magic.

Now the Church is seeking capable adventurers or investigators to delve deep into the sewers and probe the district to determine who is responsible and their motivations. The Ironhand is stretched thin due to multiple issues in the city, and its officers are reluctant to enter the sewers; their brainwashed soldiers are ill-suited for investigative work.

What happened? A **Kemet necromancer** named Atilas Jinasael, a traitor to his people who allied himself with the Ungods after becoming disillusioned following the defeat of Gullog in the Kemet Invasion decades ago, aims to sow chaos in the city. His plan involves unleashing a horde of undead in the Downtown district during the next weekend when a large number of commoners will be attending the Cathedral's sacred rites. Utilizing his necromantic powers, he has created ghouls, zombies, and shadows that now infest the sewers, awaiting the signal to rise and attack.

GM Note: Atilas is also involved in the resurrection of Myriad Glaid as a banshee (in the Martpart district). The characters may find information in Atilas' hideout that leads them to the Martpart Side Quest - A Banshee of Problems, should you find that interesting.

Hidden within the labyrinthine capital's sewer system, Atilas continues to grow his horde. Occasionally, he receives help from a roaming emogun, unleashed into the city by the Cult, which provides additional corpses for his purposes.

Challenges. The characters must locate the source of the undead, investigate where the acolytes have gone missing, and search the sewers for clues. They may encounter various undead, shadowy creatures, and even some cultists who may be carrying messages to or from Atilas. Finding Atilas' hideout will be no simple task, as he is cautious by nature. Engaging him will require careful planning to prevent the characters from falling into a trap and being overwhelmed by the undead, along with a powerful necromancer.

Rewards. If the characters find and capture or eliminate Atilas and provide proof of his actions to the Church, Cardinal Erithad will be extremely grateful. He will pay the characters 2,000 gp and offer free healing services and even two *scrolls of resurrection*. Should the characters express a desire to locate the Cult, Erithad will promise to employ the Church's best divination magic and resources to find leads on the Cult's whereabouts, as he too is concerned about their recent activities in the city. After a few days, he will provide useful information that may lead the characters closer to discovering the Cult's hideout beneath Hogaw's Wind Inn.

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Palacedomain District

Palacedomain is the epitome of imperial grandeur and aristocratic influence in the capital, embodying the Empire's complex, multifaceted identity. This district serves as a focal point for those who hold power and influence, gathering at Baleroth's court in an ongoing struggle for wealth and prestige. It encapsulates the Empire's three main pillars: martial prowess, a veneer of religious piety, and tightly controlled but powerful arcane magic, all set against a backdrop of ceaseless intrigue, covert disputes, and power plays.

From an architectural standpoint, Palacedomain is a visual spectacle. Pristine cobblestone streets lead to grand estates, elaborate towers, and majestic mansions adorned with gilded accents. Enchanted gardens flourish in perpetual splendor and floating lanterns give the night an ethereal glow. Among these architectural marvels, the Imperial Palace stands unchallenged, fortified with intricate magical wards that manifest as pillars of energy soaring into the sky. Verdant parks and thermal springs provide serene respites, enhancing the district's overall sense of tranquility and forming a truly paradisiacal view.

However, this surface elegance masks a labyrinth of hidden complexities. Noble houses engage in endless political maneuvering and subterfuge, each action cloaked in the semblance of benevolence, righteousness, or religious piety.

Emerging officers of the Ironhand are trained in Duke Wicar's War School, where they master both martial arts and political strategy, shaping them into the future leaders of the Imperial forces.

The district exerts strict control over property ownership. No real estate transaction can take place without direct approval from Baleroth's court, and only high-ranking nobles have the privilege of buying land here. Renting is not an option; only families and staff directly employed by them are permitted to reside in Palacedomain.

Mobility within the district is likewise restricted. Commoners are confined to certain streets, Embassy

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Boulevard and Imperial Avenue, and must avoid approaching the Imperial Palace or wandering the district's internal streets without a legitimate purpose, such as making deliveries to noble households. Ironhand officers patrol the area day and night, questioning anyone they encounter and often tailing them to ensure they are fulfilling their claimed intentions.

Despite its oppressive atmosphere, the nobility relish the peace and quiet that these regulations afford. The district's ultimate status symbol comes in the form of exotic, magical creatures bound in servitude to the great houses. Paraded around like purebred dogs, these creatures are a vivid display of a house's wealth and influence, and of the oppressive culture of the Empire, as many of these creatures are hunted and sold to the nobles at exorbitant prices to serve as their pets.

It is clear to all that Palacedomain stands as the ultimate manifestation of the Empire's values, serving as a sanctuary for the elite. It is the most secure region of the capital, which is itself remarkably safer than any other city of its size in Tanares, thanks to rigorous imperial surveillance and severe punishments that keep crime to a minimum, while also limiting many of the freedoms enjoyed in other regions of Tanares.

Places of Interest

Central Complex of Capital Portals

This location is the primary entry point for individuals traveling by portal into or out of the Central Empire. Although the Palace has an even more exclusive hub of portals, most travelers — including diplomats — usually arrive and depart via this complex.

The hub features portals to all the capital cities in Tanares. However, these portals remain inactive until both sides approve a journey through magical communication. The portals operate only when their runes are correctly aligned, allowing either side to easily disable a portal by shifting just one rune out of alignment.

Security is strict, with a significant contingent of **Ironhand soldiers** stationed at the facility. Given the risk of sudden invasion into the heart of the capital, especially if a spy realigns a portal's runes, access is tightly controlled. Numerous magical securities, such as multiple layers of *"dispel magic"* barriers at the entrance, counteract magical disguises and invisibility. An officer equipped with glasses that grant truesight is also stationed here, among other precautions.

The current administrator of the Central Portals is **Duke Hilliard Mirare** (LN human **archmage**), the reigning patriarch of House Mirare. He's a pragmatic man who values action over words and prefers straightforward communication. Although he has little patience for politics, dismissing much of it as "useless babble," he remains fiercely loyal to Baleroth and the Empire. He holds favorable views of House Omathyr and House Wincar, seeing them as key pillars that support the Empire. While he regards the Imperial Wizards as a necessary evil — effective but often morally ambiguous — he maintains a neutral stance toward them, focusing on his commitment to the Empire's stability and security.

Duke Mirare is aware of the ongoing conflicts in the Dweomer and is seeking suitable adventurers to mediate between Thidexius and Archduke Omathyr to maintain the balance of power in the capital.

Celestianist Temple of the Children of Tamera

This temple is dedicated to charity work and serves as the most important orphanage in the capital. Built strategically across from the Imperial Palace, it was constructed by Baleroth and donated to the Church as a display of his devotion to the gods and his commitment to the welfare of the Empire's citizens. This act was a political maneuver designed to improve his public image and strengthen his hold on power, a strategy that proved quite successful.

The Ironhands are instructed to bring to this temple any children found in the streets whose parents cannot be located. Some nobles occasionally adopt children from here to display goodwill or to raise a child when they cannot conceive one.

Though the temple grounds are expansive, the public portion is relatively small compared to its overall size. The entrance is adorned with numerous symbols of Tamera, statues of child-like angels, and depictions of the sun, children, and young animals. Most of the temple is reserved for priests, acolytes, and children. Predominantly, women work here, a tradition influenced by the temple's closeness to the Goddess Tamera and the belief that women are better suited for child care. However, this tradition shifted after the Celestianist Reform, as male priests eager to assist the children also began serving here.

While the temple has experienced no disappearances, the priests are acting cautiously. They keep the children indoors and guard all entrances and windows as they are aware of the acolyte disappearances at the downtown Cathedral.

The temple is currently overseen by Great Matron Edimilla Wincar (see page 215), a serious and imposing older woman. She is the elder sister of Duke Wincar and chose from a young age to dedicate her life to Tamera, distancing herself from the political schemes and questionable ethics of House Wincar. This burden then fell on her brother's shoulders, a fact that Edimilla had no power to change, as her brother decided to embrace it.

The Great Matron is stubborn, determined, and often a voice of reason, capable of viewing situations from both pragmatic and emotional perspectives. Yet, when interacting with children, her personality shifts dramatically; she becomes kind, protective, and understanding. She always kneels down to talk with kids at eye level and will even sit on the ground to play with them. Her deep connection with children has guided her path within the church, leading her to the current position in this temple.

She still treats her younger brother, Duke Wincar, as a little brother and often serves as a voice of reason for him. Duke Wincar always values her counsel in difficult situations.

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Duke Wincar's War School

One of the most important institutions in the Empire, the War School is the training ground for those aspiring to become high-ranking Ironhand officers. Advancement to the upper echelons of the military is impossible without training and approval from this academy.

Managed by the Wincar family, who have long-held significant influence over the Empire's military, the school has the sole authority to determine who can ascend in military rank. The only exception is when the Emperor recommends an individual for a specific position, a rare event.

The curriculum at the War School is rigorous, focusing on battle tactics, strategy, leadership, and logistics. While combat skills are essential, they are not the primary focus; officers are trained to be leaders rather than frontline combatants.

Enrollment is limited to those with noble titles who can afford the exorbitant fees. Consequently, the student body consists of a select few from the middle nobility, deemed worthy investments by their families, and high nobility who can readily meet the financial demands.

However, graduation is far from a guarantee. While family influence can be beneficial, the instructors are stringent in their evaluations, making failure common. While some students may need more than the standard five-year training period, with a few taking over a decade to graduate or withdraw altogether.

Great Matron Edimilla Wincar

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

Armor Class 15 (Blessing of Tamera)
Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +8, Cha +7
Skills Insight +8, Medicine +8, Persuasion +7, Religion +5
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Celestial
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Matron's Care (3/Day). As a bonus action, Edimilla can touch a creature within 5 feet and grant it 20 temporary hit points. She can use it three times, regaining all uses after a long rest.

Blessing of Tamera. Great Matron adds her Wisdom to her armor class when not wearing armor.

Voice of Reason. Edimilla can add her proficiency bonus on all untrained Wisdom and Charisma checks that involve calming down others, offering advice, or managing social situations.

Sanctuary of the Orphaned (1/Day). As an action, Edimilla can make a prayer to apply the effects of the Sanctuary spell on all creatures of her choice within 30 feet of her. She can use this once, regaining its use with a long rest.

Actions

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

Spellcasting. Great Matron Edimilla Wincar is a 15th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). Edimilla has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, mending, light, spare the dying*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, bless, sanctuary*
2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, calm emotions, aid*
3rd level (3 slots): *create food and water, remove disease, sending*
4th level (3 slots): *divination, freedom of movement*
5th level (2 slots): *commune, greater restoration*
6th level (1 slot): *heroes' feast*
7th level (1 slot): *regenerate*

Reactions

Warding Blessing. When a creature within 30 feet of her becomes the target of an attack, Edimilla can use her reaction to grant that creature a +4 bonus to AC against that attack.

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Those who successfully complete the training are invariably appointed to middle or high-ranking positions within the Ironhand military. Their duties include commanding legions of brainwashed Ironhand soldiers and overseeing officers of lower ranks.

House Wincar unapologetically leverages its control over the War School to bolster its political power and suppress rival houses. Despite their commitment to producing top-tier commanders for the Empire, the family is well aware that others covet their privileged position. They are prepared to use any means necessary to maintain their influence, including assassination and sabotage.

While the Duke's children oversee the day-to-day operations of the War School, the true authority rests with **Duke Hillard Jammil Wincar II**. An aging man with long, graying hair, he bears the weighty responsibility of leading House Wincar and serving as a pillar of the Empire. While not inherently cruel, he believes in doing whatever is necessary to protect his house and the Empire. The only moderating influences in his life are his elder sister, Edimilla Wincar (see Celestianist Temple of the Children of Tamera), and his wife, Duchess Amarillia Wincar (LN human **mage**). He is grateful to both of them, as he fears that he might threaten his house and the Empire without their guidance.

Duke Wincar is currently preoccupied with several urgent matters: investigating odd rumors surrounding the Knights of the Tanarean Order Training Grounds in Uptown; addressing whispers of a spy or cult member within the ranks of Ironhand officers; and managing a rising political conflict between his niece and Archduke Omathyr in the Dweomer district. Duke Wincar is seeking competent agents to help

Duke Hillard Jammil Wincar II

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (plate armor)
Hit Points 142 (19d8 + 57)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +7
Skills Athletics +8, Deception +7, Insight +5, Intimidation +7, Perception +5, Persuasion +11
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Elvish, Orc
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Combat Arcanist. Duke Hillard can cast spells in armor without incurring the normal arcane spell failure chance. In addition, casting a spell does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

Duke's Command. As a bonus action, Duke Hillard can issue a command to one allied creature within 60 feet. The ally can immediately make a single weapon attack or move up to half its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Parry. Duke Hillard can use his reaction to add 4 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, he must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Actions

Multiattack. Duke Hillard can make three weapon attacks or two weapon attacks and cast a spell as part of the same action.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8+4) slashing damage, or 10 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if used with two hands.

Spellcasting. Duke Hillard Jammil Wincar II is a 12th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). Duke Hillard has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, minor illusion, fire bolt*
1st level (4 slots): *mage armor, shield, magic missile*
2nd level (3 slots): *misty step, scorching ray*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, lightning bolt*
4th level (3 slots): *dimension door, fire shield*
5th level (2 slots): *wall of force*
6th level (1 slot): *disintegrate*

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resolve these issues and is offering generous payments based on the results achieved.

Ironhand Headquarters

This is the Ironhand forces' command center, housing the army's administrative offices and the headquarters of its highest-ranking officers. While Emperor Baleroth holds ultimate authority over the Ironhand, day-to-day decisions are largely made by officers here and throughout the Empire under the direction of the Ironhand Captain. The current holder of this position is **Captain Brook** (LE human **elite warrior**, with proficiency in all checks related to military strategy, wars, or influencing officers' and warriors' morale), who became prominent after the Kemet Invasion. He adheres to a strict personal code of honor and is committed to the Empire and its people, advocating for ruthless expansion to counter the Malrokian Curse. His rigid application of the law has earned him both fervent supporters and critics among the nobility.

Emperor Baleroth values Captain Brook's capabilities, bolstering Brook's position despite differing opinions among the nobles. While Duke Wincar supports him, the Imperial Wizards openly dislike him, and Archduke Omathyr views him as a valuable ally, albeit occasionally too ruthless due to his rigid personality.

Recently, a rebel group plotted to assassinate Captain Brook in an attempt to destabilize the Empire and expose its vulnerabilities. However, Ironhand investigators uncovered the plan and launched a preemptive strike, employing a highly toxic alchemical bomb that released lethal gas. The two houses occupied by the rebels were affected by them, resulting in most of the rebels being killed or captured, with only a few escaping. Now, Captain Brook seeks those affected by the bomb's lung-damaging gas to locate any remaining rebels and their hideouts.

Unbeknownst to all, Lieutenant Henry Juvelius has been killed and replaced by the Purple Witch Berna Shadowscale, a Cult member. Posing as Juvelius, she disrupts Ironhand operations from within. This has led to sluggish investigations and inconclusive outcomes. Captain Brook, sensing irregularities among his officers and suspecting a spy, is yet to identify the true perpetrator.

Tamera's Melody Inn

This opulent inn, maintained by the Empire, primarily accommodates diplomats, wealthy merchants, and significant international visitors. It also serves high-ranking nobles from distant regions of the Empire who require lodging in the capital. The inn's extravagance aims to impress guests and symbolize the Empire's wealth and power. Its diverse menu, featuring dishes from across the continent, highlights the Empire's expansive reach. Although celebrated for its culinary diversity, the inn is exclusive to the nobility, a fact reflected in its exorbitant prices.

The establishment is currently managed by **Sir Edmund Alkaizer** (LN human **noble**, proficient in all aspects of inn administration and guest relations). A short man with a thin mustache and monocle, Sir Edmund is invariably dressed in formal attire, characterized by his exceedingly polite manner. Deeply invested in upholding the inn's reputation and retaining his management role — an appointment from Baleroth's Court — Sir Edmund, hailing from a minor noble house, achieved his position through diligent work and strategic networking, often at the expense of his pride. He exhibits little tolerance for those he views as inferior, whether due to their social status or capabilities. As a manager, his approach is stringent, demanding perfection in service to the inn's esteemed clientele.

Sir Edmund has recently been intrigued by rumors of a vengeful ghost — an elven woman who supposedly died unjustly in the arena — said to haunt Martpart in recent nights. These tales, shared by merchants frequenting the inn, fuel his inclination for gossip, particularly stories involving betrayals.

Tyreen's Verdant

The most expansive and beautiful park in the capital is reserved for nobles. They often walk its paths for leisure, sometimes accompanied by rare, leashed mystical creatures showcased as pets. The park's borders are strictly guarded by Ironhand patrols, ensuring only the nobility can access it.

Nobles utilize this park for informal meetings, conversing discreetly to evade the ever-present threat of spies among their own servants. The park is also a neutral ground for adversaries, as it's commonly accepted that confrontations are unlikely in such a public and revered place during daylight.

The park features an array of rare tree species, a gazebo suitable for tea drinking, and a stunning fountain adorned with a statue of Queen Tyreen, the deceased elder sister of Emperor Baleroth and former queen of the Mystical Kingdom.

As the second most beautiful spot after the Imperial Botanical Garden, any harm to the park would provoke considerable indignation among the nobility, reflecting their childhood memories and profound sentimental connection to the area.

The rebels are plotting to destroy the park using Kemet plague dispensers, relics from the Kemet Invasion. These dispensers are capable of engulfing an area in a necrotic plague, killing plant life and causing severe illness to people. However, they are still waiting for an opportune moment to enact their plan. The mastermind behind this scheme is **Hilldrick Jassaya** (CE human **noble**), the third son of House Jassaya. Hilldrick harbors a deep hatred for Emperor Baleroth, the Empire, and even his own family.

Born into a declining baronial house that had twice failed the Emperor, losing both land and prestige as a result, Hilldrick grew up ostracized by other young nobles and under intense pressure from his family to achieve success. Lacking the sword skills of his brother Abelard (LN human **gladiator**) and the magical talent of his sister Amanda (N human **mage**), he tried to become a scholar but failed. His festering anger, envy, and resentment transformed him into a bitter individual. He joined the rebels, offering inside information on the nobility and access to Palacedomain when necessary.

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Hilldrick's sole desire is to wreak havoc on the Empire for vengeance. While the rebel leadership recognizes him as a twisted man, they are willing to exploit his hatred. However, younger rebels see his actions as justifiable retaliation.

Hilldrick, often seen wandering Tyreen's Verdant alone, was involved in a plot to assassinate Captain Brook. However, he did not participate in the attack, believing he should act as a mastermind, manipulating things to ruin the Empire. He is aware that a girl survived the attack and is hiding in the Boomburbs district, but he does not know her exact location.

Governor's Square

This square is reserved for the mansions of governors from the Empire's provinces, including Kolbjörn, Ben'net, and Seashores. Mansions that once belonged to governors of provinces that are now independent remain here, repurposed as a gentlemen's club for nobles and a residence for the Ironhand Captain's family.

The current administrator of the club is Marquis **Gregory Frazzato** (LN human **noble**, with proficiency and expertise in Insight, Persuasion, and all checks related to playing cards and recognizing wine brands and styles). He is the eldest son of the Frazzato family and currently holds the title of Marquis after his father retired from politics.

A bon vivant at heart, Gregory savors the privileges that come with wealth and status. Well-versed in imperial politics, he chooses the safer path, cultivating friendships with the powerful while steering clear of the risks associated with grasping for more power. He is cautious, exceedingly courteous, and keen to provide his family with a comfortable life. While not seen as exceptionally brilliant or ambitious, he is respected in noble circles and among his own family as a stable and reliable figure.

A specialist in the city's finest cuisine, Gregory is well-acquainted with Chef Gearot Michelline from the Usual Tavern in the Arenarea district. He knows that Michelline is being pressured for extra payments by the Silverveil family. Gregory always recommends dining at the Usual Tavern at least once and is currently spreading rumors that the Silverveil family is engaged in shady activities, a belief he holds to be true based on Chef Gearot's claims.

Frenzuck's Manor

This residence belongs to the prestigious Baron of House Frenzuck, a noble family that gained influence following the end of the Kemet Invasion. They played a key role in quelling separatist movements in Ben'net and Kolbjörn, earning Baron Kardok Frenzuck the title of Lord Mayor of the Imperial Capital (see Municipal Palace in Downtown District). This title grants the family significant power and influence, as the Lord Mayor is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the city.

The manor is notably impressive, particularly compared to Palacedomain's older estates, many of which are over a century old. Built according to the latest architectural trends within the Empire, the Frenzuck manor features imposing walls of dark, finely cut slate combined with clear Carrara marble. The mansion represents a fusion of timeless grandeur and avant-garde design. Turrets capped with glistening copper soar towards the sky, while extensive stained glass windows add vibrancy to the facade. The estate also boasts a beautiful garden filled with colorful flowers, which complement the vivid stained glass windows.

While the Lord Mayor is frequently occupied with city affairs, his eldest son, **Carlton Frenzuck** (LG human **knight**), manages the household. Carlton is a naive and well-intentioned young man aspiring to become a paladin of Tamera. Although his good-hearted nature is sometimes exploited, his father fully supports his paladin ambitions. Baron Kardok believes that the rigorous training associated with paladinhood could give Carlton purpose and wisdom, potentially molding him into a great man in the future.

Carlton is currently attempting to assist the Church with the disappearance of some acolytes in the Downtown area, but has had no success so far. His goal is to enlist the aid of any adventurers or mercenaries he meets, informing them of the Church's offer of a substantial reward. He directs them to see Cardinal Erithad at the Celestianist Cathedral.

Imperial Thermal Springs

Located in the northern part of Palacedomain, this architectural marvel is a jewel of nobility in the capital. These springs, crafted with a unique blend of holy, arcane, and elemental magic infused into volcanically heated water, symbolize the mystical expertise shaping the Empire. The perpetually steaming waters are said to be imbued with arcane essences, reputed to rejuvenate the body and calm the mind.

The springs are encircled by artfully crafted walls of enchanted onyx, which are adorned with frescoes that depict the Empire's history. Precious gemstones, imbued with subtle magic, are embedded at regular intervals along the walls, lending the atmosphere a soothing glow. An elegant domed pavilion stands at the center of the springs, constructed from magically reinforced crystalline glass. This feature allows visitors to gaze at the stars above.

Access to the Imperial Thermal Springs is stringently controlled, consistent with the district's overarching ethos of exclusivity. Commoners can only dream of such luxury, as they are confined to the less enchanting vistas of Palacedomain.

The springs are more than just a haven of relaxation; they also serve as a discreet theater for politics and social interaction. Quiet conversations held here often influence the Empire's policy as much as heated debates in Baleroth's court. Alliances are forged and broken on the mosaic steps leading to the pools, which are divided into different sections, including smaller, more private pools for secretive discussions and larger communal areas.

The springs are owned by **Lord Avanccio Valore** (LN human **mage**, with proficiency in Insight and Persuasion), the elder son of House Valore. This noble house allied with Baleroth in the past to help build the Empire. They are a reserved house with extensive investments throughout the

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imperial lands, owning numerous businesses. Avanccio has developed the springs as both a source of wealth for his house and a wellspring of information and soft political power, aiming to become the next Baron. He faces competition from his younger brother, **Lord Jelliard Valore** (CN human **noble**, with proficiency and expertise in all checks related to business and economics), who manages investments in the guilds of Artisansquare. Jelliard seeks to gain the favor of Baron Valore by contributing the greatest wealth to the family.

Lord Jelliard, aware that Marquis Sebastian Krois is a doppelganger, has aligned with him to expand his financial influence in Artisan Square. On the other hand, Lord Avanccio suspects his younger brother is hiding something. He is seeking someone willing to investigate both his brother and the escalating conflicts between guilds in the Artisan Square district, spurred by troubling rumors.

The Imperial Palace

The Imperial Palace stands as the crowning glory of the capital and ranks among the most awe-inspiring edifices on the entire continent. Erected to manifest the indomitable power of Emperor Baleroth, its walls of pristine white marble and domes of pure gold are bathed in azure luminescence. These ethereal lights emanate from potent magical wards, their glow reaching far into the heavens.

The palace serves not merely as a residence, but also as the seat of the Imperial court, where weighty matters of state are deliberated under Baleroth's watchful eye.

The inner sanctums are reserved exclusively for Baleroth and his most trusted servants, guarded by formidable demons who serve their master with absolute loyalty. These otherworldly beings assume mortal guises, revealing their true forms only when compelled to act by the Emperor.

In the grand halls and resplendent throne room, the societal elite of the elite vie for the Emperor's favor. Barons, marquises, dukes, and high-ranking bureaucrats congregate, shaping the political landscape through intricate webs of alliance and rivalry. Among the current key players are:

- **Archduke Gregory Orsal Omanthyr**, who champions the cause of the commoners, openly confronting Archmage Thidexius and the Imperial Wizards over a series of unwarranted arrests in the Dweomer District *(See Dweomer District - Side Quest An Arcane Situation)*.
- **Archmage Thidexius**, head of the Imperial Wizards, who counsels the Emperor to enact martial law and a citywide curfew, citing an increase in mysterious occurrences. He advocates for finding who is behind it at any cost, believing that the situation is very dangerous *(See Dweomer District - Side Quest An Arcane Situation)*.
- **Don Bartollo Basco**, who is publicly accusing Baron Viktor Greystone of manslaughter, a charge the Baron counters as a smear campaign *(see the Arenarea District for details)*.
- **Duke George Genovia**, who treads carefully, hinting at possible Cult infiltration within the Imperial Court. He exerts covert pressure on the noble houses of the Silverveils, Thornridges, and Greystones *(see Random Encounter - Side Quest A Noble Vendetta)*.
- **Lord Aric Silverveil, Lady Larini Thornridge, and Baron Viktor Greystone**, who formed a secret alliance to sow discord. Each feigns opposition to the others during court proceedings, all the while working in concert to engender as much chaos as possible *(see Random Encounter - Side Quest A Noble Vendetta and Arenarea - Side Quest A Don Takes Care of His Own)*.
- **High Censor Epamion Chellinger**, who aligns with Thidexius, urging a firmer grip on subversive elements within the Empire. A recent attempt by the rebels to assassinate Captain Brooks bolsters his argument *(see Scholarnest - Imperial Department of Truth, and Random Encounter - Side Quest A Sick Rebel)*.
- **Baroness Jessys Wincar**, who proposes giving Archmage Thidexius the reins of the martial law he suggests, trusting his capacity to resolve the situation.
- **Lord Mayor Kardok Frenzuck**, who reports on escalating disappearances and murder rates in the city, attributing many to the Cult. He urges the court to set aside petty disputes in favor of a unified solution.
- **Cardinal Erithad**, who decries the unsettling disappearances in Downtown, demanding an explanation as even the clergy has been targeted. He is unsure if it's the Cult's doing, as they found undead in the sewers of the district *(see Downtown Side Quest The Missing Acolytes)*.
- **Duke Hilliard Jammil Wincar II and Captain Brook**, who harbor a secret known only to the Emperor: they suspect a spy among the Ironhand Officers. They advocate caution and call for the gathering of reliable intelligence *(See Duke Wincar's War School and the Ironhand Headquarters in Palacedomain)*.
- **Duke Hilliard Mirare**, who maintains neutrality, keenly observing the unfolding dynamics while advising restraint in decisions.
- **The Valore brothers**, Avanccio and Jelliard, who are embroiled in brotherly conflict for the control over their house and who offer political allegiance to any party that might tip the scales in their favor *(See Imperial Thermal Springs)*.
- **Bromeliad, the Emperor's court bard and secret spymaster,** who vigilantly monitors the court's interactions. Currently, her scrutiny falls upon Lord Aric Silveveil, Lady Larini Thornridge, and Baron Viktor Greystone, suspecting their allegiance to the Cult.
- **Emperor Baleroth**, who orchestrates a nuanced strategy. Fully aware of the Cult's presence in the city, he deploys both demonic and mortal agents to gather intelligence. His intent is to dispatch a band of adventurers or mercenaries as an initial foray against the Cult, while using magical means to observe their findings. Thereafter, he plans to muster a more tailored force to vanquish the Cult, potentially leading the charge himself. He is well informed about the player characters and their investigation of the Cult, and has been secretly monitoring their activities.

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Side Quest - The Emperor's Call

Emperor Baleroth is well aware that the adventurers are investigating the Cult and has been discreetly observing their actions through his network of spies. If the party lingers within the Palacedomain for an extended period, Baleroth may opt to send his spymaster, Bromeliad *(see statistics ahead)*, to gauge their intentions and potential usefulness.

Challenges. Bromeliad will discreetly follow the adventurers, evaluating their trustworthiness and the extent to which their aims align with those of the Empire. She may employ a variety of tests to probe their loyalty:

- ***The Stolen Dispatch.*** Bromeliad might orchestrate a situation where the adventurers stumble upon counterfeit Imperial plans. These fake documents outline an attack on a rebel stronghold. Will the party warn the rebels or turn the plans over to the Empire?
- ***Speech as Bait.*** Assuming the guise of an itinerant bard, Bromeliad recites a provocative tale critical of the Emperor's harsh policies. She watches the adventurers' reactions attentively.
- ***The Fugitive.*** Bromeliad will reveal the presence of a peddler merchant from the Republic, **Josiel Bart** (CN human **scout**, with proficiency in all commerce-related checks), who is wanted for smuggling magic items into the capital without a permit. She sets up circumstances for the party to encounter this man, so she can assess whether they will aid or expose him. Bart was indeed supplying items to the rebels for profit. Although he believes in freedom and sees the Empire's prohibitions as unjust, his primary motive is personal gain. He was okay with the risks in light of the potential for considerable profit — until his goods were found and he was forced to flee and hide, now trying to find a way to return to the Republic to avoid imprisonment.

If Bromeliad determines that the PCs are not enemies of the Empire — based on their choices, the circumstances, and the nuances of their solutions (which she will not evaluate as mere black-and-white decisions) — she will formally introduce herself as the Emperor's representative. She will then request specific challenges on the court that need resolving to test their competence further. She will offer the Emperor's aid in investigating the Cult should they prove themselves capable individuals. The number of tasks may vary based on the adventurers' prior accomplishments in the city.

- Investigating Lord Aric Silveveil, Lady Larini Thornridge, and Baron Viktor Greystone *(see Random Encounter - Side Quest A Noble Vendetta and the Arenarea District - Side Quest A Don Takes Care of His Own)*.
- Resolving the dispute among the influential Wizard Houses in the Dweomer District *(see Dweomer - Side Quest An Arcane Situation)*.
- Uncovering the cause of the disappearances in Downtown and addressing it *(see Downtown - Side Quest The Missing Acolytes)*.

Reward. If the adventurers succeed in earning Bromeliad's trust and demonstrate that they are capable of combating the Cult, she will aid them in their investigation. As a great master spy, she may even be able to acquire clues that will lead the characters to find the secret underwater entrance to the Shadow Wing Lair (see Chapter 7).

Should the adventurers opt for this course of action, Emperor Baleroth will monitor their activities closely and may dispatch aid as required. This alliance has the potential to significantly alter the adventure's conclusion, as the party could become valued allies of the Empire if they continue to demonstrate alignment with its objectives.

Chapter Ending

The characters will forge alliances, gain influence, and gather information during their time in the capital, all of which will ultimately enable them to assemble the clues needed to learn more about the Cult.

When you sense that the adventurers have sufficiently explored the capital and it's time to advance the narrative, arrange for one of their newfound allies to reveal critical information. Alternatively, have several allies collectively contribute smaller pieces of intel that cohesively guide the party to Hogaw's Wind Inn in the Oldtown District, or to the concealed underwater cavern in the Rubicund. This will begin the events of Chapter 7.

Be sure to consult the recommended level at the start of each chapter to gauge whether you need to accelerate or decelerate the characters' progress to keep them appropriately aligned with the adventure's pacing. You may also need to adjust encounters to better match the party's current level.

> Consider awarding 7,000 XP to each PC for completing this chapter. The recommended level for ending this chapter is 10th. If your group is above or below, consider adjusting future encounters and side quests to speed up or slow down their progression.

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Bromeliad, the Copycat

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 16 (leather armor)
Hit Points 130 (20d8 + 40)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +10, Int +8, Cha +10
Skills Stealth +10, Perception +6, Deception +10, Insight +6, Acrobatics +10, Investigation +8
Damage Resistances poison
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elven, Thieves' Cant
Challenge 13

Evasion. If Bromeliad is subjected to an effect that allows her to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, she instead takes no damage if she succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if she fails.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Bromeliad deals an extra 24 (7d6) damage when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Bromeliad that isn't incapacitated and Bromeliad doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Assassinate. During her first turn, Bromeliad has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit Bromeliad scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Master of Disguise. Bromeliad has expertise in the disguise kit and can use the *disguise self* spell at will, without expending a spell slot.

Copycat (1/Day). When Bromeliad observes a creature using a class feature, racial trait, or spell, she can spend her reaction to learn that ability. If that ability consumed a slot or use, she can use it once, if it is a passive effect she will have it until she makes a long rest. Bromeliad uses her own ability modifiers and proficiency bonus when determining its effects, attack roll, and CD. Once she uses this ability, she can only recover it after a long rest. She may never have two abilities copied at the same time.

Spellcasting. Bromeliad is a 12th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). She knows the following cleric spells:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance*, *light*, *resistance*, *sacred flame*
1st level (4 slots): *command*, *detect magic*, *purify food and drink*, *sanctuary*
2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness*, *find trap*, *hold person*, *silence*
3rd level (3 slots): *clairvoyance*, *sending*, *tongues*
4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *divination*, *locate creature*
5th level (2 slots): *geas*, *scrying*
6th level (1 slot): *harm*, *true seeing*

Actions

Multiattack. Bromeliad makes three weapon attacks and can replace one of these attacks with the use of a Positive or Negative Ray.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Negative Ray. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +10 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6) necrotic damage.

Positive Ray. Bromeliad targets a willing creature within 60 ft., granting it 4d4 temporary hit points for 1 minute.

Reactions

Uncanny Dodge. When an attacker Bromeliad can see hits her with an attack, she can use her reaction to halve the attack's damage against it.

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Chapter 7
The Shadow Wing Lair

Following the exploration through the streets of the Imperial capital city and pursuing the trail of the Cult of Shadow Wing, the characters finally find the location of their secret underground fortress: a secret temple dedicated to the Ungods, lying beneath an old inn in Oldtown. Here, Garry's mercenary group is waiting for new orders and the final payment owed to them. In this chapter, the player characters will find the mercenaries, encounter the local leader of the Cult of Shadow Wing, and discover the truth about Tenebrizon's plan. However, to achieve this, they must find a way to enter the temple and survive the descent to unveil its secrets.

Exploring the Shadow Temple

The Cult of Shadow Wing maintains its temples with great secrecy, as almost all realms and organizations in Tanares want them extinguished. The Empire's capital is both a greatly prized target for them and the most difficult place to keep their temple. The cultists built their temple here very carefully, which took a long time. They took advantage of the underground galleries of an abandoned dwarven mine and concealed its main entrance with an inn known as "Hogaw's Wind". The late Hogaw, the inn's first owner and a clever cultist leader, carefully selected new disciples and expanded the temple without attracting attention from the Empire's authorities.

Currently, the inn is overseen by **Zalrik Kasmar**, who maintains appearances for customers until they are identified as brethren of the faith. Those who worship the Ungods are allowed to pass through a secret passage, descending to the level of the old mine, which hosts an extensive temple dedicated to Shadow Wing and its eldritch offspring.

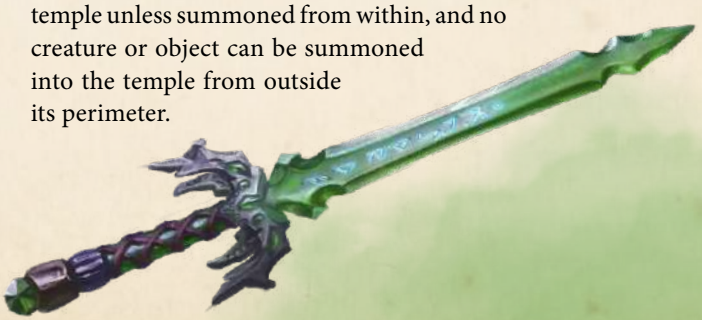
The temple is currently ruled by **High Priest Seraphina Shadowblaze**, along with her right-hand and leader of the guard, **Morvus Ironshadow**. They oversee the temple's operation and control its attendees. Various emoguns can be found there; the weakest ones serve as servants or guards, while the most powerful, having goals of their own, can be allies of the cultists or simply have a temporary deal with them.

As the characters navigate the temple, they may discover information and treasures, as well as interact with various types of cultists, gaining firsthand knowledge of their practices and methods of operation. Their primary objective is to uncover Tenebrizon's plan and find a way to reach him before it's too late.

Temple protections:

Because of an unholy artifact in the temple, the *orbs of dusk shroud (in room 18 of the Temple of Z'ulvath)*, the entire location is protected against many magical effects.

- No divination spells or effects from outside the temple can perceive or influence anything within. All spells are unable to extract information from inside the temple.
- The temple area is immune to spells and effects revealing magical presences, negating detection spells cast from beyond its bounds.
- Teleportation into the temple from an external point is rendered impossible.
- Entities cannot traverse from other planes into the temple unless summoned from within, and no creature or object can be summoned into the temple from outside its perimeter.



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Running this Chapter

The characters will need to enter the temple, confront the cultists and find Gary's mercenary group and High Priest Seraphina, finally revealing what lies behind all the events that have transpired so far and the true plans of Tenebrizon.

This chapter will begin after the characters find enough information about the Imperial capital city to uncover the location of the Temple and choose to either go to Hogaw's Wind Inn or to the hidden entrance in a submerged cave in the Rubicund River.

If the characters go by the Inn, you will start with **The Hogaw's Wind Inn** section, while **The Cave** section will be used if they enter through the secret cavern.

Tenebrizon's Possession

In this chapter Tenebrizon will be focusing his forces on finishing the last part of his ritual, and will not be possessing any of the creatures in the temple.

Summary of the Chapter

Following the investigations from the previous chapter, the characters will find the location of the secret Cult Temple. Thus, they can choose the best approach to enter the place.

Two Main Ways to Enter the Temple

There are two primary means by which the characters can enter the temple:

- ***The Inn.*** The characters can act as guests of the inn and, once inside, seek the entrance to the temple. Alternatively, they can attack the Inn and force the cultists to reveal their nature. Here, they can find a secret entrance, or documents that point to the hidden entrance by the underwater cavern.
- ***The Cavern.*** If the characters seek an alternative entrance, or are highly successful in their investigations in the last chapter, they may uncover a secret underground entrance under the river that provides access to the temple. It is not used by the cultists, but is instead used for emoguns to leave the Temple to assault the city.

Both sections will lead to **The Temple of Z'ulvath** section of this chapter, where the characters will explore and face the horrors of a temple to the Ungods.

Four Ways to Learn of Tenebrizon's Plans

There are four main ways for the characters to learn of Tenebrizon's goal and how to reach his current lair in the Penumbral Plane:

- ***High Priest Seraphina's Diary.*** Located in her chambers *(room 23 of the Temple section)* is a book that contains information on Tenebrizon's plans.
- ***Interrogate High Priest Seraphina.*** If the high priestess is captured and forced to speak through magical coercion, the characters can learn of Tenebrizon's plan. She is unaware that his plans include the characters killing her and arriving at his lair for a final confrontation so that he can use their souls.
- ***An'Kur, the Kepeshian Prisoner.*** A priest of Ba-Ka who took part in the construction of the Vandanamalika was captured during the cultists' operation. Awaiting his death at the hands of the cultists in the prison *(room 7 of the Temple section)*, he will provide information about the portal and Tenebrizon's plan to the characters if he is rescued.
- ***Gary's Mercenaries.*** While they don't know all the details, if the characters find a way to make them talk, they can uncover Tenebrizon's plans to use a Vandanamalika and its current location.

In addition to these four ways of obtaining information about Tenebrizon's plans, the characters can also acquire some information from a set of letters from Gary's mercenary group. Torviukos, an imprisoned **collector**, also knows the whereabouts of the Penumbral Portal, which may serve as an option for characters who have not obtained any information, as they can blindly enter into the Penumbral Plane and discover more there *(entering into Chapter 8)*.

The characters will need to use the portal to reach Tenebrizon's Shadow Temple in the Penumbral Plane (Chapter 8). It should be resilient to all forms of attacks and not easily destroyed, but if it somehow gets disabled, Tenebrizon will try to open penumbral rifts in the capital to lure the characters again, while sending penumbral creatures to wreak havoc in the city, pressing the arrival of the adventurers.

The Hogaw's Wind inn

The inn, located in the Oldtown district, is situated in the Sheep's End street, near the banks of the Rubicund River, and is managed by **Zalrik Kasmar** (CE human **master of pain**). Zalrik is a robust, middle-aged man with well-groomed, graying hair and beard, dressed in attire that covers his entire body, concealing numerous scars from the practices of the Cult of Shadow Wing. He tends to be somewhat gruff and impatient with strangers, discouraging the stay of unfamiliar individuals by citing a lack of space or charging high fees for accommodation. Zalrik holds a set of keys that can open all locked doors in the inn, as well as the key to his office drawers *(see Location 9 - Administrative Office)*. Most of his time is spent in this office, receiving or sending magically encrypted correspondences and maintaining records in a large book, which also contains the names of all those who have stayed there.

In addition to him, the inn employs a cook, a blacksmith, and a cleaning lady (all CE, human, **shadow mages**). They, along with eight "guests staying in the rooms upstairs (all CE, human, **Shadow Wing initiates**), are all cultists. Like Zalrik, they tend to wear clothing that covers most of their bodies. When they are certain that there are no intruders,

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they act openly, conversing and planning their descent for the cult meetings. However, in the presence of outsiders, they all seek to maintain the utmost discretion, focusing on their tasks and lending a semblance of normality to the inn.

Locked internal doors can be opened with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check, or be forced open with a successful DC 18 (Athletics) check.

The Hogaw's Wind inn floor 1 | 1 square = 5 ft.

Ground Level

1- Entry

The entrance is adorned with two beautiful stone statues depicting fictional characters from Hogaw's bizarre literary works. Both are mounted on horses, and their names can be read as "Zephyros Deathrider"' and "Thorne Blacksteel." Behind these statues, you'll find the inn gate reinforced with iron frames.

2 - Main Hall

As you step into the main hall, you quickly realize it is a carefully crafted and sturdy building, adorned with simple tapestries and embroidered curtains. In front of the entrance stands a magnificent statue of a warrior, illuminated by chandeliers. The inscriptions on the statue indicate that it represents Hogaw, the inn's founder.

On a counter, you can see a bell, clearly positioned for use by incoming guests.

The entry is most often empty. Zalrik will only appear to receive the characters when they ring the bell or make loud noises. He will arrive to offer the services of the Inn (see more about him in The Hogaw's Wind inn section).

Services	Price
Overnight in poor collective accommodation.	8 sp
Overnight in modest collective accommodation.	2 gp
Modest meal of the day.	5 sp
Comfortable meal of the day.	1 gp
Simple forging services.	2 gp + material
Stables (outside), period.	2 sp

If the characters decide to stay and settle in, Zalrik will ask for their names and places of origin, making a note in his book.

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If the characters do not register, they will be barred from access beyond the entrance hall by the cultists. Should they force their entry, Zalrik will be prompted to attack them.

3 - Mess Hall

Just to the right of the main hall, you can see a handful of wooden tables and chairs where guests take their meals. The tables are individually lit by candlelight, and beneath them, it's possible to see a few cockroaches scuttling to and from the doors behind the tables.

The dining hall is usually empty, but it may host cultists acting as common guests during dinner time. They will attempt to eavesdrop on any outsiders' conversations.

4 - Kitchen Counter

The establishment's kitchen prepares dishes and places them on a counter for guests to pick up and take to their tables. The inn must have adopted this method due to a lack of additional staff. There's a bell available to draw the cook's attention to an order.

This chamber is usually empty, awaiting the sound of the bell's gong for the cook to come and attend to the request. The task is performed very slowly and without much effort from the cook, **Graves** (CE human **shadow mage**).

If Graves sees any invader, he will rush inside the kitchen to get help *(see location 6 - Kitchen)*.

5 - Pantry

Approaching the small, dim pantry, you're assaulted by an unsettling and repulsive odor, hinting at something far more sinister than mere spoilage. As your eyes adjust to the gloom, you observe that many of the shelves, encased in cobwebs and grime, bear odd assortments of grotesque meat provisions. Peculiarly, amidst the decay and destitution, remnants of humanoid anatomy and other bizarre, unwholesome items are haphazardly stored as if they were ordinary sustenance. Some small rats, seemingly unbothered by the morbidity of their surroundings, have nestled amidst the horror, scurrying away and causing their tiny claws to patter swiftly through the macabre scene. It becomes nauseatingly clear that the "food" stored here is meant for tastes far removed from the ordinary.

This area is restricted to the inn's staff only. The scene is terror-inducing, revealing that what is stored as food here likely consists of the remains of those sacrificed by the cultists.

Nothing of interest can be found here aside from the grotesque display. Any character who has consumed food from the inn must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become incapacitated by nausea for 1 minute upon witnessing this scene.

6 - Kitchen

The scent of meat pervades this chamber, accompanied by dozens of incessantly buzzing flies. The floor, damp and soiled, bears traces of partially dried, oily grease. Pots and ingredients on the shelves are disheveled and equally dirty. A curtain discreetly conceals an exit to the rear.

The cook typically remains here during the day, preparing simple dishes from undercooked meat. He will become furious if anyone enters the kitchen, as there are traces that could incriminate him.

If Graves sees an invader, he may use an action to activate a sigil hidden on the side of the stone oven, which will summon a **penumbral gluttony** to help deter any intruder.

A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Medicine) check can reveal that some pieces of meat on the table are actually humanoid.

7 and 8 - The Anteroom

This room serves as a sort of private lounge for the staff, providing access to the innkeeper's office. Aside from a large rug adorning the center of the room, no other furniture is present. A large painting on the north wall depicts a cataclysm, with the caption: "The Malrokian Curse will take us into the realm of Madness."

This location conceals a secret passage leading to the Shadow Wing temple. A character must succeed on a DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check to find the secret lever, which is hidden in a decorative barrel at the back of this room *(in area 8)*.

Upon activation, the rug (in area 7) will roll back, revealing a trapdoor that hides a spiral stone staircase. **These stairs lead to area 1 on the Shadow Wing Temple map.**

The doors to this room are always locked, and access is heavily restricted. Any character found here without compelling justification will undoubtedly be attacked by any cultists present.

The locked door can be opened with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check, forced open with a successful DC 18 Strength (Athletics) check or with Zalrik's key.

9 - Administration Office

This small room houses a desk, atop which sits a candle inside a lantern. Draped over the back of the chair behind the desk is a dark leather cloak, and an adorned rug beneath the table is the room's only other furnishing, rendering the space strangely empty.

This is where **Zalrik Kasmar** spends most of his time. Here, he keeps the correspondence he receives and his notebook. He rarely allows anyone inside, keeping all his information secret, even from his fellow cultists working at the inn.

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The cloak on the chair is a **cloaker**, summoned by the cultists in the temple and used as a guardian. It can be called to action by Zalrik and will also attack anyone besides him who sits in the chair.

The drawers on the table are locked and a character with thieves' tools can try to pick locks with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check to be opened, or with a key that is always with Zalrik. Inside one of them, 175 gp, 13 sp, and 213 cp can be found; on another, there is a *gem of seeing*.

10 - The Archives

In this small, dimly lit room, several stacks of papers and books are piled upon a rustic wooden table and within a cabinet in the back. Dust seems to have claimed much of the room, accompanied by numerous spiderwebs adorning every corner.

In this locked room, which can be opened with a DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check, ancient guest records, spanning its entire existence, are stored alongside letters and other important documents, including correspondence with nobles and Ironhand officials from the city. A successful DC 15 Investigation (Intelligence) check could reveal a box among the stacks of papers, containing six onyx stones (50 gp each) and three copper chalices studded with garnets (25 gp each).

11 - Staff Quarters

The door bears a sign: "Restricted Access." Inside, a simple, rustic chamber designed to accommodate two people contains two straw beds, two low-quality wooden chests, and a table in the corner. The room smells of dampness, and the bedding, quite dirty, needs to be changed.

The cook and the blacksmith use this chamber for sleeping and storing some of their belongings. The scarcity of items like clothes and other personal effects may draw attention, since the contents of the chests do not resemble everyday objects. Both chests are locked and require a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools to reveal the following treasures:

First chest: Thieves' tools, a playing card set, studded leather armor, 37 sp, and 10 gp.

Second chest: Smith's tools, a silvered longsword, a fine wine bottle, 28 sp, and 2 pp.

Beyond this content, it is noteworthy that there are no personal belongings, such as day-to-day clothing, within the chests.

12 - Staff Quarters

The door sign reads: "Restricted Access." Inside, a humble and rustic chamber is intended to serve as accommodation for two people. Within the room, you can see two beds, two wooden chests, and a simple desk.

Zalrik Kasmar and the chambermaid use this room for resting and storing some of their belongings. The absence of additional items, such as clothing and personal effects, might raise suspicions since the contents of the chests do not resemble everyday items. Both chests are locked and require a successful DC 17 Dexterity check with thieves' tools to unlock, revealing the following treasures:

First chest: a forgery kit, a healer's kit, a scholar's pack, and a flute.

Second chest: 77 sp, 82 gp, 11 pp, and one gold bracelet (25 gp).

The desk contains a few horror literature books written by Hogaw and two magical scrolls: *bestow curse* and *gentle repose*.

13 - Warehouse

In this dark and foul-smelling room, amid some debris, lie several crates containing seasonal tools and utensils, spare bedding, and various cleaning and gardening supplies. Furthermore, two tables stand here: one seemingly for the staff to rest, and the other cluttered with assorted objects. However, a map catches your eye.

Among the vast array of items is a set of silver cutlery, weighing 3 lb. and valued at 100 gp.

The map on the table, ancient and partially intact, unveils the galleries and corridors of an old dwarven mine, now a stronghold of the Shadow Wing temple. It distinctly indicates the river entrance leading directly into the temple (see The Cave - page 228). It does not reveal the location of the inn's secret passage.

A character can delve deeper into the map's secrets with 5 minutes of study and a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Upon success, they will gain insights into the intricacies of the temple below, aiding in discovering secret passages and alternative routes in **The Temple of Z'ulvath** section of this chapter.

14 - Forge

You enter a small forge, set in a seemingly impractical location due to the limited space and intense heat, which still manages to maintain its basic function. In addition to the forge, an anvil and two shelves filled with second-rate metal objects complete the rustic setting.

The blacksmith **Samans** (CE human **shadow mages**, with proficiency with smith's tools) typically pretends to work here, appearing busy whenever someone approaches. His true duty is to destroy any evidence that might incriminate them by incinerating the belongings of the victims inside the forge. With enough persistence, he might even perform simple blacksmithing services.

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The Hogaw's Wind inn floor 2 | 1 square = 5 ft.

Upper Level

15 - Library

In this room, you see several shelves and cabinets containing numerous books, scrolls, and engravings. All materials stored here appear quite old and dusty. A desk, used for reading and writing, is adorned with a sinister skull.

The library is used by cultists who entertain themselves with literary works written by Hogaw, in which he expresses his morbidity through dark and macabre tales. A simple glance at the book spines reveals several titles, including "*The Jewel of Despair*," "*The Final Breath of Death*," "*The Meaning of Pain*," "*A Thousand Days of Terror*," "*Real Nightmares*," "*Until the Last Drop of Blood*," and several others along this vein.

If the PCs investigate, a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check may reveal a book that appears to have been recently used. Inside it, they find a folded and crumpled letter bearing the following words (PCs may get it):

"My most beloved art, a depiction of the cataclysm, a fatality inevitable. My complete work is but an expression, each word a fragment, suffering, and sins intertwined in ink, showing what the Father brings. My life's work shall bring me close to the Father, while behind, I shed my vulnerable side."

16, 17, and 18 - Superior Collective Accommodations

In this spacious room, four relatively comfortable beds are paired with four high-quality chests, a large wardrobe, and a small table. A balcony is also present, though access is blocked by a door of iron bars, securely locked.

This upper room typically accommodates cultists who help guard the Inn. Rooms 16 and 17 are often occupied by four cultists each (all CE, human, **Shadow Wing initiates**), totaling eight. They may be found here, or walking in the Inn as if they were guests.

Room 18 can be used by the characters if they opt to stay, paying the premium price for "comfortable accommodation".

Should they investigate Rooms 16 and 17, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check will reveal a hidden compartment within each wardrobe, each containing four ceremonial black robes bearing the symbol of Z'ulvath, the Penumbral Father.

Room 16 houses a chest with a *scroll of contact other plane* and a *scroll of cloudkill*.

Room 17 contains a chest with scrolls of *circle of death*, *mass healing word*, and *forbiddance* (one of each), as well as a black statue of a bizarre-looking fly with tentacles; in reality, it's a *figurine of wondrous power, ebony fly*.

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19 - Bath and Latrines

Entering here, you see a spacious bathing area featuring several alcoves used as private latrines. Beyond the unpleasant odor pervading the chamber, the presence of flies and cockroaches indicates the lack of cleanliness.

This bathroom is used by the staff and some guests. Nearby, one can often see an old woman, **Granny Sillery** (CE human **shadow mage**), who acts as the inn's cleaner. While she appears busy most of the time, many parts of the inn remain filthy. Strangely, the entry and exterior of the inn are instead always kept in pristine condition.

20 and 21 - Simple Collective Accommodations

You enter a somewhat cramped and poorly ventilated room. This space carries the scent of dampness. It is furnished with a few simple beds, chests, a wardrobe, and a table, all crafted from wood of mediocre quality.

This simple room typically accommodates up to four guests, usually non-members of the cult, and thus, the accommodations are intentionally unsatisfactory in the hope that they will depart the inn soon.

If guests linger too long, cultists may grow suspicious, suspecting investigation, and might set up an ambush during the night to prevent any discovery of the inn's true nature.

Other mundane NPCs, unrelated to the cult, may occupy this room if appropriate. Consequently, the chests may contain their belongings, accessible through successful use of thieves' tools on a DC 15 Dexterity check to pick the locks

The Cave

The characters can learn about this cave during their investigation of the Imperial capital or during the exploration of the Howag's Wind Inn (on a set of maps in the Warehouse, location 13).

The entrance to this cave requires entering the Rubicund River and swimming into a submerged cavern that will lead into an underground lake that is connected with the dwarven tunnels.

The lake is used by the temple to gather water, and the passage is used for summoned emoguns to leave the temple and enter the capital without rising notice to the inn, as they can emerge from any part of the Rubicund.

After a swift dive into the river and navigating through the underwater tunnel, you discern the brightness of the water surface above, signaling an opening into a cavern. As you emerge from the water, you find yourself in an underground lake, a water spring to your left, and two separate tunnels ahead. The space would be shrouded in complete darkness, were it not illuminated by a strange, luminescent fungus blanketing the stone cavern ceiling.

While cultists seldom visit this location, penumbral creatures regularly traverse it en route to the Imperial capital. To safeguard the place, the servants of Droggath have summoned and mystically bound a great monster to this place: a hydra.

This creature, perpetually alert, resides near the water in the room's corner, crafting its nest from the remnants of the scant few who have entered and the remains of prisoners cast here to satiate its hunger.

Magically bound, it does not assault cultists or penumbral entities, but will attack all others. The **hydra** has been endowed with a mystical sense of connection to the Penumbral Plane, enabling it to discern true cultists.

Madwalkers may traverse this area unharmed; the creature will refrain from attacking them, even if attacked, due to the connection they carry with the Penumbral Plane, which marks all beings that the creature is compelled to never attack.

In addition to the **hydra**, 1d6+1 **penumbral envies** can be often found here, drawn to the humid environment.

Running the Encounter. The water here is not sufficiently deep to necessitate swimming, but it will hinder medium and small creatures as difficult terrain (moving 1 foot in it costs 2 feet of speed).

The **envies** may utilize their swim speed to mitigate this issue, while the **hydra** is too large for this terrain to impede its movement.

Should the **hydra** fall, any remaining **penumbral envies** will flee toward the way to the temple, attempting to muster additional allies before re-engaging *(see Room 9 of the Temple of Z'ulvath, as they will arrive there first)*.

Treasure. In the Hydra's lair lies a hoard amassed from its victims. Droggath's cultists often present offerings to this splendid treasure pile, believing they are thereby dedicating these riches to the Fleshspawner himself, who reigns over all monsters.

Here one can discover 23 pp, 1,372 gp, 3,073 ep, 6,333 sp, and 191,013 cp, forming a colossal pile of coins. Among them also lie 5 bloodstones (50 gp each), 1 jasper (50 gp), 2 quartzes (50 gp each), 3 sardonyxes (50 gp each), 1 zircon (50 gp), a gold dagger set with an emerald (250 gp), a *necklace of fireballs*, and two *potions of superior healing*.

After defeating the creatures, the characters can advance into the tunnel to reach room 9 of the Temple of Z'ulvath.

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The Cave | 1 square = 5 ft.

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The Temple of Z'ulvath

Patrick Karg (Order #4214378)

1 - Reception
2 - Shrine of Droggath
3 - Shrine of C'thraxis
4 - Shrine of Krynnethoth
5 - Shrine of Z'ulvath
6 - Storage Room
7 - Prison and Torture Room
8 - Library and Study Room
9 - Underground Garden
10 - Cultists' Laboratory
11 - Poisonous Corridor
12 - Hall of Envy
13 - Armory and Guard Lodging
14 - Mess Hall
15 - Ritual Room
16 - Chamber of Sacrifices
17 - Treasure Room
18 - Hall of Statues
19 - Penumbral Portal
20 - Morvus' Room
21 - Lords' Crypts
22 - Priests' Rooms

The Temple of Z'ulvath

The characters can enter here either by the secret passage inside the inn, arriving at location 1 of the map, or by the cave tunnels, arriving at location 9.

The Temple Structure

While the construction retains several aspects of the original dwarven architecture, such as certain columns and beams and even forsaken rails and carts, many areas have been entirely reworked and repurposed by the cult over the numerous years it has maintained this hidden temple.

The cultists have employed polished dark stones and magical torches that cast a purple or red dim light throughout the place, endeavoring to mimic the Penumbral Plane as closely as possible. Serving as a well-organized and long-standing temple, it provides all the amenities necessary for the cultists' daily life, including various altar rooms, dormitories, a library, and a dining room, all adorned with spears, chains, fabrics, and carpets. Echoes of screams frequently pervade the air, their sources difficult to pinpoint within the corridors.

1 - Reception

Read this to the Players if they went down the passageway at the inn:

Descending the long and winding staircase, so narrow it almost provokes claustrophobia, you become aware of the gradually intensifying sounds of screams and moans, blending eerily with a purplish light that slowly permeates the darkness in the stairwell. Upon reaching the ground level, a large room unveils itself, two floating magical orbs stationed at the entrance. Inside, a vast, white, glowing magical circle envelops the floor. To the left, near the wall, stands a modest desk and chair; further ahead on the wall, a shelf is mounted on the wall. Various sharp spears and hanging chains, intertwined with fabrics, adorn the walls and ceiling, crafting a chillingly macabre decoration. Two doors are apparent: one to the left of the shelves, and another at the far end of the right wall, adjacent to a sinister stone statue depicting an aberrant creature.

Read this to the Players if they came from the hall:

Navigating through the long, dark corridor, you emerge into a large chamber. To the left of the door, a grotesque stone statue keeps a silent vigil. Directly ahead, a shelf stands, with a door concealed behind it. A small desk and a table can be seen near the other wall, while a bright, white magical circle radiates from the room's center and two magical orbs hover near a staircase at the room's far end. The walls and ceiling are embellished with sharp spears and hanging chains, woven with fabrics, forging a grotesque tableau of decoration.

This room serves as a safeguard to prevent unauthorized entry into the Temple. Entry is permitted only upon the utterance of a specific prayer.

Guardian Orbs. Enchanted orbs are positioned on either side of the stairs, attuned to detect any intruders in the room. A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that these orbs are connected to the magic circle and require a specific command word for deactivation. Speaking the words aloud deactivates the orbs for 1 minute. Should any creature attempt to navigate the space between the orbs without uttering the command, the circle activates, summoning a **penumbral anger** to defend the temple.

The command words are: "*The Malrokian Curse will take us into the realm of Madness.*"

Hints towards these words can be found in the portrait at the Anteroom of the Inn (Room 7). While characters can extract this password from a cultist, such a feat proves no easy task. Most cultists, devout and fearful in their worship of the Ungods, would sooner choose death over betrayal. Their resilience to pain complicates matters, for many cultists practice self-flagellation as a means of venerating their eldritch deities.

Storage Room. This location also features a storage room at the back. Inside, one can find simple supplies for the temple, such as barrels of oil, steel bars, brooms, and other durable goods of low value. Although low hierarchy cultists sometimes use it for private conversations, it is most often empty.

2 - Shrine of Droggath, The Fleshspawner

Upon entering, you find yourself in a room where the ground is littered with scattered bones and a massive pile of them is forming a macabre altar at the center. The air is dense, laden with the pungent odors of iron and decay. Dried blood stains the bones, as if it has been poured over them, and the eerie structure casts a faint crimson light that bathes the entire room in red. Within the altar, a red ruby gleams, pulsating with mystical energy.

In this unholy place, cultists devoted to Droggath immerse themselves in worship, honoring the Ungod of monsters and slaughter by offering their own blood or sacrificing prisoners to the Fleshspawner.

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Should a non-worshiper touch the altar or the ruby in it, Droggath's magic will summon the spirits of those sacrificed here to defend the location. Furthermore, the altar will begin to emanate a powerful aura of bloodlust.

Altar of Droggath. If the aura activates, all living creatures that do not serve the Ungods and end their turn within 20 feet of the altar must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be affected by the spell *confusion* until the end of their next turn.

The altar has 50 hit points, AC 15, resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical attacks, immunity to poison and psychic damage, and immunity to all conditions that do not specifically apply to objects. Destroying it ends the aura and frees the spirits; knowing that requires a successful Intelligence (Religion) check against a DC of 16.

Spirits. The altar will summon forth four **wraiths**, consumed by rage, which will attack the nearest living creature on each of their turns — even if it is, on occasion, a cultist.

Mystical Ruby. The ruby is a magic item used by some cultists of Droggath called the *ruby of carnage*.

Ruby of Carnage

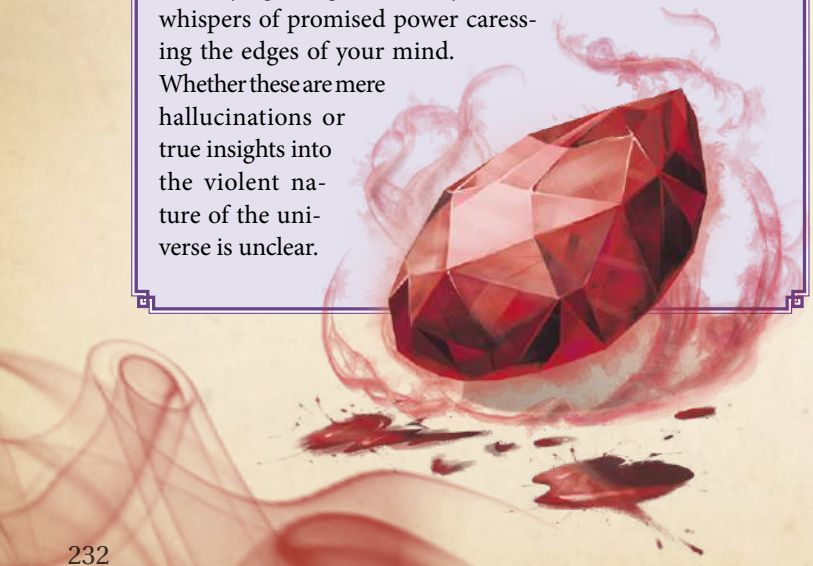
Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This large ruby, saturated with a malevolent dark-red hue, pulses with a sinister energy that seems to throb in time with the heartbeat of its wielder. This gem yearns for the vitality that flows through the veins of the living and rewards offerings of blood with power.

As a bonus action, you may activate the Ruby of Carnage *(you must be holding or carrying it in a necklace)*, willingly offering your life force to the gem. You lose 3d6 hit points, causing blood to leak from your mouth and eyes and the ruby to glow with malevolent light. Your next attack roll, ability check, or saving throw before the end of your next turn is made with advantage as the ruby infuses your body with power.

The hit points lost to the Ruby of Carnage cannot be restored, except by taking a long rest or by the spell Greater Restoration or other more potent magics. The loss of hit points ignores temporary hit points.

Carrying this gem makes you sometimes hear malevolent whispers of promised power caressing the edges of your mind. Whether these are mere hallucinations or true insights into the violent nature of the universe is unclear.



3 - Shrine of C'thraxis, Lady of Sins

Upon entering this room, you are met with the strong, intoxicating fragrance of incense. At the center of the chamber, a brazier alight with purple flames produces a continuous stream of white smoke that crawls along the floor. Numerous cushions are laid out around it, and upon them lie three women, seemingly distracted, as if in a trance. At the end of the room stands a statue of an aberrant female form: multiple tentacles serve as her legs, a skull is held in her extended right hand, and an amethyst is encrusted in its chest.

This room is dedicated to the Ungod C'thraxis. Her followers come here to worship her, often using hallucinogenic herbs to enter a trance. They believe that by freeing their minds and embracing madness, they can more easily receive revelations from their mistress.

Currently, three female cultists are present: one **Purple Witch sorcerer** and two **shadow mages** from the Cult of Shadow Wing. They are lost in a haze, lying on the couches.

If the characters enter the room quietly, they will surprise the cultists. The door to this room is heavy, so significant outside noise is needed to draw their attention while it is closed.

Toxic Incense. When a creature ends its turn inside this room, it must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be affected by the *slow* spell for 1 minute. While under this effect, the creature's movements and thoughts are lethargic. Creatures immune to charm or poison or those that do not need to breathe are unaffected by the incense.

C'thraxis Statue. This statue holds a large amethyst worth 300 gp. Removing it will cause the brazier to stop producing smoke, but it will still take 1 minute for the Toxic Incense effect to dissipate from the room.

Rewards. The Purple Witch sorcerer carries a *ring of protection*, one of the **shadow mages** carries a *philter of love*, and the other one is using a *cloak of elvenkind*. They also carry a total of 430 gp shared between their pouches.

4 - Shrine of Krynnethoth, The Mystical One

Upon entering, you observe a circular room, with mystical runes etched into the floor, glowing with an icy blue light. The temperature drops noticeably, making your breath visible in the chill air. Four cultists, cloaked in mantles and clutching staffs, are channeling some form of ritual magic toward an altar, upon which rests a large, open mystical book. Its pages are inscribed in a bizarre, incomprehensible language. The cultists all turn towards you, alerted by the opening door that they are no longer alone.

In this room, the cultists of Krynnethoth practice their ritual magic, imbuing the altar with their own mystical essences.

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Among the four cultists, the leader is a **mage**, accompanied by a **shadow mage** and two **Shadow Wing initiates**.

Special Combat Rule

Altar of Krynnethoth. A servant of Krynnethoth can, as an action, expend one of their spells as if they had cast it to empower the altar. At the end of the round, the altar will cast a spell based on the total levels of all spells channeled into it during that round *(if no spell was channeled, then it will cast 0)*.

The spell is cast by the altar, with the target being determined by the last surviving cultist who channeled magic into it. If no such cultist exists, it targets the closest creature that is not a servant of the Ungods.

The altar has 50 hit points, AC 15, resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical attacks, immunity to poison and psychic damage, and immunity to all conditions that do not specifically apply to objects. Destroying the altar ends this effect.

The altar is considered a 17th-level spellcaster. The DC to resist its spells is 16, and it has a +8 to hit with spell attacks.

Spell Sum	Effect
0	Magic Missile
1	Scorching Ray
2	Hold Person
3	Fear
4	Ice Storm
5	Cone of Cold
6	Circle of Death
7	Power Word: Pain
8	Finger of Death
9	Power Word: Stun
10	Weird

GM Note: If you decide not to use this rule, instead have the altar confer disadvantage on all attacks made by creatures that do not serve the Ungods while they are within 20 feet of the altar. The altar retains the same statistics as above, ensuring that there remains some strategic significance in destroying it, which may be relevant in the Ritual Room *(location 15)*.

Rewards. 210 gp shared among the pouches of the cultists, and the following items:

Tucked into the robe of the mage cultist is a *gem of brightness*, pulsing with a faint, eerie light. On the belt of each of the Shadow Wing initiates is a *scroll of animate dead*. While the **shadow mage** carries a *potion of cold resistance* with him, its contents appear to be a swirling, icy blue liquid.

5 - Shrine of Z'ulvath, The Shadow Wing and Penumbral Father

Opening this door reveals a room with natural cavern walls and a large statue of a draconic aberration, which boasts six pairs of wings and dozens of tentacles. The statue's four glowing eyes seem to track your movements. A thin green mist pours continuously from its mouth, casting a faint green tinge throughout the room.

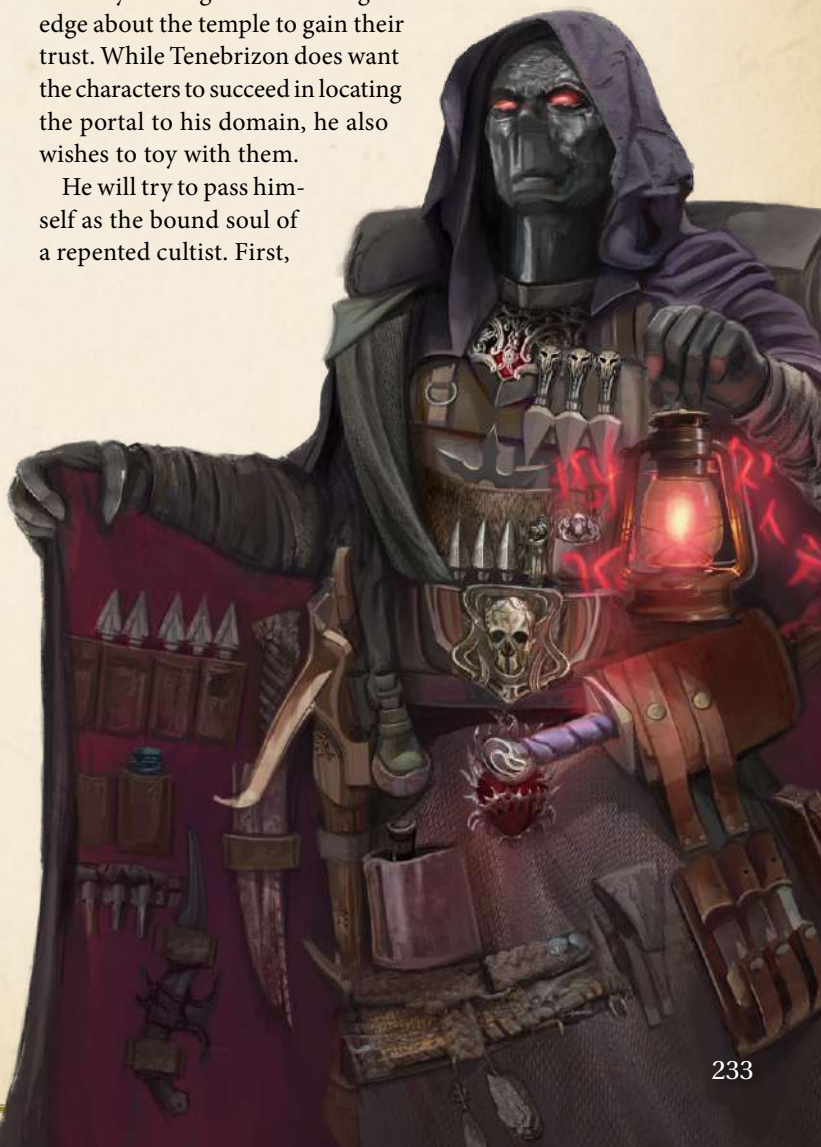
This place houses an altar to Z'ulvath, the Penumbral Father. Unbeknownst to the cultists, Tenebrizon has employed his magic on the statue to manipulate those who come to worship Z'ulvath, ensuring adherence to his orders by providing them with supposed approval from the Penumbral Father himself.

Tenebrizon fears no retribution for this act, as Z'ulvath cares not for trivialities, only the results produced by whatever methods employed.

Should the characters enter the room, Tenebrizon will become aware of their presence and be able to communicate with them through the statue. His interaction is limited to speech and listening; he cannot affect them in any other way.

Initially, he will attempt to deceive the characters by offering aid and sharing knowledge about the temple to gain their trust. While Tenebrizon does want the characters to succeed in locating the portal to his domain, he also wishes to toy with them.

He will try to pass himself as the bound soul of a repented cultist. First,



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to gain their trust, he will assist the characters by revealing a hidden cache in this very room *(details below)*. He will say that another cultist killed him and hid his belongings there.

After that, Tenebrizon will inform them that if they seek answers about the cult, he knows about the temple, but not about the cult's plans. He will tell them that they need to find **High Priest Seraphina Shadowblaze** and will provide the cardinal direction and general location of her quarters without offering specifics on how to get there.

Subsequently, he will feign providing additional useful information but will instead lead the characters into perilous locations such as the central hall *(location 15)*.

If the characters return here later, he will continue to provide useful hints to maintain their progress, but will also toy with them as much as he can without revealing himself.

Hidden Cache. Behind the statue, an illusion conceals a stone in a specific location that can be removed if pulled with sufficient force, requiring a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check.

Discovering this hidden cache without knowledge of it is almost impossible, requiring a DC 24 Wisdom (Perception) check.

If you are aware of it, finding it is relatively easy *(Tenebrizon created the cache, and he alone knows of its existence)*.

Within, one can find two *potions of greater healing* and a *tome of clear thought*, accompanied by a note reading, "Let's see if you will finally get smarter."

If the characters ask the "statue" about the note, he will feign ignorance. Yet if they uncover that it is him, he will just openly mock them, and then end his link with the statue.

6 - Storage Room

Upon entering this room, you observe piles upon piles of objects, stacked in boxes, on shelves, and strewn across the floor. Despite the dim lighting, you discern a substantial layer of dust on the objects and are met with a pungent, musty odor.

This storage room is where the cultists store objects stolen from their victims that were neither claimed for personal use nor sacrificed to the Ungods. The content ranges from mundane objects, such as boxes, chairs, tables, and barrels, to a selection of simple magic items, kept in case they should ever serve a purpose for the temple.

Searching. Should a character spend time searching the room, they can find 1d4-1 of the following items for each 5 minutes spent searching:

Roll (1d6)	Item
1	*Immovable Rod*
2	*Driftglobe*
3	*Rope of Climbing*
4	*Alchemy Jug*
5	*Scroll of Protection (Undead)*
6	*Portable Hole*

(Roll again if the result is an item they already found, until an item not found is rolled.)

Portable Hole. Within the *portable hole* resides a **collector** named **Torviukos**. His clan was discovered and attacked in the Penumbral Plane, but he survived by seeking refuge within the Portable Hole inside a secret pocket of a bag. Unfortunately for him, the cultists stumbled upon the bag and took it.

He ingeniously managed to leave open a small space allowing air into the hole and enabling him to listen for cultists or other presences outside.

Should the characters discover and open the *portable hole*, or converse in a manner that convinces Torviukos they are not cultists and are in fact infiltrating the temple, he may muster enough courage to exit the hole — though he must succeed on a DC 10 Strength check (with the possibility to retry in the event of a failure).

Should the characters converse with Torviukos, he implores them for help to escape the temple, promising a handsome reward if they assist him in finding the portal back to the Penumbral Plane.

If they agree, Torviukos, in a gesture of goodwill, will bestow upon them all the items he had when he concealed himself: a *potion of hill giant strength*, a *mithral chain shirt*, and 5 *vials of alchemist's fire*.

What Torviukos Knows

- The leader of this establishment is High Priestess Seraphina Shadowblaze, with her second-in-command being the formidable Morvus Ironshadow.
- He is aware of the approximate location of the penumbral portal in the Temple (room 19).
- He knows the portal leads to a distinct section of the first layer of the Penumbral Plane: the Soulflayer Caverns, where many lost souls are bound in eternal nightmares.

Torviukos is weakened from his prolonged period outside the Penumbra *(see collectors)* and cannot engage in combat. However, he can utilize his invisibility and remain hidden while accompanying the characters.

If the characters manage to transport Torviukos to the Penumbral Plane, he will reward them with a *collector's penumbral key*.

Collector's Penumbral Key
Wondrous item, very rare

This key contains 3 charges. While in the Penumbral Plane, it can open any lock, even those protected by magic, expending one charge. It regains one charge after remaining unused for 24 hours.

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7 - Prison and Torture Room

In this repugnant, dimly lit chamber, several cells, constructed from thick, thorny metal bars, line the walls. Moans and cries from beings of various species echo hauntingly through the corridors, their forms barely visible within the cells. In the center of the room, a large torture table, adorned with an array of sinister implements, sits ominously, chains suspended directly above it from the ceiling. Nearby, a muscular, long-bearded cultist sharpens his tools with deliberate precision, while two aberrations sit obediently at his feet, like hounds awaiting a command.

All prisoners brought to the temple are confined within this grim space, awaiting their inevitable transfer to the grand hall (room 15) for execution.

Upon entering the chamber, characters encounter a **master of pain**, meticulously preparing his instruments for the next torture session, while two **penumbral pains** wait obediently, acting under his command.

Prisoners. While most prisoners here possess scant knowledge about the temple or the cultists' practices, providing minimal information upon liberation, one individual stands out: An'Kur, a Kepesh high priest of Ba-Ka.

Weakened, with 4 levels of exhaustion, and incapable of aiding in combat against the cultists, An'Kur is bound by cursed magical chains that stifle his ability to cast divine spells. Removing them necessitates a Dexterity check using Thieves' Tools, contested against a DC of 20.

Should he be liberated from his magical confines, An'Kur will express his gratitude by casting *cure wounds* and *lesser restoration* on the characters, utilizing his remaining 2 slots of 2nd-level and 2 slots of 1st-level spells.

What An'Kur Knows

- He's aware that Tenebrizon's plan involves taking control of a secret nearly-finished Vandanamalika, crafted by the Kepesh, and its mystical transposition to an unknown location in the Penumbral Plane. He speculates that the cultists are executing a ritual with potency surpassing even the one that birthed Zarumag and the Wasteland at the dawn of the Imperial Age.
- Once, he possessed a tameranium idol, the Peretuk, a pivotal component in the Vandanamalika's protective ritual, which is now in the cultists' hands.
- He is certain that a portal to the Penumbral Plane exists within this temple, and it likely leads near to where Tenebrizon orchestrates his dark plans. However, its exact location is unknown to him.

If the prisoners are set free, An'Kur will promise to invoke Ba-Ka's favor upon the characters during their ventures within the Penumbra. While the other prisoners plead for safe escort, An'Kur confidently assures he can guide them to safety if he is briefed on the path the characters used to infiltrate the temple.

If the PCs are acquainted with Turmalind Thrud (the mage being coerced by Seraphina in Chapter 6), they will discover that one of the prisoners is Angela Thrud (NG human **commoner**), his wife. Turmalind will be eternally grateful upon learning that they were the ones who rescued her.

8 - Library and Study Room

A grand hall filled with tall, dark wooden shelves, laden with books, scrolls, and parchments. It's illuminated by magical candles that hover in the air, following each of the visitors. Some desks are arranged in the room, with books for taking notes placed upon them. Upon a quick examination of the book contents, many of them seem to be stories from the perspective of Shadow Wing throughout the ages, as well as some biographies of revered cultists among them. On one of the walls, there's a large map of Tanares, with the continent of Darkall circled in its northern region, indicating where it all began.

Within this library exist only books of tales, accounts, and few maps that narrate the story of Tanares from the cultists' perspective.

A secret room lies ahead, the activation lever for which is a lever disguised as a book. It can be found through a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Secret Library. Inside the secret passage, one can find a secluded **penumbral sadness** reading a book in the secret portion of the library. He will immediately attack anyone who is not a high-standing cultist and dares to enter this place where he keeps his secrets hidden.

If the characters search this room, they will find many books on dark magic, including a select set of powerful scrolls: *scroll of cloudkill*, scroll of *geas*, scroll of *circle of death*, scroll of *eyebite*, scroll of *create undead*, scroll of *finger of death*, scroll of *symbol*, scroll of *clone*, and scroll of *feeblemind*.

A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check or the use of *detect magic* can also reveal that two books in this room are magic items: A *tome of seeping darkness* and a *tome of mystical insight*, the most prized items in the **penumbral sadness**' collection.

Tome of Seeping Darkness
Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

This black, eerie tome is adorned with unsettling eldritch symbols that seem to shift and whisper when gazed upon. A non-evil character who attunes to this tome has their maximum hit points reduced to half until the attunement ends.

This tome can be used as a focus for casting spells, conferring a +1 bonus to your spell save DC and your spell attack rolls.

Once per long rest, when you cast a spell that deals necrotic damage, you can choose to deal maximum damage with that spell instead of rolling for damage.

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Tome of Mystical Insight
Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

This tome, protected with enchanted silver adornments, is written in the Draconic language. Any spellcaster who touches it can sense its power flowing through them.

If you are attuned to this tome, you gain one extra spell slot of the highest spell level available to you, up to 6th level.

Once per long rest, when you cast a spell, you can use a bonus action to either increase your spell save DC by 2 or gain a +2 bonus to your spell attack rolls for that spell.

9 - Underground Garden:

You arrive in what appears to be an underground garden, shrouded in bizarre, mutated vegetation that has never beheld sunlight. The plants here are pallid, and some emit a faint purple glow, bearing a melancholic aspect. To the far south, a small pond of water can be found. The room has three other passages, besides the one through which you arrived.

This place is where the cultists gather fresh water provided by the spring in the caverns (see The Cave).

While mostly unoccupied, should the characters linger too long, there is a possibility that some (1d4+1) **Shadow Wing initiates** may arrive here to collect water for their superiors.

10 - Cultists' Laboratory

In this damp and dimly lit place, stone tables laden with alembics, retorts, and other alchemical instruments waft various odors and vapors into the air from a blend of herbs, metals, and other exotic ingredients. Shelves surrounding the area seem to hold all kinds of mundane and magical ingredients suitable for crafting infusions, creams, and potions.

This locale serves as a crafting station for various types of potions, poisons, and other alchemical substances. Some are utilized by the cultists themselves to endure pain or counteract penumbral effects, while others are various kinds of poisons and toxins they use on their weapons or to torture their victims.

The place also houses some enchanted cloth masks meant to cover the nose and mouth, to resist the effects of the poisonous corridor in room 11 (it gives advantage on saves against it). It can also be used to gain advantage on the save of the effect of the incense on C'thraxis' shrine (room 3).

Secret Storage Room. If the characters search the laboratory, a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check will allow them to find a secret room that contains various mundane and magical substances.

There they can find: 2 doses of *Crawler Mucus*, 3 doses of *Malice*, 5 doses of *Serpent Venom*, 3 doses of *Truth Serum*, one dose of *Wyvern Poison*, and 4 doses of *Penumbral Bush Essence*.

Penumbral Bush Essence (Ingested).
Poison(Ingested). Cost: 500 gp
A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature takes 7 (2d6) poison damage, 7 (2d6) psychic damage, and is poisoned for the next 24 hours. On a success, it takes half the damage and is not poisoned.

11 - Poisonous Corridor

You enter a long, dark corridor, observing tracks that were likely once part of a mine. Despite apparent abandonment, the place retains the original structure of a mining tunnel, though in a precarious state. A thin green mist, carrying a sweet scent, shrouds the corridor.

This corridor, once a primary access point to the temple's various rooms, was overtaken by poisonous gas following a failed mystical experiment by the cultists a long time ago.

After establishing alternative access routes, this mine was abandoned and is now seldom used, except by cultists who desire to navigate the temple unseen by others.

Poisonous Fragrance. The light, sweet scent here is actually a powerful mystical poison. A creature that starts its turn or enters the area of the fragrance must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 22 (4d10) poison damage and is poisoned for 10 minutes. On a successful save, the creature takes half the damage and is not poisoned. A creature poisoned in this way that goes 1 minute without breathing the fragrance can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the poisoned condition on a success. A creature using an alchemically treated mask against gaseous poisons has advantage on saving throws against it.

12 - Hall of Envy

You enter a vast hall, adorned with numerous statues of penumbral creatures, each hosting a large black onyx gemstone encrusted at its top. Illuminated by shimmering, floating spheres of purple light, the hall also features eerie paintings on the floor. Among the statues, numerous reptilian aberrations can be seen, the eyes at the ends of their long tails gleaming ominously in your direction.

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This hall houses many of the **penumbral envies** that guard the temple, enabling the cultists to rapidly muster them in the event of a significant invasion.

There are a total of eight **penumbral envies** in this room, and they will attack any outsider who enters. The statues, representing powerful emoguns, are placed to attract the envies and keep them here — which they do most of the time, unless they become too dehydrated and retreat to the Cave to drink and swim.

The Twelve Statues. Each statue has a large black onyx gem encrusted in it. Due to their size, each of the twelve onyxes is worth 200 gp.

When a penumbral creature dies in this room, an onyx attached to a statue will shatter, and the creature's hit points will become half of its total (rounded down) instead of 0. An onyx must be attached to the statue to produce this mystical effect.

The onyxes are attached to the tops of the statues, so one must climb with a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) to reach the top and use an action to remove an onyx, or destroy the stone by attacking it. The gems have 10 hit points, AC 14, and resistance to piercing, slashing, fire, cold, and lightning damage, immunity to psychic, poison, and necrotic damage, and vulnerability to bludgeoning.

13 - Armory and Guard Lodging

Here, the temple guards are lodged in simple beds nestled in alcoves carved into the stone walls of the room. In the center, chests and crates store their belongings. There are also wooden tables and some chairs. Weapons and armor hang on metal pedestals, their shapes aggressively exaggerated, featuring sinister spikes and distorted forms.

In this area, temple guards convene for respite. Typically, four guards (CE human **knights**) linger here, awaiting orders. An adjoining chamber provides a modest space for bathing, as well as a latrine for their use.

Treasures. Each of the four soldiers dons splint mail and wields a long sword, a longbow, a metal shield, and a quiver holding 20 arrows. Within the chest, seven *Dungeoneer's Packs* and 134 gp, shared among backpacks and money pouches, can be found. Additional finds amidst the cultists' belongings include a *+1 chain mail*, a *+1 scale mail*, a *+2 warhammer*, and thirteen *+1 arrows*.

GM Note: You may opt to equip the guards with the magic items for consistency, or allow these items to be stored, perhaps catching the guards off-guard without their prime equipment, to streamline your AC, attack, and damage calculations.

14 - Mess Hall

You enter what appears to be a mess hall, filled with long wooden tables and benches. In the corner, a large, grotesque, headless creature consumes remnants from a cauldron, while at the tables, a few cultists dine on a thick stew from rustic bowls.

This place serves as a communal eating area, where some cultists (1d4 **Shadow Wing initiates**) and a **penumbral gluttony**, who consumes all their leftovers, can always be found.

Two small annex rooms can be found in this area:

Storage Room. Here, the cultists store their food stocks, including various vegetables and meats, both of animals and humanoids, preserved in salt or honey.

Kitchen. In this small kitchen, all the food for the entire temple is prepared. Two S**hadow Wing initiates**, tasked with preparing the food, are always present.

GM Note: If Jazannah (NE human **Purple Witch sorcerer**) escaped in Chapter 2 and you have not introduced her anywhere else, you can add her here, as she fled and was guided to this temple to keep serving the Ungods.

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Ritual Room | 1 square = 5 ft.

15 - Ritual Room

This vast hall, divided into three sections, boasts a lofty ceiling supported by numerous intertwined metal beams running from end to end. In its central section stand four enormous statues of the Ungods, their bases housing altars and receptacles for offerings. At the center of all the statues, a central altar is situated where a cultist is channeling his unholy magic. The floors of the lateral wings are adorned with macabre paintings and bloodstains. Three fissures can be seen on the ground, from which a mystical purple light emanates, bathing the room in a shroud of purple illumination.

This room is where the cultists perform their most powerful rituals. Often, prisoners are brought before the statues to be sacrificed, empowering the sinister magics cast in this place, especially those that summon emoguns to serve the temple.

The cultist performing magic here is a **prophet of shadows**, who was conducting a bloody sacrifice, bleeding himself into the altar to show his worship to the Ungods. He currently has 55 hit points and is taking 1d6 bleeding damage at the end of each of his turns.

- Any healing magic or a success on a DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine) check will stop the bleeding.

If the prophet dies while in this room, either by being outright killed by the characters, or by being left unconscious and subsequently dying from the bleeding, the ritual room will consume his soul and activate the unholy magic in the four Ungod statues. *(To prevent his death, the characters must knock him unconscious and stop the bleeding.)*

The Ungod Statues. Upon activation, each of the statues will glow and generate a unique mystical effect. If the characters destroyed the related shrine to that Ungod in locations 2, 3, 4, and 5, this will lessen the effects produced by the statues here, as the power of that Ungod will be diminished in the temple.

Statue of Droggath (Red). This statue will summon a monstrous creature, in a space adjacent to it, that will be overtaken by bloodlust, attacking anyone who is not a servant of the Ungods. The creature will always attack the closest enemy to it, disregarding its own safety or any strategy.

- If the gem on the altar (location 2) was not taken and the altar was not destroyed: It will summon a **chimera**.
- If the gem was taken or the altar was destroyed: It will summon a **manticore** instead.

Statue of C'thraxis (Purple). This statue will summon an Arachne, in a space adjacent to it, that will arrive to oversee the elimination of any intruders in the temple.

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- If the gem on the statue (location 3) was not taken and the statue was not destroyed: It will summon two **arachne ambushers**.
- If the gem was taken or the statue destroyed: It will summon only one **arachne ambusher** instead.

Statue of Krynnethoth (Blue). This statue will curse the characters with the mark of Krynnethoth. All creatures in this room that are not servants of the Ungods will be affected.

- If the altar (location 4) was not destroyed: The characters must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become permanently cursed to have disadvantage on all attack rolls. It can be removed by a *remove curse* or similar magic.
- If the altar was destroyed: They face the same effect above, but the curse has a 1-hour duration instead of being permanent and the DC is 13 instead of 16.

Statue of Z'ulvath (Green). This statue will summon a penumbral creature, in a space adjacent to it, bearing a purple glowing sigil of Z'ulvath, giving it advantage on all attack rolls and all saving throws.

- **If the statue (location 5) was not destroyed:** It will summon a **penumbral grudge**.
- **If the statue was destroyed:** It will summon a **penumbral pain** instead.

Penumbral Fissures. The three fissures on the ground were created by past powerful summoning rituals and now are penumbral taints on the material plane. Any creature that is neither a penumbral creature nor native to the Penumbral Plane *(arachnes and emoguns are native to the Penumbra)* takes 1d10 psychic and 1d10 necrotic damage whenever it ends its turn within 5 feet of these fissures. Ending its turn directly inside a fissure will cause 3d10 damage, instead of 1d10, for each of those damage types.

16 - Chamber of Sacrifices

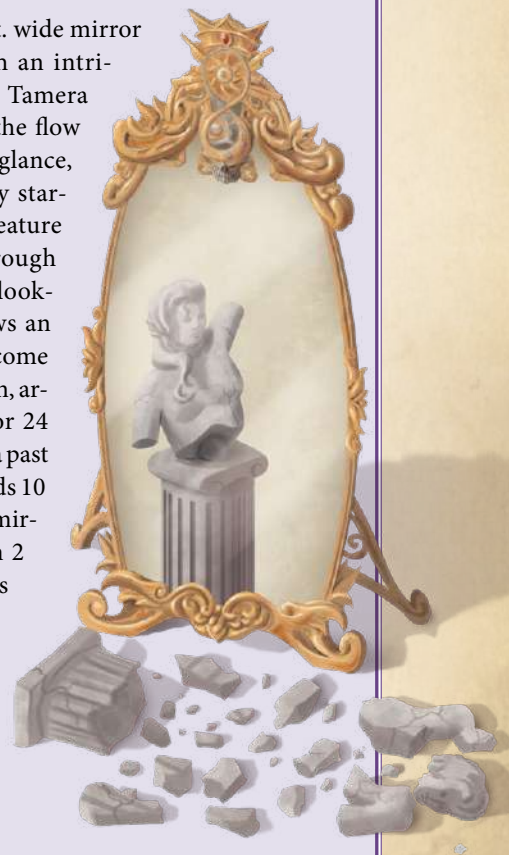
This room contains a large sacrificial table with shackles and magical inscriptions, surrounded by various pedestals holding spell components for the cult's rituals. Just below the table, a large ceramic bucket is positioned to collect the blood that drips from the sacrificed bodies. On the walls, various magical inscriptions and mysterious statues appear to emerge from the rocks, sending shivers down the spines of those who gaze upon them for too long. In a corner, one can see a strange mirror that seems completely out of place; its golden structure depicts a woman holding the sun and a man holding the moon.

This room is used by the cultists to prepare the targets for sacrifice with processes such as using their own blood to create sigils on their bodies, engraving their flesh with eldritch runes, and using specific components necessary to enhance the specific ritual they may be preparing. Such preparations might involve carving objects associated with the emotion of the emogun they seek to summon — spikes for **penumbral pains**, or gems and coins for a **penumbral greed**, for instance.

The characters can find some gems in the room (7 malachites worth 10 gp each, 5 bloodstones worth 50 gp each, 3 garnets worth 100 gp each, and 1 peridot worth 500 gp), one *rust bag of tricks*, one *elixir of health*, one *+1 wand of the war mage*, and one *+1 dagger* used as a carving instrument. Resting near the wall, they can also find the *soulgaze mirror*.

Soulgaze Mirror
Wondrous item, artifact

This large 2 ft. high, 1 ft. wide mirror has a frame of gold with an intricate engraving depicting Tamera and Bauron controlling the flow of life and death. At first glance, it reveals nothing, but by staring into the mirror, a creature can see its past lives through it. Spending 10 minutes looking into the mirror allows an intelligent creature to become proficient in a skill, weapon, armor, language, or tool for 24 hours due to memories of a past life. A soulborn who spends 10 minutes looking into the mirror becomes proficient in 2 skills, languages, or tools (in any combination) for the next 24 hours. After using its power, the mirror will only reveal more of a person's past life after another 24 hours have passed.



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17 - Treasure Room

The interior of this chamber gleams with piles of gold, gems, and magic items strewn across the floor, as well as in chests and on shelves arranged along the walls. The quantity amassed in this room is almost impossible to fathom, including some statues that appear to be made of pure gold. Various magical runes, etched into gems embedded in the walls, seem to glow differently with your every movement.

This hall, where the High Priestess safeguards the bulk of the temple's treasures, is crucial for sacrifices, the acquisition of spell components, and the corruption of individuals within the capital. Here, various magic items can be found, all protected by a mystical curse.

Greed Curse Trap (Magic Trap). Walls adorned with myriad gems, embedded amidst runes in a spiral design, guard the room. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check unveils the trap link in the pattern. Meanwhile, a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that unauthorized removal of any valuable object will incur dire consequences. Either the High Priestess herself must take the items, or a specific command word, which she often changes, must be used to deactivate the trap and retrieve something safely.

Attempting to lift any object, even merely a single coin, without neutralizing the trap necessitates a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. A failed save begins the target's transmutation into gold, becoming restrained. The restrained target must retry the saving throw at the end of its next turn. A success ends the effect; a failure petrifies the target until freed by the greater restoration spell or another strong magic. The saving throw is repeated for each valuable object taken.

While the creature appears gold, a meticulous inspection reveals it as a mere curse effect with no market value. Removing any piece of the statue reverts it to flesh. If the statue is destroyed, the creature dies, and its remains revert to their uncursed form.

The Treasures. The list of items that the characters can discover here is as follows:

- 10,000 gp, 1,800 pp, 500,000 cp, diamond (1,000 gp), 2 x black opal (1,000 gp total), blue sapphire (1,000 gp), 1 x fire opal (500 gp), opal (1,000 gp), star ruby (1,000 gp), embroidered castle tapestry (300 gp, 60 lb.).
- *ring of invisibility, wand of paralysis, staff of healing, +2 rapier, shortsword of wounding, +2 greatsword, +2 halberd, +2 heavy crossbow, +3 shortbow, frost brand longsword, dwarven thrower, +3 mace, robe of stars, figurine of wondrous*

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power (onyx dog), eversmoking bottle, bracers of archery, +2 studded leather armor, dragon scale mail (gold), +2 ring mail, and a plate armor of resistance (psychic).

In addition to this huge hoard of magical treasures, one can also find the Peretuk, a tameranium statuette that once belonged to An'Kur, the Kepesh prisoner. This idol can be used in Chapter 8 to help purify the Kepesh pyramid.

Among the riches are also three golden statues of cultists who tried to steal from the High Priestess and were turned to gold. They are kept here as a demonstration of what happens to those who dare cross her path.

GM Note: The extensive list of items above exists to ensure that the party will have access to interesting magic items, independent of the specific build choices the characters made.

This list may not be extensive enough to guarantee that all characters will find useful items, so feel free to tweak the loot above according to the needs of your table.

It was crucial for this room to contain a large assortment of magic items, both to showcase the influence and power of the cult and to allow you to add any item that you believe your group would find more interesting, without making it obvious that it was placed here solely for them.

Feel free to remove items you deem unnecessary or reduce the amount of gold or items in this room if you believe this treasure is too substantial for your preferred campaign style.

You can also equip some of the cultists, including the High Priestess, with any of these items if you want to increase the difficulty of the encounters in a thematic and interesting way. But beware, as it increases your load of keeping track of various enemies' stats and abilities.

18 - Hall of Statues

You enter a room with four statues, one representing each of the Ungods, each holding an orb shining with a crimson hue.

This room harbors the mystical protection that has enabled the temple to elude magical detection, a crucial element that has allowed this vast temple to prosper for an extended period under the nose of Emperor Baleroth.

The four orbs, each held aloft by a statue, constitute a powerful artifact crafted by four of the most poweful servants of the Ungods: Bellara, Gideoni, Abhorroth, and The Dark Collector, all under the command of Z'ulvath.

Each orb is placed on a statue resembling the Ungod associated with that orb: Z'ulvath's on a statue that mirrors a draconic being of tentacles with expansive wings; C'thraxis' on a statue of a humanoid creature with a slender feminine figure and a myriad of tentacles in place of legs; Droggath's on a statue that resembles an aberrant Tarrasque enveloped in tentacles; and Krynnethoth's on a statue that appears as an aberrant humanoid creature with three serpentine heads.

Orbs of Dusk Shroud

Artifact (set of four orbs), legendary (requires attunement by a creature of evil alignment)

The Orbs of Dusk Shroud, four immaculate spheres of onyx, exude a somber crimson glow and are engraved with enigmatic glyphs. When activated, they conjure a formidable ward against varied forms of magical intrusions.

Powers

Upon activation and placement of all four orbs, the following protective effects manifest within a designated area, up to a 1-mile radius. The activator defines the protected area, whether a specific location like a temple or an abstractly shaped region. The orbs bestow four powers:

Divination Shield (Z'ulvath's Orb): No divination spells or effects from outside the area can perceive or influence anything within. All spells are unable to extract information from inside the protected zone.

Arcane Cloak (C'thraxis' Orb): The area concealed by the orbs becomes immune to spells and effects revealing magical presences, negating detection spells cast from beyond its bounds.

Teleportation Ward (Krynnethoth's Orb): Teleportation into the area from an external point is rendered impossible.

Blocked Summoning (Droggath's Orb): Entities cannot traverse from other planes into the area unless summoned from within, and no creature or object can be summoned into the area from outside its perimeter.

Even potent spells, such as *wish*, or formidable abilities like Divine Intervention, falter against the orbs' might.

Activation

An evil creature activates an orb by placing it within the intended area of protection and whispering the secret name of the corresponding Ungod. The full protective effects take hold only when all four orbs are concurrently active.

Deactivation

To deactivate an orb, a creature must touch it and utter the respective Ungod's name. If the name is incorrect, the creature becomes the target of a *disintegrate* spell (save DC 18). Deactivation of an orb negates its corresponding power.

While at least one orb remains active, none can be displaced by any means, being effectively anchored in space.

Destruction

The *orbs of dusk shroud* are nearly indestructible. Legend has it that their destruction can only be achieved using the blood of the four beings who crafted them.

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19 - Penumbral Portal

In the center of this circular chamber, arcane symbols and markings form intricate patterns. The edges of these designs are adorned with numerous sparkling gems, each surrounded by inscriptions. Torches illuminate the room, while its center is occupied by a large, dark portal of swirling energy.

Here lies the grand penumbral portal, which leads directly to the Eternal Cathedral, the first layer of the Penumbral Plane.

The chamber is typically guarded by two cultist guards (CE human **knights**) and one **master of pain**. Once the characters pass through the portal, they will enter the Penumbral Plane in the Soulflayer Caverns region, as described in Chapter 8 - **In the Realms of Madness.**

GM Note: The characters may choose to enter the Penumbral Plane blindly or first gather information on what Tenebrizon is doing. It is advisable to let the players explore their options in the way they prefer.

If they lack information, allow them to use the portal to return to the temple and find out more about what is happening if they deem it necessary, or let the story progress without them knowing exactly what they are up against. Allowing players to explore and face the consequences of their choices often brings a better outcome to the game.

However, feel free to lock this portal behind a mystical keyword, known only by the High Priestess, if you believe it will work better at your table.

20 – Morvus' Room (Locked Room)

A luxurious chamber, abundant in stone sculptures and dark iron and wood furnishings. In addition to the beds, it boasts chests, wardrobes, chairs, and a table. Black and red tapestries adorn the walls and floor, creating a sinister decor. Large chandeliers cast a dim light throughout the room.

A character equipped with thieves' tools can attempt to pick the lock of this room, requiring a successful DC 15 Dexterity check. Alternatively, using brute force to pry it open requires a successful DC 18 Strength check.

This area serves as the accommodation for the leader of the guards, **Morvus Ironshadow**, who alone carries the key to this location. Aside from his personal belongings, there isn't much here, save for books on sword art and on the worship of various Ungods, as well as his own small accumulated wealth, totaling 27 pp, 250 gp, and 42 sp.

Morvus visits this room only to sleep and will be in the company of the High Priestess at all other times.

21 – Lords' Crypts

Upon entering, you discover a grand mausoleum, home to four ornate stone tombs, each adorned with meticulously carved stone statues upon their lids. A total of ten tombs populate the room: six stand upright along the periphery, while the central space is occupied by four particularly imposing tombs, bathed in an eerie, magical light. A dark, sinister mist, originating from openings within the walls, enshrouds the space, contributing to a palpably ominous atmosphere.

In this sacred space, some of the most distinguished members of the temple have been interred and immortalized since its foundation. The name "Hogaw" is inscribed on one of the tombs.

Penumbral Mist. The room is suffused with a faint, dark mist that lightly obscures vision throughout. All creatures that do not serve the Ungods and end their turn within the mist must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or suffer one level of exhaustion as it siphons their very essence.

The tombs only have old bones, except for Hogaw, which also has his last penned book "The Hidden Temple", an autobiography that tells of the building of this very location. On the last page of the book is written in blood "please complete my collection".

Hogaw's Collection. If the characters bring this book back to the Hogaw's Wind Inn Library (location 15 of the inn), and place all Hogaw's books next to each other, they will burn and leave behind a golden ring that resembles a marriage ring. It has the same effect as a *ring of protection*, but also makes the wearer immune to charm effects.

22 - Priests' Rooms

This chamber brims with individual beds, each separated by partitions fashioned from frames and drapes, affording privacy to the cultists. Within each secluded area lies a personal chest. Black and red tapestries grace the walls and floor, weaving a sinister ambiance throughout the space. Large chandeliers cast a dim illumination across the room. At the back of the chamber, some cultists converse while seated on the beds, and a gloomfolk woman is finishing locking a chest.

While this area traditionally serves as accommodations for priests, it currently hosts Gary and his mercenary group, who rest here while awaiting new orders.

The characters will find **Gary Landen** (if he was not killed or captured before), **Tabek Tchopin**, **Zahlla Zowerina** and **Bagasse** here conversing with each other.

Should they see the characters, they will ready their weapons but may be persuaded to retreat if sufficiently intimidated or bribed with a significant sum of gold (10,000 gp or more). These mercenaries hold no true loyalty to the cult, their allegiance bought only with the promise of reward. They'll grow uneasy upon seeing intruders so deep within the temple,

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particularly if these intruders appear to be in good physical condition (if the characters appear battered, the mercenaries might instead opt to eliminate them, hoping to earn favor — or additional reward — from the High Priestess).

GM Note: Should Gary still be alive, recall his characteristic personality. If needed, refer back to Chapter 1 for a refresher. At his core, Gary is a charlatan. If he perceives himself to have an advantage, he will employ his charm in an attempt to lower the characters' guard before launching an attack. Conversely, if he senses a disadvantage, he'll leverage his charm to orchestrate the most advantageous escape possible.

Expect him to lie, fabricate pitiful stories, and engage in any necessary action to manipulate the situation in his favor.

Gary Landen. He is the leader of the mercenaries (if he is alive). More about him can be found in Chapter 1.

Gary Landen

Medium humanoid (human redeemer), lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +7
Skills Deception +9, Insight +5, Perception +5, Persuasion +9, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +6
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Draconic, Elvish
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Blessed with Spell Resistance. Gary Landen has the redeemer blessing of spell resistance and has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Ray (3/Day). Gary Landen can cast a spell through his Rays. The Ray will cause its effects and the spell will now have the Ray range and the location of impact as the center of its effects (if area-based).

Spellcasting. Gary Landen is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). Gary Landen has the following redeemer spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, resistance, sacred flame, spare the dying, thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, guiding bolt, hideous laughter*
2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, hold person, spiritual weapon*
3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse, dispel magic, vampiric touch*
4th level (3 slots): *freedom of movement, guardian of faith*
5th level (1 slots): *contagion*

Stealth Equipment. Gary Landen has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks that rely on moving silently.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Positive Ray. *Ranged Spell Attack:* reach 60 ft., one creature, grants 5 (2d4) temporary hit points.

Negative Ray. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) necrotic damage.

Equipment. *Boots of elvenkind, hat of disguise, +2 studded leather*

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Tabek Tchopin (Extra Background Information)

Tabek's father was a human who made musical instruments, and his mother was an orc and a leader in their town's guard. Publicly, they worshiped the deities of civilization and hearth, but privately, they devoted themselves to C'thraxis. Tabek was popular in the cult's revels, and he chafed under the burden of keeping their activities hidden, though it did give him early practice with lies and other deceptions. The desire to live openly and true to himself was the beginning of Tabek's quest for self-sufficiency and personal freedom.

While traveling, Tabek came across a destroyed caravan. Iron cages lay on the ground among chunks of shattered wagons, the cage doors broken open. Tabek saw a small wooden statue near a wagon wheel.

When he knelt to examine the statue more closely, he spotted a goblin named Bagasse hiding among the wreckage. He took her and the statue, hiding her in his drum.

Gazing at the statue of a smug halfling helps Tabek center himself before a performance. The feel of the wood in his hand reminds him of spending time with his father in the shop where his father made musical instruments.

Tabek revels in his athleticism and personal magnetism. He loves being the center of attention. In particular, he loves drinking contests. When he travels, he teaches his favorites in local taverns.

He even invented one of his own, in which he drums increasingly complex patterns on tables, pitchers, tankards, or whatever is handy, and the other drinkers must imitate his patterns or drink.

He joined Gary and Bagasse, the goblin he had saved, forming a sinister group of mercenaries capable of the direst actions to achieve their objectives. Tabek's cheerful personality, personal magnetism, and stories about his father often lead people to believe he is a good person. However, unbeknownst to them, what Tabek admired most in his father was his cunning and devious mind.

Tabek Tchopin

Medium humanoid (half-orc bard), chaotic evil

Armor Class 17 (aberrant studded leather armor)
Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Cha +5
Skills Acrobatics +5, Deception +5, History +2, Insight +2, Intimidation +8, Medicine +2, Perception +4, Performance +5, Stealth +8
Senses darkvision 60 ft., Passive perception 14
Languages Common, Goblin, Orc
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Blessed with Power. Tabek has the redeemer blessing of power and all DC saving throws imposed by him are 1 point higher.

Spellcasting. Tabek is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Tabek has the following bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *minor illusion*, *vicious mockery*
1st level (4 slots): *charm person*, *healing word*, *hideous laughter*
2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness*, *calm emotions*, *suggestion*
3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse*, *dispel magic*, *tongues*
4th level (3 slots): *confusion*, *freedom of movement*
5th level (1 slots): *dominate person*

Relentless Endurance (1/day). When Tabek is reduced to 0 hit points but not killed outright, Tabek can drop to 1 hit point instead.

Savage Attacks. When Tabek scores a critical hit with a melee weapon attack, he can roll one of the weapon's damage dice one additional time and add it to the extra damage of the critical hit.

Actions

War Cleave. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

War Drum. As a bard, Tabek can, once per turn, use his War Drum to either help his allies or harm his enemies, generating the following magical effects:

Contagious Rhythm (2/Day): As a bonus action, Tabek can play a contagious rhythm. All allies within 60 ft. who can hear it add 1d6 to their next attack roll. This benefit lasts until the end of Tabek's next turn.

Disruptive Rhythm (2/Day): As a bonus action, Tabek can cast vicious mockery.

Equipment. +2 Aberrant Studded Leather

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Bagasse (Extra Background Information)

Scrawny but agile, Bagasse was born with two gifts. She loved to cook, mastering controlled spoilage and fermentation at an early age. Other races find the sharp tastes and powerful odors of goblin food distasteful, but Bagasse reveled in it. Her infused vinegars were valuable trade items for her clan.

Her other gift was a towering rage. She became a key component in her clan's defenses, but that was not enough to save them when Kroct Nine-Fingers, a hobgoblin, came looking for slaves. Bagasse's vinegars had caught his attention and he tracked them back to their source. He and his minions attacked the clan and enslaved the survivors, including Bagasse.

As they traveled to Kroct's steading, their slave caravan came under attack by gnolls. The slavers abandoned their goblin captives. Although her fury drove her to battle, Bagasse knew she was unarmed and outnumbered. When the gnolls broke open the cage she was in and started to drag goblins out, Bagasse tumbled out and hid.

She was trying to decide what to do after the gnolls left, when she heard people approaching. She thought the slavers were coming back, but it turned out to be an adventurer. A half-orc carrying a war drum knelt to examine a small statue near where she hid. He saw her and spoke to her in Goblin. She warned him about the gnolls and swore to serve him if he would help her escape. That was how she met Tabek Tchopin.

Now working with her only friend Tchopin, she is part of Gary's mercenary group, becoming known for her savagery in battle.

Bagasse

Small humanoid (goblin), chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (unarmored defense)
Hit Points 66 (12d6 + 32)
Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +4
Condition Immunities frightened
Skills Acrobatics +6, Intimidation +2, Stealth +8, Survival +3
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Goblin
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Blessed with Speed. Bagasse has the redeemer blessing of speed that increases her movement.

Nimble Escape. Bagasse can Disengage or Hide as a bonus action on each of her turns.

Light Weapon Mastery. Bagasse can use light weapons as if they had the finesse property.

Bloodlust. If Bagasse surprises a creature and hits it with a melee weapon attack, the creature takes an extra 4 (1d8) slashing damage from the attack.

Frenzy Attack. After using her Multiattack using melee attacks, Bagasse can use her bonus action to move up to 20 ft. and perform an additional melee weapon attack. The target of this attack must be a different target than the ones from her previous attacks this turn.

Actions

Multiattack. Bagasse makes two melee or ranged attacks.

Deadly Handaxe. Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack, +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Equipment. Two Dragon Ivory Handaxes (+1)

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Zahlla Zowerina (Extra Background Information)

Zahlla grew up in a family of circus performers. When she was an infant, just being one of the gloomfolk was enough to make her a carnival attraction. Zahlla became painfully shy, unable to remember a time when strangers had not gawked at her for no reason that she could understand. Zahlla developed a beautiful singing voice, but the conflict between her shyness and her family's desire for her to perform led to her developing a painful stutter.

Eventually, her stealth and nimbleness brought her to the attention of some less savory members of the carnival, who taught her the skills involved in burglaries and theft. The leader of the ring of thieves was a human named Octans Bagshott. Octans had a tiny, gnome-crafted music box that fascinated Zahlla.

Her fascination led to her stealing the music box. Theft among members of the carnival was harshly punished, and she ran away to avoid that and to keep the box. Unfortunately, she overwound it soon after and broke it. When she sings to herself, she's trying to recall the music it played.

To survive, she was forced to become an adventurer and later a mercenary. She became part of Gary's mercenaries after knowing them in a tavern in the capital, which worked greatly to her advantage as she can rely on Gary and Tabek for their greater skills in social interactions. In particular, she relies on Tabek to create distractions she uses to slip away and exercise her talents as a thief. She still sings, but only softly and when she thinks no one can hear her. Tabek has heard her, and occasionally tries to get her to sing along with his percussion, but she hasn't yet overcome her stutter.

Zahlla Zowerina

Medium humanoid (gloomfolk rogue), neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural)
Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)
Speed 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +5
Skills Acrobatics +6, Intimidation +2, Investigation +4, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +8
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages Common, Deep Speech
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Flaming Arrow (3/Day). As a bonus action, Zahlla can light up one of her arrows. Her next Longbow attack deals an extra 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Blessed with Secrecy. Zahlla has the redeemer blessing of secrecy which grants advantage on all her Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

Cunning Action. Zahlla can Dash, Disengage, or Hide as a bonus action on each of her turns.

Evasion. If Zahlla is subjected to an effect that allows her to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, Zahlla instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Zahlla deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Zahlla who isn't incapacitated and Zahlla doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Sting. Melee Weapon Attack, +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw, taking 3 (1d6) poison damage and being poisoned on a failed save. The target must repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success or taking 3 (1d6) poison damage on a failed save.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage and the target is grappled (Escape DC 10).

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Deploy Trap. As a bonus action, Zahlla can place rune traps or small glass spheres on the floor in a space within 5 ft. of herself. The spheres activate when a creature enters the space. A DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the presence of the trap. Zahlla does not activate her traps when going through them, but the space they occupy is treated as difficult terrain.

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- ***Sleep Spheres (3/Day).*** The creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it falls asleep and is considered unconscious, and it can make a new saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the effect on a success. The sleeper can also be awakened by taking damage, or if someone uses an action to shake or slap the sleeper awake.
- ***Venomous Spheres (3/Day).*** The creature must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it is poisoned, taking 2 (1d4) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. The poison lasts for one minute. The creature can make a new saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the effect on a success.
- ***Oil Spheres (3/Day).*** The sphere explodes on the creature, covering it with flammable oil for one minute. If lit up, the oil burns for two rounds, and the creature takes 5 damage at the start of each of its turns. Zahlla can also, as a bonus action, throw the Oil Sphere against an enemy within 20 ft. of her. The target must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, getting covered in oil on a failure.

Rewards. Amidst the many unlocked chests with simple clothes and personal belongings of the cultists, only one locked chest contains items of value.

Locked Chest. A character with thieves' tools can try to pick the lock, requiring a successful DC 15 Dexterity check. Alternatively, brute force can be used to pry it open with a successful DC 18 Strength check. Zahlla is carrying the keys.

Within this chest lie the belongings of Gary's mercenary group: 40 pearls (each valued at 100 gp, collectively representing the reward for Vang's assassination), six *potions of greater healing*, a *potion of fly*, 500 gp, and 100 pp.

Moreover, amongst these treasures are two letters, correspondences between the mercenaries and the temple that they are keeping as proof of their deal, awaiting further payment.

Letter 1. *"Vang has met her demise as orchestrated by the cult. The Empire remains blissfully ignorant of our role, attributing the act to the Republic, just as anticipated. Your strategy to involve her in pilfering Republic's documents was masterful, but the matter of our payment has yet to be addressed…"*

Letter 2. *"Your act has successfully plunged our adversaries into chaos. A pouch of pearls awaits you upon your arrival at the temple. Use the enclosed map to navigate through the Penumbral Plane. Our sights now turn towards taking the Vandanamalika from the Kepesh. Should we prevail, anticipate rewards far surpassing your current recompense."*

Letter 1 is a magically made copy of an original letter, and can be recognized as so with an Intelligence (Arcana) DC 16 check. Both letters do not share the same handwriting.

What the mercenaries know

- They are aware that the cult hired them to assassinate Vang, with the aim of instigating conflict between the Republic and the Empire.
- They understand that this conflict was engineered by the cult to prevent the two dominant factions from obstructing the Kepesh's heist for magic items.
- They have knowledge that the Kepesh were nearing the completion of a Vandanamalika and that the cult had plans to steal it, though the exact method of theft remains unknown to them.
- They recognize that the cult's plan nearly crumbled when the Kepesh struggled to find materials, due to being simultaneously pressured by both the Empire and the Republic. Thus, the assassination was orchestrated.
- They are cognizant that a high-ranking individual within the Cult of Shadow Wing is coordinating these endeavors, and that the Vandanamalika possesses quasi-divine powers.
- They know that a portal to the Penumbral Plane is located in a nearby room, and that the Vandanamalika was transported to a location in close proximity to that portal's endpoint.

23 - High Priest Seraphina Shadowblaze's rooms

In this spacious and luxurious chamber, you find a large circular bed adorned with pillows and blankets made from animal furs. Above it, there's a grand statue of a black dragon with three pairs of jewel-encrusted wings that dominate a significant portion of the room. You'll also notice sophisticated wardrobes and chests, along with a table and two iron chairs. Dark red and black tapestries grace the walls and floor, creating an eerie decor. Large chandeliers provide subdued lighting to the room.

This area serves as the chambers for High Priestess Seraphina Shadowblaze, where she dedicates the majority of her time to refining plans, augmenting her magical knowledge, and studying the books and artifacts collected for her by her cultists. In addition to the Priestess, characters will encounter Morvus Ironshadow here, as he is perpetually on guard, protecting Seraphina.

Seraphina will not exhibit leniency towards any interlopers in her temple and will direct Morvus to attack. A cautious woman, she prefers to maintain a secure position, utilizing her bodyguard advantageously, prioritizing the defeat of weakened enemies first while safeguarding herself.

Should Seraphina's hit points fall below half *(48 hit points or fewer)*, she will utilize her *plane shift* spell to flee to the Penumbral Plane, at the first opportunity she has. If this occurs, she will reappear in Chapter 8.

High Priest Seraphina Shadowblaze. A beautiful middle-aged woman with long, smooth black hair and a slender figure. She remains calm and meticulous, wearing a luxurious ceremonial robe that emits a black mist wherever she walks. She wields two whip-like lashes that seem like extensions of her fingers, capable of striking with them and channeling her spells through them. She holds knowledge of Tenebrizon's plans (at least most of it) and was responsible for hiring Gary and his mercenary group.

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Seraphina Shadowblaze

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (+1 mithral half plate armor)
Hit Points 97 (13d8 + 39)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +9, Cha +6
Skills Insight +9, Medicine +6, Perception +9, Persuasion +6, Religion +6, Stealth +7
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19
Languages Common, Deep Speech, Draconic, Infernal
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Finger Whip. Seraphina Shadowblaze possesses a unique magical implant in place of one finger on each hand, which transforms these fingers into +1 magical whips. When she uses her spellcasting abilities using a touch spell, she can make a whipstrike attack instead of a normal melee spell attack. If this attack hits, it applies both the spell effects and the whipstrike damage (or neither on a miss).

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, Seraphina Shadowblaze can take the Hide action as a bonus action. Her stealth bonus is also improved to +11.

Shadowshift. Seraphina Shadowblaze can instantaneously teleport from an adjacent shadow to another shadow within a 40-foot radius of the initial shadow, without provoking attacks of opportunity. This ability consumes her entire movement for the round. To do so, she must have access to two shadows that are both large enough to accommodate her body for entry and exit.

Spellcasting. Seraphina Shadowblaze is a 13th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). Seraphina Shadowblaze has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light*, *resistance*, *sacred flame*, *spare the dying*, *thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds*, *guiding bolt*, *inflict wounds*
2nd level (3 slots): *darkness*, *hold person*, *lesser restoration*
3rd level (3 slots): *animate dead*, *bestow curse*, *dispel magic*
4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *freedom of movement*, *guardian of faith*
5th level (2 slots): *contagion*, *insect plague*
6th level (1 slot): *harm*
7th level (1 slot): *plane shift*

Actions

Multiattack. Seraphina Shadow makes two whipstrike attacks

Whipstrike. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, Seraphina Shadowblaze can use her bonus action to grapple it (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained and Seraphina can automatically deal her whipstrike damage at the start of her turns, or can cast her touch spells with automatic hit against creatures restrained in this way. She can only keep two creatures grappled, one with each whip.

Equipment: +1 mithral half plate

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Morvus Ironshadow. A burly middle-aged man, bald with his face and body covered in scars and black tattoos, easily capable of intimidating anyone. Cold and cruel, he executes anyone at the slightest hint of suspicion. He wields a serrated blade sword, and a shield shaped like a dragon's wing, with spikes he often covers in poison. He answers only to Seraphina, and he commands the guards of the temple.

Morvus Ironshadow

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

Armor Class 21 (full plate armor, shield)
Hit Points 127 (17d8 + 51)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +6
Skills Athletics +7, Intimidation +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 11
Languages Common, Deep Speech, Dwarvish
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Brave. Morvus Ironshadow has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Morvus hits with it (included in the attack).

Actions

Multiattack. Morvus makes three melee attacks.

Serrated Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 15 (2d10 + 4) slashing damage if used with two hands. Once per turn, when Morvus hits a creature with this attack, he can wound the target. At the start of each of the target's turns, the creature takes 1d4 necrotic damage for each wound it has received. The creature can then make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, ending the effect of all its wounds on a success. Alternatively, the wounded creature, or a creature within 5 feet of it, can use an action to make a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check, ending the effect of such wounds on a success.

Shield Bash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 5 (2d4) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. If the target is a medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Reactions

Parry. Morvus adds 3 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, Morvus Ironshadow must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Equipment: +1 Full Plate, Spiked Iron Shield, Serrated Longsword (Sword of Wounding)

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What Seraphina and Morvus know

- They were aware that they were serving Tenebrizon, and they may be acting against Lypoec. But they believe this is all Z'ulvath's will.
- They are aware that Tenebrizon secretly assisted Vang in obtaining documents from the Republic; then they paid Gary to assassinate her, initiating a conflict between the Empire and the Republic.
- Seraphina helped devise the plan to deter the two dominant factions from inhibiting the Kepesh's heist for magic items.
- They know the Kepesh were on the verge of completing a Vandanamalika and that Tenebrizon planned its theft by infiltrating cultists among the Kepesh high priests, using a ritual and a penumbral artifact to transport the building into the Penumbral Plane.
- They realize the cult's plan almost fell apart when the Kepesh, pressured by both the Empire and the Republic, struggled to source materials, necessitating the orchestrated assassination.
- They understand that the Vandanamalika harbors quasi-divine powers.
- They are aware that a Vandanamalika necessitates an astral alignment to function. Tenebrizon discovered a method to craft pylons, infused with penumbral energy and concealed within Tanares, which could facilitate a connection and an anomalous alignment to function from the Penumbral Plane. However, this demands intricate magic and is powered by the souls of formidable mortals.
- They're aware that a portal to the Penumbral Plane is located in a nearby room at the corridor's end and that the Vandanamalika was relocated near that portal's endpoint in the Penumbral Plane.
- They know Tenebrizon intends to summon an Avatar of Z'ulvath using the Vandanamalika, ultimately enabling Tanares to succumb to the control of the Ungods.
- She knows Tenebrizon's temple location is in the Soulflayer Caverns, a region of the first layer of the Penumbral Plane where many souls are bound in eternal nightmares.

Treasure. Besides the equipment worn by Morvus and Seraphina, the characters can find in this room a *potion of cloud giant strength*, a *potion of resistance (necrotic)*, a *potion of resistance (psychic),* the key to Morvus room (location 20), and a few coins in a small pouch (29 pp and 30 gp).

Searching the room also allows them to find Seraphina's diary. Within it, the characters may uncover the following entries of significant relevance, in addition to personal musings and older schemes from bygone days:

Day of the Waning Crescent. The shadows whisper of a conflict born from deceit; the pawns dance as the Empire and Republic eye each other with suspicion. A well-placed blade in the dark, a conflict ignited. It is all, perhaps, as Z'ulvath wills it.

Day of the New Moon. Plans within plans, a heist shrouded in the veil of chaos. My machinations steer the great factions away, their eyes elsewhere while Kepesh's fingers close around power untold. The Vandanamalika's completion looms near, and so, our moment draws nigh. Tenebrizon will take it, and our Mistress will rejoice.

Day of the Veiled Star. Even the best-laid schemes know the caress of peril. The Kepesh falter, the Republic and Empire unknowing catalysts to our needs. A single life snuffed out, an assassination to maintain the balance. The Vandanamalika must awaken.

Day of the Penumbral Eclipse. The astral alignment is close, a cosmic confluence essential for the Vandanamalika's might. Tenebrizon is doing his part – pylons of shadow to anchor the celestial event from the Penumbral Plane. But the materials are complex to fetch; souls of the mighty are seldom freely given. I will need to lure them to our lair. Fools believing in heroes will feed our ritual.

Day of the Shrouded Sun. A new group of sacrifices was sent to the ritual.Having a portal merely a corridor's walk away has surely become handy. The Kepesh pyramid now lies within the Penumbral Plane, snatched to the Soulflayer Caverns. The Vandanamalika divine power is at our fingertips. The Avatar of Z'ulvath beckons, a harbinger of Tanares' fall. We are a mere step away.

Chapter Ending

Upon entering the Penumbral Portal at location 19, the characters will be propelled into the final instance of this adventure, proceeding to Chapter 8 - The Shadow Temple.

They may or may not have learned the plans of Tenebrizon, depending on their choices of exploration and interactions during Chapter 7.

Another way for them to proceed to Chapter 8 is by using planar traveling magic, upon learning the location of Tenebrizon's temple (within the Soulflayer Caverns, a region in the first layer of the Penumbral Plane).

If they return to the city and take too long to decide to enter the portal, Tenebrizon might begin opening rifts in hidden locations throughout the Imperial capital, sending penumbral creatures to ravage the city and pressure the characters to find a way to stop him. Remember, Tenebrizon needs the characters to reach his temple so he can use their souls to complete his ritual.

> Consider awarding 7,000 XP to each PC for completing this chapter. The recommended level for ending this chapter is 11th. If your group is above or below, consider adjusting future encounters and side quests to speed up or slow down their progression.

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Chapter 8
In the Realms of Madness

After successfully uncovering Tenebrizon's plot, the characters will venture into the Penumbral Plane to confront the mad dragon himself and thwart his plans. Meanwhile, Tenebrizon stands on the brink of achieving his goal; he merely needs to capture the souls of the would-be heroes to power his ritual.

The corrupted pyramid, stolen from the lands of the Kepesh Theocracy, has been transformed into a shadow temple under Tenebrizon's control. Transported to a section of the Soulflayer Caverns — a region of the first layer of the Penumbral Plane where souls are trapped and slowly consumed by the power of the Ungods — Tenebrizon is using the location's unique trait to absorb the necessary souls to empower his ritual.

In the Soulflayer Caverns, any mortal who dies has its soul imprisoned, shaping a section of the caverns into a physical representation of its nightmares where it is tortured and slowly corrupted by the manifestations of its sins, given physical form within the plane.

Tenebrizon has taken control of these souls and is forcing them to protect his ritual while he drains their energy to empower it. Now, the characters must navigate this bizarre section of the Penumbral Plane, where each location has its own unique logic emanating from the captured souls' sins and nightmares. The characters will have to find ways to save or eliminate the souls on their way to the Shadow Temple while also contending with cultists and emoguns serving the **ancient penumbral dragon**. All this to reach their final destination: the ritual room where Tenebrizon awaits to face them himself, if they survive the journey to him.

Running this Chapter

The characters are set to enter the caverns; consult the map to track their current location, identifiable by its corresponding number and designated area.

The ultimate objective of this chapter is to guide the characters to the pyramid's central chamber, where they shall confront Tenebrizon. It is highly recommended that the characters liberate as many souls as possible along the way; doing so will diminish the formidable powers the ancient penumbral dragon derives from his ritual. Failing to disrupt this ritual could render Tenebrizon too overwhelming for the characters to withstand.

Nonetheless, grant the characters the liberty to explore this realm of madness. Now more potent than ever, they are capable of assessing risks and making informed decisions. Each location they encounter will offer a distinct set of challenges, replete with various options and unique outcomes.

The Caverns

This unique region, situated in the first layer of the Penumbral Plane, earned its name — Soulflayer Caverns — from its distinct geography, which starkly contrasts the typical cathedral interiors found in most other places, and its sinister ability to imprison the souls of any mortals who perish here, no matter their purity or the cause of death.

The souls confined within this realm gradually shape the reality of a small portion of this region, creating a unique environment emblematic of the nightmares, sins, and regrets the creatures harbored in life. This manifestation becomes a physical reality in the Penumbral Plane, existing to torture and erode the remaining will of the imprisoned souls, ultimately transforming them into emoguns to serve the Ungods.

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Tenebrizon is exploiting this location to fuel his ritual with the souls of individuals he has captured and sacrificed. The characters are the last souls he needs; now that they have arrived at this cavern, Tenebrizon will deploy all his servants to eliminate them, ensuring their souls are captured. This will enable him to use the characters' potent souls to finally complete his ritual.

Soul Prisons. At present, seven souls are imprisoned here, forming six unique areas with their own features, spawned from their nightmares, sins, and resentments in life. The geography, illumination, and overall style of each section vary widely, creating a complete disconnection between each part of the caverns, where it is impossible to anticipate what will be encountered.

The imprisoned soul, bound to that location, cannot leave it. The conditions of the souls will vary greatly: some may be aggressive; others may be bound or transformed into something else. Each soul is in a unique situation.

Dealing with a Soul. There are two ways to sever the connection between a soul and Tenebrizon's ritual: find and destroy the soul or free it from the burdens that bind it to the plane.

The more souls that remain bound to the ritual, the more powerful Tenebrizon will be when confronted by the characters.

Once a soul is freed from the ritual, it will often say any parting words and go into the afterlife unless it has great pending meters to settle before doing so (such as Drolev soul, see Area A).

Freed souls will return to give a boon to the characters in the final confrontation against Tenebrizon. Destroying a soul will not grant such a gift but will weaken Tenebrizon's ritual, causing him damage as the mystical connection is severed.

Freeing a soul is often more complicated than destroying it, but ending a soul's existence will permanently remove it from the cycle of reincarnation. Any character trained in Religion will understand the moral implications of such a dire choice.

Characteristics. Most locations here are faintly illuminated by green or purple gems that glow on the walls, though each area can vary. However, due to the unique aspects of the Penumbral Plane, all areas are considered, at most, to be in dim light.

Main Areas

The following sections offer concise summaries of each location and the souls that reside therein.

Area A - The Traitor's Nightmare. A cultist who betrayed his sect lived in constant fear of discovery. Eventually found and sacrificed, he now endures an unending nightmare of paranoia, believing he is still among his cultist brethren, under their watchful eyes.

Area B - The Messy Rooms. A **collector** was captured and stripped of his cherished items. Transformed into a **golem**, he now serves as guardian to his own collection, which has fallen into the clutches of a **powerful aberration** that embodies **greed**.

Area C - The Arena of Death. An adventurer and famed arena hero tried to confront the cult but met a tragic end. Filled with self-blame for leading his friends to their deaths, he is now consumed by the anger born of his failure.

Area D - The Temple of Wealth. A priestess grew increasingly prideful of her healing abilities and succumbed to corruption, accepting gifts from nobility. Excommunicated, she sought power from the Ungods but died attempting to ascend the cult's hierarchy. Now, she seeks to deceive the adventurers, aiming to prove her devotion to Z'ulvath.

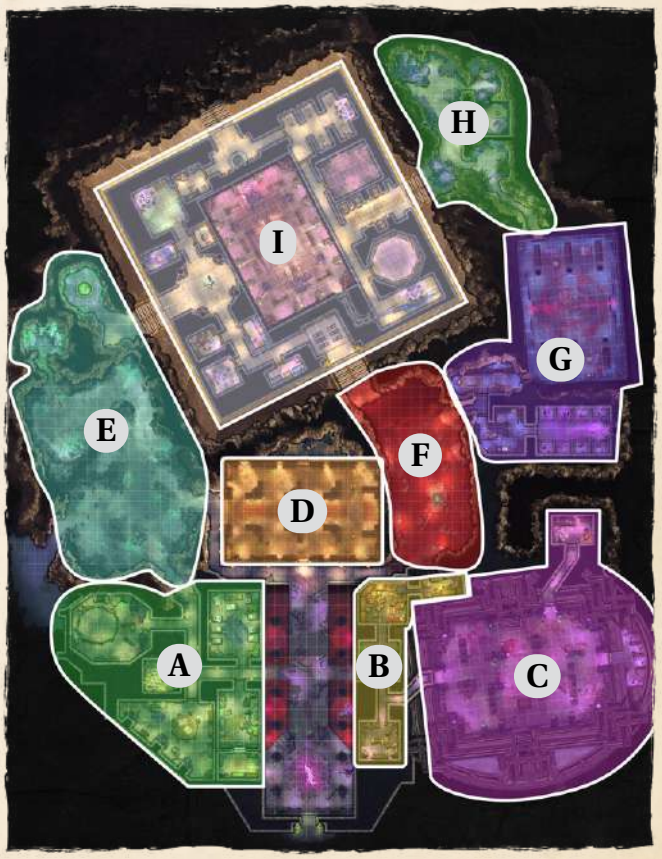
Area E - The Cave of Lost Honor. The souls of two dwarf brothers clash here. Both loved the same woman, yet they were unwittingly ensnared by a **penumbral lust** that pitted them against each other, leading to the ruin of their clan.

Area F - The Bloody Path. A highly skilled assassin met his demise due to a mistake and now resides here. He relives the nightmare of evading the vengeful spirits of his victims, forever caught in a cycle of flight and dread.

Area G - The Arcane Sanctum. This area houses the location where the ritual that brought the Pyramid to the Penumbral Plane was conceived. Here, magical experiments continue to be conducted, overseen by a Penumbral Sadness.

Area H - The Grove of Mushrooms. This is what remains of the mushroom forest that was destroyed by the arrival of the pyramid. A fugitive druid hides here to avoid becoming the next sacrifice.

Other Areas. They are not shaped by the nightmares of a soul.



The Pyramid - Area map

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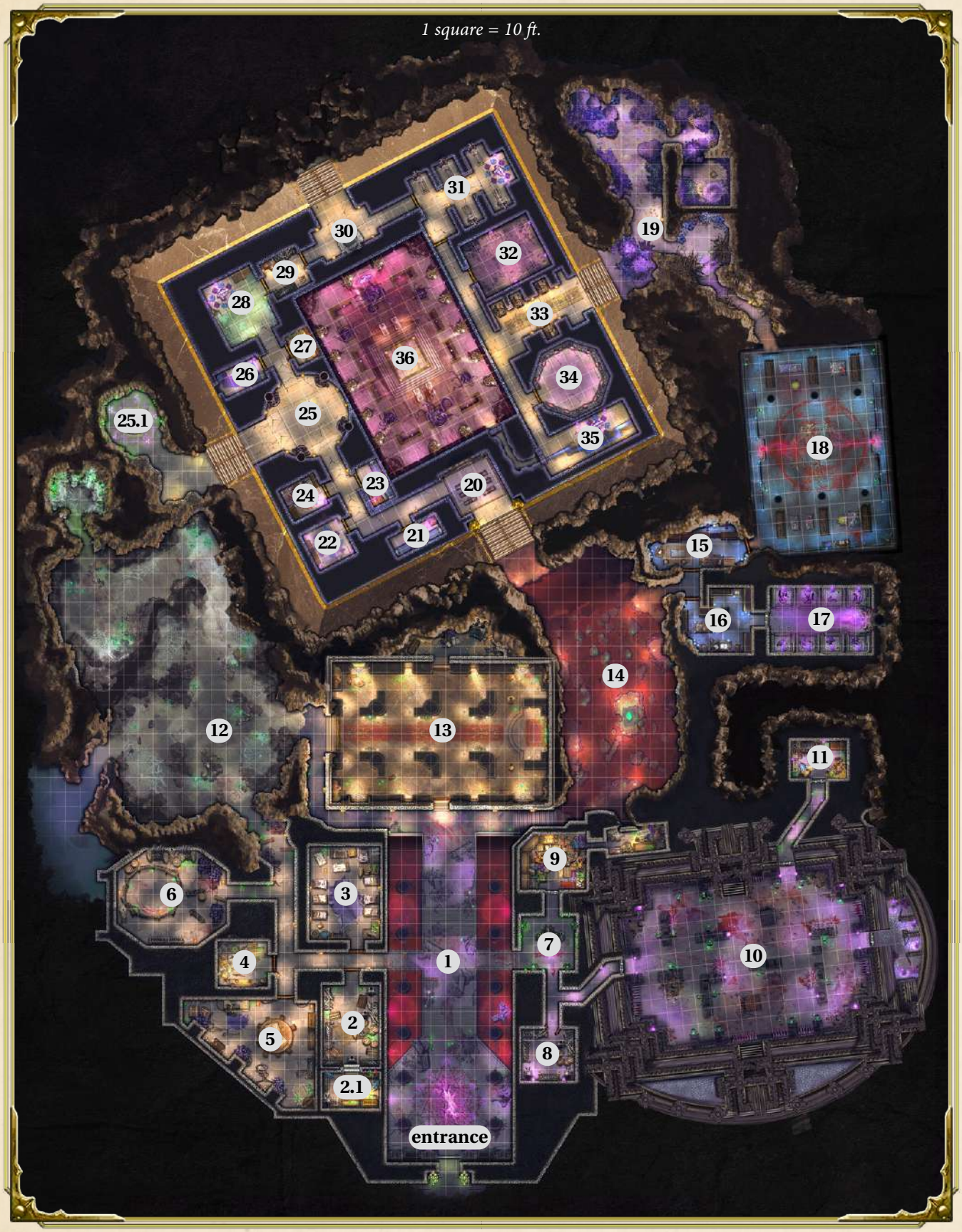
The Pyramid



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1 - The Bridge
2 - Armory
2.1 - Secret Alchemy Room
3 - Cultists' Bedroom
4 - Storage Room
5 - Dining Hall
6 - Ritual Room
7 - Guardian Room
8 - Weapons Room
9 - Messy Collection Rooms
10 - The Arena Grounds
11 - Arena Treasure
12 - The Temple of Wealth
13 - The Cavern
14 - The Blood Lake
15 - The Wailing Quarter
16 - The Apprentice Rooms
17 - The Hall of Bound Souls
18 - The Ritual Chamber
19 - The Grove of Mushrooms
20 - Main entrance
21 - Priests' Quarters
22 - Priests' Prayer Room
23 - Priests' Quarters
24 - High Priests' Quarters
25 - Guardians' Room
25.1 - Pool of Corruption
26 - Meditation Room
27 - Preparation Room
28 - Meditation Room
29 - Guardroom and Armory
30 - Purification Room
31 - Sarcophagi Room
32 - Hall of Spirits
33 - Crossing of the Blessed
34 - Conjuration Room
35 - Treasure Vault
36 - The Pyramid's Vandanamalika

The Pyramid

The end goal of this chapter is for the characters to enter the pyramid, which has been transformed into Tenebrizon's Shadow Temple.

Here, they will confront the corrupted Kepesh temple where the Vandanamalika was being prepared. The characters will battle the last of Tenebrizon's forces before having the opportunity to confront the penumbral dragon himself.

Some mystical altars, once dedicated to Ba-Ka, the Kepesh deity, have been corrupted and are now utilized by Tenebrizon's servants. The characters will have the opportunity to cleanse some of them, potentially using the boon of the God of Magic and Spirit to their advantage, should they choose to do so.

The final confrontation, which will determine the fate of Tanares, will occur at the center of this location, providing the characters an opportunity to exact revenge on Tenebrizon for all he has wrought throughout the adventurers' journey.

Tenebrizon's Possession

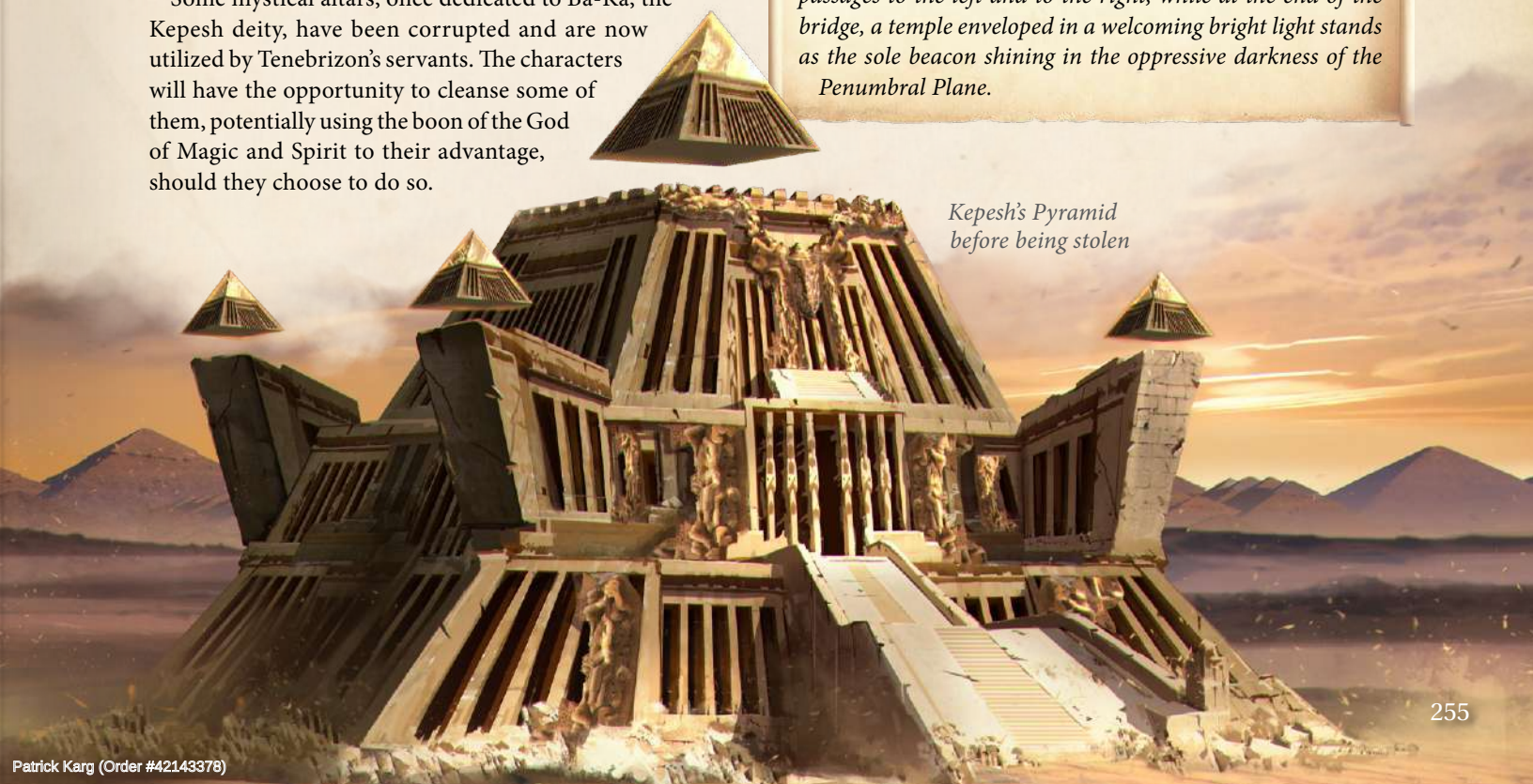
As in Chapter 7, Tenebrizon will be focusing his forces on completing the final part of his ritual and will not be possessing any of the creatures in this location. Instead, he will command his servants to deal with the characters and await their demise while he focuses on finishing the ritual, now that the souls he needs are finally here.

The Arrival at the Soulflayer Caverns

You step through the Penumbral Portal inside the Shadow Wing Temple and your bodies are immediately thrust into another reality — the Penumbra. In an instant, all your senses collapse: the air becomes thick and foul; sounds, while muffled, are pierced by distant cries and laments; and your vision blurs, darkening.

You find yourselves on an immense stone bridge, the depths below bathed in rushing rivers that smell of blood and gleam crimson. The ceiling is barely visible, with darkness revealing only the tips of a few stalactites. Behind you, an immense gate of iron bars looms, its huge, spearlike spines bearing the impaled, hanging carcasses of humanoids and aberrations.

On the ground around you lies a huge magical circle made of blood, its center shining with an ominous purple light, forming the portal from which you arrived. Further ahead, in the direction of the bridge, you see debris from collapsed pillars. To the sides are stone walls that further ahead reveal passages to the left and to the right, while at the end of the bridge, a temple enveloped in a welcoming bright light stands as the sole beacon shining in the oppressive darkness of the Penumbral Plane.



Kepesh's Pyramid before being stolen

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1 - The Bridge | 1 square = 5 ft.

1 - The Bridge

The ceiling here soars 40 ft. high, giving way to a rugged cavern adorned with stalagmites. The area bathes in dim light; even close to the shining gems, the illumination is subdued due to the effects of the Penumbral Plane.

Blood River. Situated 15 feet below the bridge level, the blood river, while thick, boasts a current that is not notably strong. Creatures (with the exception of aberrations) that enter the blood or end their turn within it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become incapacitated by nausea until the end of their next turn, their minds assaulted by visions of bloody massacres and grisly dismemberments.

Arachne Ambush. Here, concealed behind the pillars and utilizing their ability to climb, lie one **arachne commander** and three **arachne ambushers**.

Anticipating intruders, they know that slaying invaders will earn them significant rewards from Tenebrizon. The Arachnes will use their climbing advantage and seek to maintain their distance, using the pillars for cover while prioritizing attacks on the more vulnerable enemies first.

Given the arachnes' capability to climb the pillars, they can effortlessly leap from one pillar to the next during their movement. They must be at least 30 ft. high on the pillar they originate from, and they will descend to 20 ft. lower on the destination pillar. They can only reach the nearest pillars when leaving in this manner.

Should the characters attempt to use flight to approach them, the arachnes will flee to the pillars above the blood river, then start using their web ability to restrain the characters, in hopes of causing them to plunge into the river of blood.

From this location, the characters can enter areas 1, 2, 4, 5, or 6: by advancing on the bridge (areas 4, 5, or 6), taking the left door (area 1), or taking the right door (area 2).

Treasure. The arachnes hold little of intrinsic value, save for silk cloths *(with a collective worth of 45 gp)*. The **commander** also bears a *ring of underwater breathing* and a tameranium statue adorned with Kepesh inscriptions. This statue, known as a Kepesh Peretuk, is stowed securely in a sack affixed to her belt. She obtained it from a Kepesh priest who narrowly evaded sacrifice just the day before; after ending his life, she claimed the idol, intending to present it to Tenebrizon later in exchange for a reward.

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Area A - The Traitor's Nightmare (Locations 2 to 6)

This area resembles a quaint cultist temple, housing the soul of **Drolev** (CE), a former cultist of Z'ulvath, who attempted to betray Tenebrizon by revealing his plans to Lypoec. Before he could curry favor with Lypoec, a fellow cultist exposed his treachery.

Tenebrizon executed him, binding his soul to his ritual. Consequently, this entire location has morphed into a manifestation of Drolev's memories and nightmares, all under the control of a **penumbral fear**.

2 - Armory

Upon entering this room, you're met with a scene of disarray: an armory where gear is strewn across the floor, and kegs — seemingly filled with poison — are overturned. Every piece of equipment bears the emblem of the Cult of Shadow Wing.

This armory has nothing but a dozen common weapons and armors of all kinds. It also has some kegs of poison, but it is old and lost all efficacy.

Behind the armor, there is a hidden mechanism that can open a secret passage that leads into an Alchemy room. A successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check can find it.

2.1 - Secret Alchemy Room

The small alchemy room has an alchemy table, a writing table, a chest, and a rack with vials and some weapons. On the ground near the chest, there is a blade shining with green runes *(blade of the Z'ulvath's champion)*.

Blade of the Z'ulvath's Champion
Weapon (longsword), very rare (cursed)

The Blade of Z'ulvath is an exquisitely crafted longsword with an onyx hilt and a blade adorned with shining green runes.

You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this weapon.

When you hit with this weapon, the target takes an additional 1d6 psychic damage. If the target is of good alignment, it takes an additional 1d6 necrotic damage.

Curse. Upon dealing damage in combat, the blade attunes to the wielder, and a curse takes effect. While cursed:

The wielder cannot benefit from spells cast by clerics, druids, or paladins — unless the caster serves the Ungods. Any such spells targeting the wielder have no effect, including healing spells.

If the wielder is not a servant of the Ungods:

- After completing a long rest, they must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or be affected by the effect of the *confusion* spell for 1 minute upon waking, as the blade plagues their mind with horrific, vivid nightmares.
- Until the curse is broken, whenever the wielder becomes more than 20 feet away from the sword, they begin taking 1d6 psychic damage at the start of each of their turns, as the curse tightens its grip on their mind.

The curse lasts until removed by a *remove curse* spell or similar magic.

On the oaken table, amidst scattered papers of cryptic formulas and malevolent schematics, one can find a *potion of poison*, a *potion of fire breath*, and a *potion of heroism*.

Shelves. The shelves hold numerous vials, jars, and urns, along with some old, simple weapons. Upon one of the shelves, a *potion of poison* is conspicuously placed alongside two *potions of healing* and a few other simple composites. The shelf where the potions are placed is protected by a poison needle trap.

Poison Needle Trap
Type: Mechanical
Perception DC 17 to notice the trap mechanism
Disable DC 18 using thieves' tools
Effects: A creature pricked by the needle must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 5d6 poison damage and become poisoned for 1 hour.

Chest. Inside the chest, one can find a stack of old scrolls with coded messages. Deciphering it requires a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

The deciphered message reads as below:

To High Priestess

My pen quivers as I inscribe these words, knowing the risk that it harbors. Drolev, the bearer of Blade of the Z'ulvath's Champion, is showing signs of dissatisfaction with Master Tenebrizon's plans. It seems he has too much loyalty to Lord Lypoec, after receiving the blade from him.

It is advised that Master Tenebrizon gets to know of this beforehand, as any leaks must be prevented.

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3 – Cultists' Bedroom

Upon entering this room, you find a simple bedroom, furnished with numerous basic beds and a large fur rug, likely the pelt of some immense creature. In one corner stands a table; in another, barrels and a weapon rack are situated.

In this space, the characters will encounter two **shadow mages** and one **master of pain** (all CE humans). They are manifestations of Drolev's old comrades and will attack anyone who enters this room.

If the characters examine the room, they will find that three of the beds have blood on them, concealed by the covers, as if someone was probably killed while lying on them. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check allows one to notice a part of the mattress that was pierced by a blade. If this is discovered, a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check allows a character to conclude that the shape and depth of the perforation suggest it was likely caused by a sharp longsword.

If the characters exit this room after defeating the cultists, the walls of the corridors will begin to bleed, forming the repeated words: *"fear is too great," "despair," "I am scared,"* and *"please, save me."* This will affect all corridors in Area A permanently.

4 - Storage Room

Upon opening this door, you encounter a small, chaotic storage room, its many assorted items scattered haphazardly across the floor.

The room contains a pile of various scraps, nothing of particular use, except for broken wood pieces, the remains of a bed, and an old table.

Under the rubble one can find a partially destroyed diary, which belonged to Drolev.

Tenebrizon's ambition blinds him. He plans a ritual, one that will not only raise the stature of our cult but place him above even Lypoec. My loyalties, however, lie with the Penumbral Avatar. The Blade of Z'ulvath, a gift from Lypoec himself, is evidence of our bond.

I am torn. My place in the cult, my reputation as one of Tenebrizon's finest warriors, is at stake. Tonight, I take matters into my own hands. The food will be tainted, and as night embraces this forsaken temple, my blade will sing its unholy song.

Yet, I fear someone suspects my intentions. Whispers reach my ears. If they know, I must be prepared for a confrontation. Loyalties are fragile in the Cult of Shadow Wing.

5 - Dining Hall

Upon entering this room, you see a large, round table with eight chairs. To the right, there is a stone oven, while to your left, shelves and cabinets are visible. Near the wall, parts of penumbral creatures are scattered on the ground, decaying.

On the shelves and cabinets, the characters can find bread and strange meat parts. All food here is poisoned with the Midnight Tears poison. A character can use an alchemist kit and make a DC 15 Intelligence check to identify the poison.

Besides that, one can find three penumbral creature piles on the ground near the wall. On the table there is a detailed map of the Temple of Z'ulvath (chapter 7 temple).

Two of the carcasses are transformed **penumbral gluttonies** that arrived here before the characters and are laying a trap. They will wait for someone to approach to surprise them with an attack, but if the characters try to leave the room, they will throw away the surprise and rush in their direction as it is very rare for fresh meat to enter the Penumbral Plane to become their prey, and they are not willing risk losing sight of them.

If the characters search the third carcass that still lays on the ground, they will find a vial of the Midnight Tears poison that still has two doses left.

6 - Ritual Room

Crossing the corridor, you see an octagonal room where a strange, ring-like structure adorned with glowing green gems stands near the center. Numerous weapon racks are visible, as well as the carcasses of dead aberrations.

In this room, one can find four cultists: two **masters of pain** and two **Shadow Wing initiates**. They are using an iron brander, heated in two coal braziers, to torture a bound cultist on the ground. The bound cultist is Drolev (CE human **champion**).

As soon as the cultists are dead, they will turn into shadows and reform, revealing that behind it all was a powerful emogun, a **penumbral fear**.

Drolev. If the characters free Drolev, he will fight at their side against the other cultists (he currently has 70 hit points).

The Penumbral Fear. The creature will offer the characters a deal, leave Drolev's soul to him, and he will take it away from here, out of reach from Tenebrizon's ritual.

If the characters refuse, the creature will engage them in battle.

Combat Against the Penumbral Fear. If Drolev is unbound, he will betray the characters and assist the **penumbral fear**, as he is afraid of confronting the creature, and believes that he may be spared torture if he proves his loyalty. However, if the characters have recovered Drolev's sword *(blade of the Z'ulvath's champion)* and given it to him, its power and

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his memories will give him a surge of confidence, enough to fight the **penumbral fear** alongside the characters.

Possible Results. In all cases the soul will not be bound by Tenebrizon's ritual, unless the characters did not intervene in the situation. The location will persist for at least one month in the Penumbral Plane, slowly shaping back to the cavern's original ambiance.

- ***If Drolev's soul survives.*** He will try to create a favorable opportunity to betray the characters and kill them. A cold-blooded betrayer, Drolev once slew his cult-mates for power and is prepared to repeat such dark deeds. He is confined to Area A, but is capable of patiently biding his time. He harbors a belief in the possibility of resurrection, should he prove his loyalty. Unlike other souls in this chapter, although he can be freed from the soul-draining ritual, he is not willing to enter the afterlife and remains bound by the effects of the caverns. Unwilling to depart peacefully, Drolev will neither vanish nor reveal why his soul is not leaving.
- ***If Drolev's soul is destroyed.*** He will disappear in a cloud of shadows.
- ***If Drolev's soul is left to the Penumbral Fear.*** The creature will offer to lift the curse on Drolev's blade as a reward. Should the characters not possess it, the **penumbral fear** will provide knowledge of its whereabouts and await their return with the item to bestow its reward. Its touch will irrevocably alter the blade, causing its runes to glow with a foreboding purple hue (it will turn it into the *blade of fear*). Subsequently, it will seize the soul, wielding its penumbral power to remove it from imprisonment in the caverns, now condemned to continuing being tortured so that the creature can extract sustenance from Drolev's despair.

Blade of Fear

Weapon (longsword), very rare

The blade of fear is an exquisitely crafted longsword with an onyx hilt and a blade adorned with ominous purple runes.

You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this weapon.

When you hit with this weapon, the target takes an additional 1d8 psychic damage.

Any creature within 20 feet of the blade, including the wielder, has disadvantage on saving throws against being frightened, and advantage on saving throws against being charmed.

Area B - The Messy Rooms (Locations 7 to 9)

This area consists of four small rooms, within which the soul of **Lympstik** (CN **collector**) is bound. His soul currently resides in a statue that is compelled to guard the entrance to Area C, against his will.

What remains of his collection has been scattered in the rooms to the north. However, most of his weapons have been set aside and placed in the south room as the **greed** cares very little for them, making a deal with the **anger** of the Arena, turning the weapons available to anyone seeking to challenge the champion of the Arena of Death.

A formidable **penumbral greed** oversees this arrangement, sometimes leaving the place by planar traveling to trade the remains of the treasured items from Lympstik's collection for gold art objects in the Material Plane, further tormenting the trapped soul as his collection keeps diminishing.

7 - Guardian Room

Upon entering the room, you are met with a large stone statue depicting an aberrant creature. Besides the path from which you arrived, there are two exits: one, a securely closed, reinforced door; and the other, leading to a corridor. Blood stains the floor, and strangely, part of it seems to have been deliberately shaped into an arrow, pointing in the direction of the southern corridor.

In the center of this room stands a stone statue of an aberrant creature. This is no mere statue, but a **stone golem** containing the trapped soul of Lympstik. The golem is programmed to attack anyone who enters the area or the rooms to the north (location 9). However, it will not pursue those who retreat from this location (intruders can take refuge in locations 1, 8 or 10, causing the golem to return to its original position).

Golem Regeneration.

- **Reformation.** Upon destruction, the golem's remains gravitate back to its original position, beginning to reform the golem.
- **Rebuilding.** Should the golem remain stationary, taking no action, for a full round, it regenerates 50 hit points.
- **Unyielding Existence.** The golem can reform indefinitely, reviving with 50 hit points each time.
- **Vulnerability to Disintegration.** If the golem is disintegrated, or another effect completely destroys its body, making it impossible for the rubble to gather again, it will be destroyed, permanently extinguishing Lympstik's soul.

Though Lympstik is powerless to control the golem's actions, he can communicate telepathically with the characters. He will desperately plead for his release and urge the party to confront the emogun, the entity responsible for binding his

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soul. This malevolent being resides in the room behind the door to the north.

Locked Door. The door to room 9 is locked and requires a DC 20 Dexterity check with thieves' tools to unlock, or it can be opened using the collector key mentioned in Chapter 7.

8 - Weapons Room

This room is brimming with an array of weapons, most of which are mundane, but expertly crafted. However, with a thorough search or the use of magic to detect enchanted items, one can uncover: a *flame tongue scimitar*, a *giant slayer greataxe*, a *greater mace of smiting*, a *mace of disruption*, a *+2 lance*, and a *bow of warning*.

Greater Mace of Smiting
Weapon (mace), very rare

This meticulously crafted mace hums with a potent power, especially devastating to constructs and capable of dealing mighty blows that resonate with smiting energy.

You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon, or +3 if it is against a construct.

When you hit a construct with this weapon, it deals an extra 2d6 bludgeoning damage. If the construct has 25 hit points or fewer after taking damage from this weapon, it is completely destroyed, turning the construct into fine dust.

In addition to that, when you roll a 20 on an attack roll made with this weapon, the target takes an extra 4d6 bludgeoning damage, or 8d6 bludgeoning damage if it's a construct.

The ***greater mace of smiting*** is capable of completely annihilating the golem in room 7. Should Lympstik witness someone wielding it against him, he will fervently plead and implore them not to destroy him. He knows its effect as the weapon was in his collection. It was left in this room on purpose by Tenebrizon, to keep the collector in perpetual fear that he could be permanently destroyed. The **greed** is not aware of this fact, as he knows very little about magical weaponry.

9 - Messy Collection Rooms

This room is a complete mess, with numerous chests, tables, and shelves filled with a variety of objects, gems, and pouches of coins. You see a small passage to the east, where the mess continues. The place is so crowded with objects that i's even hard to walk inside.

In these two chambers, the **penumbral greed** is carefully counting his vast collection of coins and safeguarding an array of treasures and magic items. Notably, he has a significant collection that he stole from Lympstik and his clan *(Torviukos, the collector introduced in Chapter 7, was one of the members of this clan)*.

Messy Location. The entire room is filled with many objects, being difficult terrain to tread upon (moving 1 foot in this location costs 2 feet of speed).

The Deal. The **greed**, being more diplomatic than confrontational, is reluctant to engage in combat unless provoked. He will present a proposal to the characters: in return for safe passage through his territory and a directive to the **stone golem** to halt its hostility towards them, the characters must relinquish their most prized magic item *(except for armor or weapons)* and surrender half of their gold.

To verify the characters' sincerity, the **greed** will evaluate the offered item and gold. He is likely to trust them if the item is of at least very rare quality and they offer a minimum of 5,000 gp. If the offer does not meet these standards, he will grow suspicious, but may be convinced that it is the best they have. Moreover, if the characters are visibly carrying a more valuable item or an abundant sum of gold, the **greed** will not be easily deceived.

If the characters consent to the **greed**'s terms, he will keep his promise. Additionally, he will be willing to sell or trade the treasures housed in the chamber. He has a penchant for coins and artistic objects and is always on the lookout for a beneficial deal. He sees very little value in magic weapons or armor, preferring other magic items or, if possible, gems and coins.

No Deal. If the characters decline his proposal, he will ask that they leave his domains and do not return if not to offer a tribute. If the characters refuse to leave, he will become aggressive. If Lympstik is still intact, he will be forced, against his will, to ally with the **penumbral greed** in the combat (if the door is locked, the **greed** can open it).

Defeating the Penumbral Greed. If the construct was not destroyed with the mace of disruption, killing the **greed** will free Lympstik's soul. In gratitude, he will tell the characters that they can keep what remained of his collection, and instruct them to find a silver mirror in it, telling them that they should tap its center three times and its left side once, and reach inside the mirror to find his most precious items. After that, he will thank the characters and vanish into the afterlife.

Treasure. *armor of invulnerability, +3 armor (scale mail), defender (shortsword),* 5,000 gp, 2,700 pp, 1,000 sp, 2 x blue sapphire (3,000 gp total), 3 x fire opal (2,250 gp total), star ruby (1,500 gp), emerald (1,000 gp), 2 x star sapphire (2,000 gp total), 2 x alexandrite (2,000 gp total), embroidered castle tapestry (450 gp, 60 lb.), a satchel embroidered with gold and silver runes (300 gp), golden statuette of a dragon (700 gp, 20 lb.), intricate silver mirror (400 gp, 10 lb.), ivory and gold chess set (600 gp, 5 lb.), engraved platinum ring (500 gp), delicate necklace of fine platinum and pearls (1,000 gp), detailed miniature gold sculpture of a castle with tiny gemstone accents (750 gp), lavish silk tapestry depicting a famous historical battle (800 gp, 50 lb.), ornate painting of a renowned noble, framed with fine gold leaf (1,200 gp), a

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well-crafted bronze sculpture of intertwining serpents with gemstone eyes (850 gp, 25 lb.), a masterfully painted porcelain vase with delicate patterns (700 gp, 15 lb.), a finely woven rug with intricate patterns and magical luminescent threads (1,000 gp, 70 lb), a carved ivory statuette of Tamera, small enough to be held in hand yet exceptionally detailed (550 gp), an exquisite wooden box containing a set of crystal decanters filled with ancient magically preserved wine (750 gp).

After the characters defeat Tenebrizon, if they had saved Torviukos (**collector** from chapter 7) and now find themselves unable to transport all the treasure back to the material plane, the collector, accompanied by his kin, will arrive to assist. They will help carry the items and even offer to purchase intriguing art objects from the characters, exchanging them for lighter gems or magic items.

Secret Treasure. The silver mirror among the treasures is no ordinary object; it's a magic item imbued with potent enchantments that render it undetectable as magical. Tapping it in the correct sequence makes the mirror permeable, enabling one to store or retrieve items concealed within. Only Lympstik knew of this secret and the precise sequence. Stored inside are his most cherished possessions: an *Ioun Stone (Dusty Rose, Protection)*, an *Ioun Stone (Deep Red Sphere, Agility)*, a *manual of gainful exercise*, a *ring of fire elemental command*, and a sizable diamond worth 4,000 gp.

Area C - The Arena of Death (Locations 10 and 11)

This area encompasses a vast arena wherein the soul of **Jirroy** (CG human **gladiator**) is imprisoned. A hero of arenas and an adventurer in life, Jirroy implored his group to assist in investigations against the Cult of Shadow Wing in the Imperial Capital. Fully aware that countless lives hung in the balance, their involvement nevertheless led them into a cunning trap, resulting in their capture. While his companions met their demise, sacrificed at the Temple of Z'ulvath, Jirroy suffered a fate even more dire: he was transported to the Penumbral Plane, where his soul was extracted from his body to serve in Tenebrizon's ritual. Thus, the Arena of Death was forged, a locale manifested from his anger and frustration over being unable to save his comrades, and eternally thwarted from fulfilling their enduring promise to stand united in the Arena of Fate against Emperor Baleroth's champions.

Now, Jirroy is bound to the Arena, overseen by a powerful **penumbral anger**, who awaits the next band of audacious souls who dare to challenge his domain.

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10 - The Arena Grounds | 1 square = 5 ft.

10 - The Arena Grounds

You enter a huge dark arena, illuminated by purple and green gems that emit faint light; the place seems to have come from a nightmare. Many of the walls are covered in huge spikes, with ominous tangles of metallic spines that seem to move as if they had a will of their own. The walls and the ground are covered in dried blood in many areas. It has no grandstand, but two stairs give access to a small upper platform at both the north and south ends of the location.

Jirroy's spectral form is confined behind bars in the room opposite the entrance, along with the undead bodies of his comrades, brought by the cultists as a gift for the **penumbral anger**. The aberration is usually overseeing the arena from a platform above the stairs to the south of the location, as he waits for challengers to prove his might and get more powerful champions bound to his will.

Upon spotting the characters entering, it will openly taunt them, challenging them to step into the arena and prove their valor.

The Bet. A wager is extended to the characters by the aberration. Should they accept, they must face his champions and, should they survive, the **penumbral anger** himself — the true lord of the arena. The victor of this battle will garner a magnificent prize. If the characters triumph, they may name an individual to be resurrected for each enemy they fell. However, should they fail, their souls and bodies will be bound to the arena, doomed to serve him. One life for one life, in a battle to the death.

No Bets. Should the characters decline the wager, the **penumbral anger** will demand them to leave the arena, labeling them as *"cowards"*. If they refuse to leave, the **penumbral anger** will then summon Jirroy and his undead companions to fight alongside him and eliminate the intruders.

If They Agree. If the bet is accepted, the **penumbral anger** will summon **Jirroy** (CG human **gladiator**) and the undead forms of his three companions: **Alana** (NG human **priest**), **Kadrok** (LG dwarf **knight**), and **Sillias** (CG elf **mage**). Emerging from the room on the opposite side of the arena, they brace themselves for the upcoming battle.

Although Jirroy is deceased, his appearance here mirrors his living form. Conversely, his companions are their real reanimated dead bodies, all in an advanced state of decomposition, but still able to fight as they did in life. The three companions have the undead type, possessing immunity to poison damage as well as to the poisoned and exhaustion conditions. They also have the following trait:

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Great Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces this creature to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC equal to the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the creature drops to 1 hit point instead.

You enter a vast, dark arena, faintly illuminated by purple and green gems that emit a dim light, giving the impression that the place has been conjured from a nightmare. Many of the walls are studded with huge spikes, while ominous tangles of metallic spines seem to move as if possessing a will of their own. Both the walls and the ground are stained with dried blood in numerous areas. While there are no grandstands, two staircases provide access to a small upper platform, located at both the north and south ends of the location.

Jirroy is consumed by his desire to resurrect his companions and is resolved to fight to win. On each of Jirroy's turns in combat, he will utter one of the phrases below in sequence, striving to convey the depths of his suffering and his tale. Although he regrets engaging the characters in battle, he cannot accept the loss of his friends as a consequence of his actions.

Phrase 1:
"I was Jirroy, champion of arenas, bound now in sorrow and regret. But I was promised a reward if I fight here and win."

Phrase 2:
"My friends and I sought to dismantle the Cult of Z'ulvath, a foolish quest that led us into a lethal snare."

Phrase 3:
"Ambushed and captured, my comrades met death as sacrifices in Z'ulvath's temple, whilst my soul was torn, brought to this spectral arena."

Phrase 4:
"Forgive me for pointing my blade at you, but to save them —Alana, Kadrok, and Sillias, I am sorry — I must defeat you with all the wrath this plane bestows upon me!"

The Arena. This location has many deadly traps that are made to ensure bloody battles.

Spiked Walls

Trigger: If a creature ends its turn within the two squares directly in front of a spiked wall (indicated by white lines), or if a creature is pushed against a spike wall.

Effect: The spikes viciously lunge forward as if driven by a malevolent hunger.

If the creature ended its turn in front of the spikes. The creature must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 3d10 piercing damage as the spikes impale it. On a successful save, the creature manages to evade the deadly protrusions.

If the creature was forcefully pushed into the spikes. The creature takes 3d10 piercing damage with no opportunity for a saving throw.

Spines Tangle

At the start of each round, the GM rolls a d6 and checks the numbers on the spine tangles in the map. The spinetangle with the rolled number will begin to contract ominously.

At the end of the round, the spines will spread throughout the ground in all directions. All creatures within 3 squares of an activated spined barrier (as indicated by the dotted red area) take 3d6 piercing damage and must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is overwhelmed by excruciating pain and becomes stunned until the end of its next turn.

Jirroy's Defeat. Should Jirroy reach 0 hit points, he will collapse to the ground, incapacitated, but not destroyed. He will plead with the characters to use their boon to resurrect his friends, trying ardently to convey his anguish and his guild and responsibility in leading them into the perils of the Cult, trying to convey that he deserves his plight but not his friends who are innocent.

First Victory. If the characters defeat the four enemies, the **penumbral anger** will leap into the arena to challenge the characters.

Second Victory. Should they vanquish the aberration, a resonant, echoing voice will cause the arena to shudder. The power of the arena itself will address the victors, inquiring whom they wish to see resurrected, as by the bet.

The arena will resurrect one individual (as if utilizing the *true resurrection* spell, without requiring a body) for each enemy they have vanquished. The characters may choose anyone they wish to resurrect. The voice will demand them to choose hastily or forfeit the opportunity to claim their prize *(they will be able to resurrect at most 5 creatures, one for each of the defeated members of Jirroy's team, and one for the penumbral anger)*.

Jirroy's Team. If the characters decide to resurrect Jirroy's team, each companion of Jirroy, including himself *(although his soul will only accept resurrection if his three friends were resurrected first)*, resurrected in this manner, will serve as companions to the characters, assisting them to the best of their abilities throughout the remaining chapter.

Jirroy's Soul. If the PCs defeat the **penumbral anger**, Jirroy's soul will be freed from the arena and will pass into the afterlife, unless the characters choose to resurrect him and his friends. Regardless of their decision, the arena will begin to dissolve over the course of a few weeks, eventually reverting to the cavernous area it once occupied.

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11 - Arena Treasure

Only if the characters won the battles.

You approach the iron gate, which opens by itself before you can touch it, as though recognizing your right to pass.

Inside, you see a small room furnished with a shelf, a chest, and a pile of coins and armor. The gate closes behind you, providing, for the first time since your entrance into the Penumbral Plane, a sense of respite and security, as it seems no one else can easily enter this location.

Should the characters vanquish the **penumbral anger** in battle, this door will unlock, for they are now the champions of the Arena.

This door, almost impenetrable even to magic, opens only for the champions and is safeguarded by the bizarre powers of the Penumbral Plane — while this arena endures, at least.

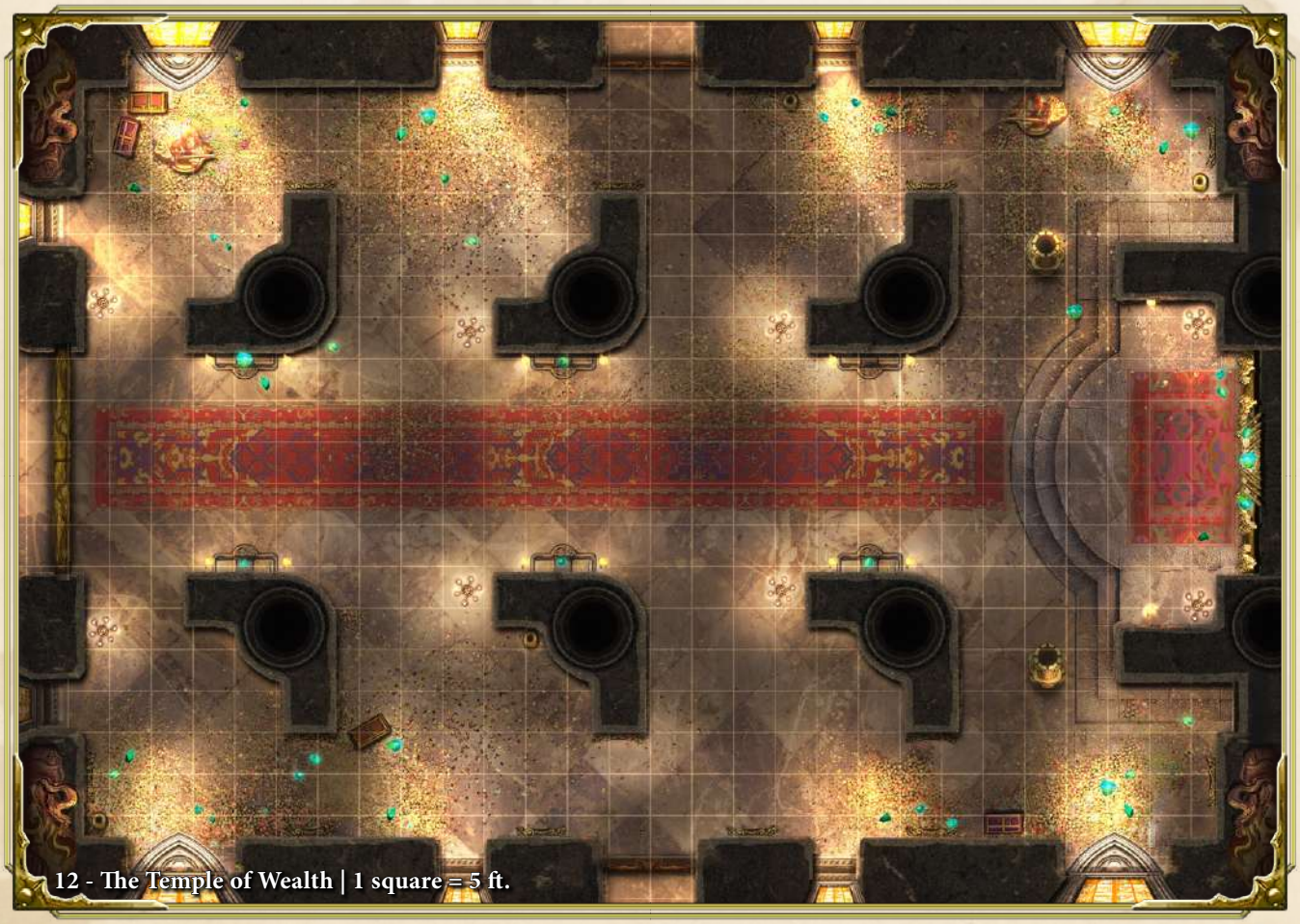
Inside, they will discover a shelf with potions, a chest, and a pile of coins with armor atop it. In total, they can find: 1,333 pp, 3,113 gp, 5,783 sp, 43,113 cp, *potion of superior healing (x2), potion of invisibility, potion of fire giant strength, potion of resistance (Fire), potion of speed,* and a *mithral breastplate*.

Area D - The Temple of Wealth

This area is a large temple emanating golden light, a bizarre scene in the darkness of the Penumbral Plane. This location is the only place that is not limited by dim light, but is encompassed by bright light instead, an exception to the natural rules of the plane.

Bound here is the soul of **Sister Liliane Grast** (NE human **priest**). Once a devoted teenager in the service of the goddess Tamera and the Sons of Tamera Order, Liliane gained renown for her exceptional skills in healing magic and medicine. Her life took a pivotal turn when she saved a dying nobleman. He not only donated generously to the temple but also showered her with lavish gifts, propelling her to fame within high society. The more her stature grew, the more her humility waned, gradually replaced by arrogance.

Confident in her unparalleled abilities, Liliane took it upon herself to heal a severely injured noble with powerful connections, bypassing the Archbishop's authority in hopes of gaining even more fame. Her gamble failed; the noble died, and she was blamed. Soon, she faced the spread of bad rumors about her, and the young people on the table began to act distant towards her. Some nobles that believed in her skills and secretly wanted to gain a pawn in the church began to pay her directly for her healing services, instead of making the usual donations to the church.



12 - The Temple of Wealth | 1 square = 5 ft.

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Eventually, she was found out and excommunicated, her hatred leading her to be forsaken by Tamera's light and losing her divine abilities. Desperate to regain her powers, she joined a cult worshiping the Penumbral Father, Z'ulvath. Yet her hubris persisted. Eager to ascend the cult's ranks, she caught the attention of the High Priestess Seraphina, who saw Liliane aiming for her position. Seraphina acted decisively, getting rid of Liliane and then offering her soul as a sacrifice for the dark ritual of Tenebrizon, setting an example to discourage any further ambitions against her leadership.

Now the soul of Liliane lies bound in this false temple, a mockery and a nightmare that mixes her sins and her earnings for glory and praise in the church. Yet she still harbors her pride, believing she can get out of the situation by proving her undeniable skills to Z'ulvath.

12 - The Temple of Wealth

You enter what seems to be a temple, bathed in brilliant daylight—a strange sight in the otherwise bleak Penumbral Plane. The floor is strewn with gold coins, and half-open chests filled with treasures lie scattered about. Golden, ornate statues lend the chamber an air of opulence. The light that suffuses the space appears to stream in through stained glass windows, which depict Celestianist religious scenes involving the goddess Tamera.

This opulent temple floor is covered with gold coins, while a few chests brimming with treasure lay scattered, and some ornate golden statues decorate the place (all figments that will disappear if taken far from this location). Bright golden light floods the space through stained glass windows, creating a stark contrast with the gloom outside.

Guarding the temple are six **penumbral pains**. Four of them rest among piles of gold, while two slowly carve their spines into Liliane's soul, who is bound by golden chains. She screams in agony, tears streaming down her face as the creatures torment her — partly from the genuine torment she feels, and partly in an attempt to attract someone who might take pity on her.

Liliane's Soul. As soon as she notices someone approaching the temple, she will begin begging for release, saying that she is Liliane, a healer. Liliane will lie as much as necessary, fabricate excuses, and feign complete innocence, imploring that the golden chains binding her be broken.

> ***Attacking Liliane.*** Should the characters choose to attack Liliane's soul, she has an AC 10 and 25 hit points. She is immune to poison and necrotic damage. If her hit points are reduced to 0, her soul is permanently destroyed, and all remaining **penumbral pains** will vanish in clouds of smoke.
>
> ***The Golden Chains.*** They possess an AC 14, 50 hit points, and are immune to poison. They resist all forms of damage except slashing and fire.
>
> ***Freeing Liliane's Soul.*** If the chains are broken, she will rise and exclaim, *"Behold, Z'ulvath! I have deceived them and proven my superiority. Embrace me, Penumbral Father, and let me bask in your glory!"* She then transforms into a **penumbral pride**, intent on destroying the characters to bind their souls and prove her worth to the Ungods.

Liliane's Buried Consciousness. As the characters enter the area, the walls will display bleeding words like *"Don't listen to the lies!"*, *"I am worthless, I am a murderer!"*, and *"I betrayed Tamera, I deserve to suffer!"* The inscriptions can change as if conversing with the characters. This manifestation "hears" everything Liliane does and represents, in fact, the last remnants of Liliane's moral conscience, struggling against the dark path she has taken.

The Penumbral Pains. These creatures are manifestations of Liliane's regret and suffering as her conscience eats her soul. When a character deals the finishing blow to a **penumbral pain**, they receive a vision revealing a part of Liliane's past. The visions are tied to the creatures randomly and should be presented in the order the creatures are defeated, not in chronological order (unless the characters manage to defeat them in the exact sequence that presents the visions in order).

These visions offer the characters a deeper understanding of Liliane, aiding them in deciding her fate.

Vision 1.

As you slay the penumbral pain, a vision flashes before your eyes. You see a younger Liliane, barely out of her teens, her face radiant with devotion. She's in a sunlit temple, offering a prayer before the altar of the goddess Tamera. The air is thick with the scent of incense and candles, the light filtering through stained glass to cast colorful patterns on the stone floor. The joy in her eyes as she performs a healing spell is palpable. She receives praise for her talents and shows great happiness for being complimented.

Vision 2.

After defeating the penumbral pain, a vision engulfs you. Liliane stands in an opulent chamber. A nobleman lies on a plush bed, near death, his family anxiously circling around him. With unwavering concentration, Liliane raises her hands, invoking her healing magic while administering herbs prepared by her to the man. The man's pallor transforms, life returning to his eyes. A woman approaches the girl and offers her a set of dazzling jewels and garments, in addition to what will be donated to the temple. Liliane's eyes fill with tears as she touches the beautiful stones of an earring.

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Vision 3.

As the penumbral pain falls, your mind is awash with a vision. Liliane is in the midst of a grand ball, garbed in sumptuous robes. She is the center of attention, surrounded by nobles hanging onto her every word. Her laughter is loud; her posture shows pride. Whispers fill the room, not all in adulation, as the nobles spread rumors about her taking gifts from nobles besides the donations from the temple, but she ignores them, reveling in her rising status.

Vision 4.

Slaying the penumbral pain, a vision appears. Liliane is in a dimly lit chamber, focused on a gravely sick noble of great importance. Some people began to call the archbishop, but Liliane demanded they stop, that she would take care of the situation. Despite the tense air, she looks confident and demands that those men give her space to work. She prepares medicine, then administers it to the man, her hands glow, but it is not enough; she tries with all her power but in the end the magic wavers. The noble gasps and then falls limp. Accusations fly, fingers pointing at Liliane. Her eyes widen in disbelief, as they call her a murderer.

Vision 5.

Upon vanquishing the penumbral pain, a vision engulfs you. Liliane is in a dark chamber, she feels a cold emptiness, and she yearns for Tamera's light, but it does not shine on her. The place is adorned with unfamiliar and disturbing symbols and she is standings before an altar to Z'ulvath, her eyes desperate but also defiant. She murmurs an incantation, and then she can feel her clerical powers once again. Her face shows a complicated mix of relief and remorse, but she quickly regains her composure, certain that she made the right choice.

Vision 6.

As the penumbral pains fall, a vision comes forth to you. Liliane is in a gloomy temple, facing the High Priestess Seraphina, who accuses her of being arrogant and acting against the cult. Their eyes lock in a battle of wills, Liliane knows she is in danger, but her pride does not allow her to bow down. Without a word, Seraphina raises her hand, and darkness engulfs Liliane. She tries to fight it, but her scream is cut short as her soul is ripped from her body, an offering for the dread ritual of Tenebrizon. As her soul is bound, her eyes betray a momentary flash of realization, perhaps regret, before they go lifeless.

Saving Liliane. Accomplishing this task should be nearly impossible. Liliane has long been lost to Z'ulvath's influence, having forsaken Tamera's light and succumbing to pride. However, if a cleric — especially one devoted to Tamera — can fully understand her story and offer her comfort without pity *(which would only trigger her pride, masking her self-loathing)*, and instead express genuine love and a desire to help, then casting an *atonement* spell on her (before breaking her chains) would be enough to save her soul. If that is done successfully, Liliane will be able to return to Tamera's light and journey into the afterlife. Should the characters manage this feat, they will earn Tamera's grace, receiving a +2 bonus on all attack rolls, checks, and saving throws for one week. Clerics of Tamera will also gain one permanent extra spell slot for both 1st and 2nd-level spells as a divine boon.

Resolution. After Liliane's soul is destroyed, or in the rare case that she is saved, the temple will lose its illusory light. All coins will be revealed as figments and will begin to fade from existence slowly over 1d4 hours. The statues will reveal themselves to be mere stone, and the area will lose its radiant glow, succumbing to the typical darkness of the Penumbral Plane. There are no objects of value in this location. The small room at the northern exit also contains nothing of worth, except for old chests and scrolls filled with cultist chants dedicated to the Ungods.

Area E - The Cave of Lost Honor

In this location, two dwarves are engaged in a fistfight: **Berkulin Stonehelm** (LN) and **Urodan Stonehelm** (CG). These brothers were ensnared by the enchantments of a **penumbral lust**, captured, and brought here to have their souls sacrificed in a ritual for Tenebrizon.

The lust, employing her uncanny shapeshifting abilities, disguised herself by creating a persona, a dwarf woman named **Glannit Rubyhelm**. She then began targeting isolated miners working in the mine west of the Imperial Capital.

Understanding the tight-knit nature of the clans that lived in the mines, the **penumbral lust** took pleasure in splitting their bonds. She was particularly enchanted by the honor-bound Berkulin and the idealistic views of his brother Urodan. She courted both brothers, timing her appearances to ensure they never met.

To Berkulin, she spun a sorrowful tale about her lost clan, the Rubyhelms, who she claimed were ancient allies of the Stonehelms. She manipulated him into retrieving clan records that "might have information" about the Rubyhelms. Meanwhile, she planted forged documents in the archives, indicating the Rubyhelms had been betrayed and abandoned.

For Urodan, she portrayed herself as a free spirit, hiding from the oppressive expectations of her "family". She dropped hints that someone from his clan, without naming Berkulin, was trying to control and manipulate her due to old clan ties.

The **lust** exacerbated the tension by skillfully weaving a tapestry of deceit. She manipulated rumors, charmed and dominated some dwarves, and even subtly altered correspondences

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between the brothers to ensure miscommunication. Well aware that Berkulin was a traditionalist, she appealed to his sense of pride, confident that he would not bear the indignity of losing a woman to his own sibling. As for Urodan, known for his fiery temperament, she stoked his innate search for villainy. Carefully fanning the flames of suspicion, she pushed Berkulin toward a corrosive jealousy and Urodan toward righteous indignation, all the while taking meticulous care to remain an undetected puppeteer in their unfolding drama.

The climax was orchestrated in an isolated cavern where she convinced both brothers they would find the truth about the Rubyhelms. Instead, they found each other, their manipulated emotions at a boiling point. As the brothers clashed, the **lust** took the opportunity to enjoy the chaos.

Finally, using a few dwarves whose minds she took control of, she captured the wounded brothers, ensuring they were too weak to resist. They were brought to the dark sanctum of the Cult, and later transported to the Penumbral Plane as some of the souls chosen to be part of Tenebrizon's sacrificial ritual.

Now, ensnared by a curse, they are fated to clash in ceaseless conflict, each casting blame upon the other. Berkulin accuses Urodan of making advances toward his beloved, consumed by a gnawing jealousy. Conversely, Urodan contends that his brother is nothing but a tyrant, coercing a young woman to remain at his side through the sinister means of blackmail.

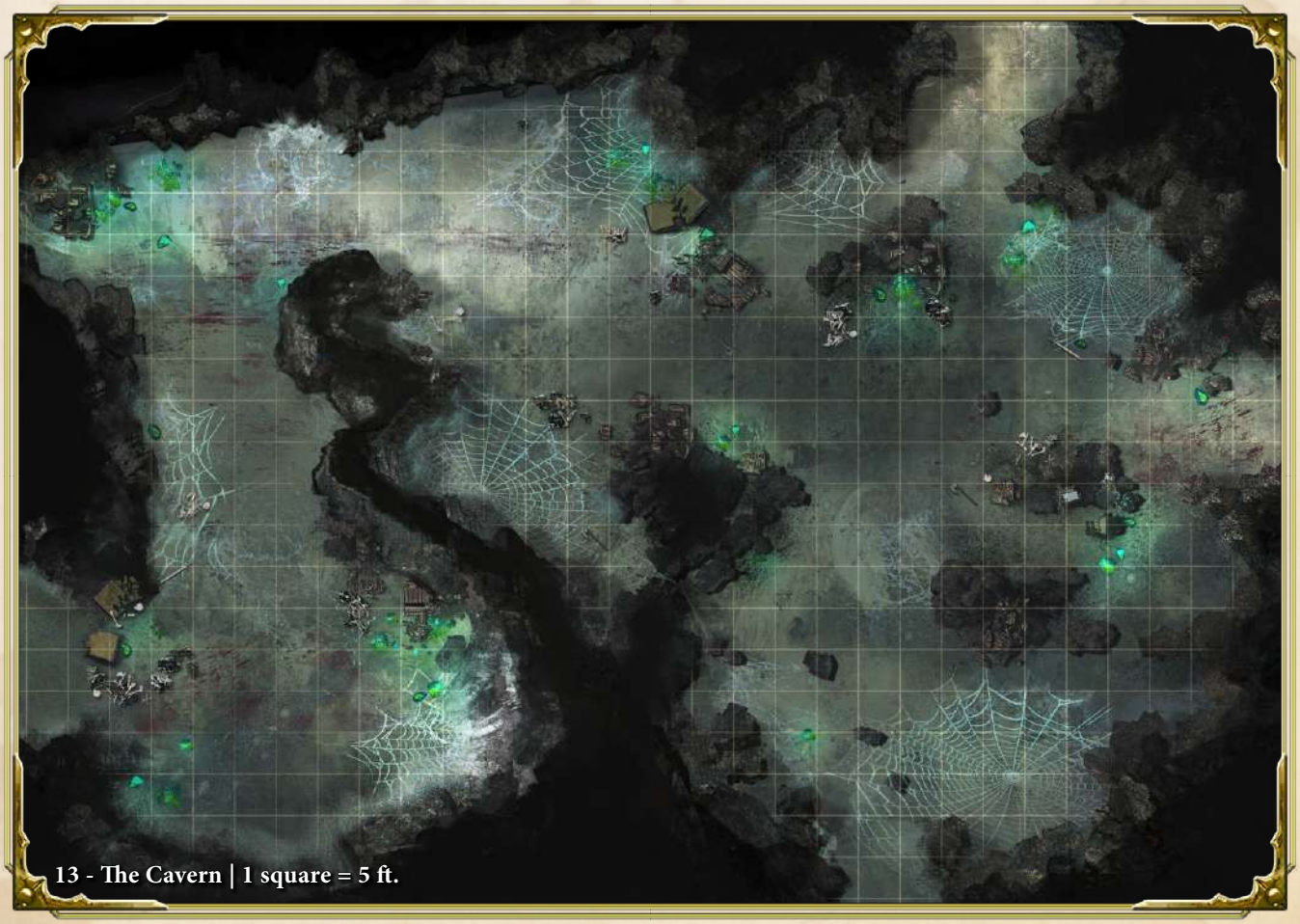
13 - The Cavern

Upon entering this location, you find yourself in an ominous cavern. The pathways ahead are shrouded in darkness, broken only by the occasional glint of light from luminescent green stones embedded in the ground. Massive cobwebs, spun by unseen spiders, drape sections of the walls and ceiling. Jutting rock formations obstruct your line of sight, rendering many areas hidden from view.

In this cavern, Berkulin and Urodan are bound to be fighting each other in a fistfight. This battle and their increased hatred for each other are consuming their souls and feeding Tenebrizon's ritual.

Most of the time they are trading blows or rolling around on the ground grabbing each other. But when they become too tired, they step away from each other to rest, only to return trying to not allow the other to recover. If the dwarves see anyone entering the cave, they will try to convince them to take their side and help deal with their brother.

Web Terrain. All areas covered by webs are considered difficult terrain. Creatures traversing through a web expend 2 feet of movement for every 1 foot they advance.



13 - The Cavern | 1 square = 5 ft.

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Should a creature enter a webbed space or end its turn in it, it must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained by the sticky fibers. Creatures restrained in this manner may use their action to attempt a DC 15 Strength check to break free.

In the northeast of the cavern, one can climb the rocks with a successful DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check to reach **location 25**.

If the adventures are seen by the dwarves read the following:

Breaking momentarily from his relentless scuffle, one of the dwarves turns in your direction, his gaze ablaze with fervor. "Wanderers! Ye've found yerselves amidst a war o' honor. Me brotha a betrayer! He is trying to take Glannit from me. She is a lass from a long-lost clan, our bloodlines, the Stonehelms an' Rubyhelms, are interwoven like veins in this rock. By Dorsis' beard, she's me soulmate, more precious than the finest ore! Yet, me own flesh an' blood, Urodan, thinks he can simply snatch her from me, disregardin' the vows of kinship. Stand with me, an' let's mend what's been broken, bringin' honor back to clan Stonehelm!"

Regaining his footing, albeit bruised and battered, Urodan locks eyes with the adventurers. "Listen well!" he bellows with urgency. "Glannit's nae just some gem to be hoarded. She's a free spirit, a wind through the tunnels, stifled by Berkulin's claspin' grasp! Aye, she's hinted that someone from our very clan seeks to chain her with stories o' old an' false entitlements. I fight nae to claim her, but to set love itself free. She love me as I her! Join me, ye defenders o' liberty, an' let us unshackle the lass from me tyrant of a brotha!"

The characters can interact with both dwarves, each one will stick to their side of the story.

What Berkulin Knows

- Believes Glannit Rubyhelm is from the lost clan of Rubyhelms, who were ancient allies of the Stonehelms.
- Retrieved clan records from the archives that he believes might have information about the Rubyhelms. They suggest that the Rubyhelms were betrayed and abandoned (he believes they are real - they are not).
- Considers himself an honor-bound traditionalist, upholding the importance of clan ties and alliances.
- Is in love with Glannit and believes her to be his destined soulmate.
- Thinks Urodan is making advances toward Glannit out of betrayal and jealousy.
- Was led by Glannit to believe that he would find the truth about the Rubyhelms in a particular cavern.
- Told Glannit about a childhood friend he had named "Dorlak", a dwarf that stayed with their clan for only a few months, when his brother was too young to even walk.
- Recalls Glannit showing him a rare gemstone pendant of dwarvencraft similar to the Stonehelm. She said that it's from her childhood, and unique to the Rubyhelms. This reinforces his belief in her Rubyhelm heritage and their clans' closeness.
- Heard from Glannit about an ancient Stonehelm battle strategy called the "Shieldwall Pivot," which she said her ancestors also used, further strengthening his belief in their shared clan history.
- Glannit told him about a unique brew recipe her clan used, which is very similar to Stonehelm secret recipe, making him sure of their shared ancestry.

Berkulin Stonehelm

Medium dwarf (hill dwarf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 15 (unarmored, Constitution modifier + Dexterity modifier)
Hit Points 105 (currently at 70)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +6
Skills Athletics +6, History +4, Intimidation +5, Perception +5
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 15
Languages Common, Dwarvish
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Dwarven Resilience. Berkulin has advantage on saving throws against poison.

Stone's Endurance. As a reaction, when Berkulin takes damage, he can reduce that damage by 1d12 + his Constitution modifier (minimum reduction of 1). Once he uses this trait, he can't use it again until he finishes a short or long rest.

Leader's Command (Recharge 5-6). As a bonus action, Berkulin can issue a command that emboldens his allies and strikes fear into his enemies. Allies within 30 feet gain a +2 bonus to their attack rolls and saving throws for 1 round. Enemies within the same range must make a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 round.

Actions

Multiattack. Berkulin makes two melee attacks.

Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Shield Bash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

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What Urodan Knows

- Sees Glannit as a free spirit, wishing to break free from the oppressive traditions of her "family".
- Has received hints (from Glannit) that someone from his clan, without naming Berkulin, is trying to control and manipulate her because of old clan ties.
- Believes his fight is to free Glannit from the shackles of such manipulation and control. He loves Glannit and believes she reciprocates his feelings.
- Was convinced by Glannit to head to a certain cavern where he believed he'd discover the truth about the Rubyhelms.
- Gifted Glannit a pendant with a rare gemstone he used his clan techniques to craft by himself.
- Heard a story about Glannit's childhood friend called Dorlak, who she misses a lot, and has not seen for decades.
- Taught Glannit about the "Shieldwall Pivot" combat technique.
- Shared a nostalgic memory of a special brew unique to the Stonehelm household with Glannit.

Hints That May Reveal They Were Played

- The contradiction in Glannit's portrayal to each brother. For Berkulin, she's a sorrowful maiden tied by clan history. For Urodan, she's a free spirit trying to break free from oppressive family expectations.
- Both were directed to the same cavern under different pretenses, suggesting they were intentionally led there to clash.
- Neither brother ever met Glannit at the same time.
- She used Urodan-gifted pendant as a childhood item when talking with Berkulin.
- Used the knowledge she got about Stonehelm brew with Urodan to convince Berkulin of their shared ancestry.
- Glannit used Berkulin childhood friend's name when creating a false story for Urodan.

Possible Outcomes. The characters may join Urodan, join Berkulin, or try to reconcile the brothers, or even ignore the situation and go away *(if they do, no combat will happen here without their interference, but they may return here later, as the souls will keep fighting)*.

Siding with One Brother. If the characters join one of the brothers, the other will become an enemy and combat will issue. If a brother reaches 0 hit points by an attack not caused by the other brother, his soul will be permanently destroyed.

This will cause the **penumbral lust** to appear from the western passage, in the form of Glannit. She will try to fool the dwarf and the players if possible; if not, she will openly fight them, which will cause two **penumbral grudges** to also appear from the west passage ready to help the **lust**.

Reconcile the Brothers. The characters may try to inquire about each brother, each of whom will be trying to convince them to take their side, but will be willing to answer questions. The answers may cause the characters to realize that something is amiss, and if they dig up enough information, they might come up with enough inconsistencies to prove to both brothers that they were played.

Doing so should not be easy, as both brothers are convinced and in love with Glannit, but if shown reason, they will reaffirm their brotherly bond. If this happens, both will plead forgiveness to the other. This will cause the **penumbral lust** and the two **penumbral grudges** to arrive from the west, not losing time with any deception but ready to stop the adventures from freeing the souls.

Killing the Lust. After killing her, all dwarves' souls that are still alive will become free from the ritual and be able to go into the afterlife.

If Berkulin is Saved. He will promise that the next time they call his name, he will come to their aid, as dwarves never forget their debts. Any of the characters can use a bonus action, once, to call his name, making his soul appear to boost them in battle as the leader he was in life, conferring +2 bonus to their attack rolls and saving throws for 1 round

Urodan Stonehelm

Medium dwarf (hill dwarf), chaotic good

Armor Class 15 (unarmored, Constitution modifier + Dexterity modifier)
Hit Points 90 (currently at 60)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +5
Skills Athletics +7, Investigation +3, Survival +4 (navigating underground), Nature +3 (knowledge about minerals and stones)
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 11
Languages Common, Dwarvish
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Dwarven Resilience. Urodan has advantage on saving throws against poison.

Stone's Endurance. As a reaction, when Urodan takes damage, he can reduce that damage by 1d12 + his Constitution modifier (minimum reduction of 1). Once he uses this trait, he can't use it again until he finishes a short or long rest.

Actions

Multiattack. Urodan makes two melee attacks.

Pickaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Rockslide (Recharge 5-6). Urodan strikes the ground with his pickaxe, causing a localized rockslide in a 20-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 18 (4d8) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. On a successful save, the creature takes half damage and isn't knocked prone.

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and 20 temporary hit points to the character that called him and all their allies within 30 feet.

If Urodan is Saved. He will thank the characters for his freedom, and to repay them in kind, he will give the characters a blessing that will also free them from their bounds. This blessing reproduces the effects of the *freedom of movement* spell, but with a duration of 48 hours.

If Both were Saved. In addition to the above, the dwarves will praise the characters for having brought them back to their senses. They will plead to Dorsi to bless the path of the characters for their deeds, giving them permanently the Stonehelm's Boon.

Stonehelm's Boon
You gain the following ability:

Stone's Endurance. As a reaction, when you take damage, you can reduce that damage by 1d12 + your Constitution modifier (minimum reduction of 1). Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Area F - The Bloody Path

In this location, the soul of an assassin from the Third Eye, captured by the cult, is imprisoned. Known as Arturius "The Bloody Dagger" Haylley, he was among the most adept killers the Third Eye had to offer in the Imperial capital. However, his last mission led him too far astray. He found himself in Hogaw's Wind Inn, where fortune abandoned him. Alone, he came face to face with Mograv and the High Priestess and was subsequently captured.

Now, his soul is tethered to this place, where he is forced to relive each of his assassinations. His many victims wail and denounce him, replaying the horror of their final moments. Although he acknowledges the deeds he's committed, Arturius is confounded by the presence of his apparently living victims. Utilizing his considerable talents in disguise, he hides among them, desperately seeking an escape. Alas, a mystical boundary confines him here.

In truth, none of the individuals present are real, save for Arturius. They are but manifestations of his sins, given form in the Penumbral Plane.

Arturius himself is a man of average stature, possessing a broad nose and cropped black hair, and a scar over his left cheek. A master of both disguise and assassination, he is highly skilled in the use of various blades. His agility surpasses that of many of his already nimble peers in the Third Eye organization. From a young age, he was groomed to be an elite agent. But now he is masking himself as a guard captain named Tybald.

14 - The Blood Lake | 1 square = 5 ft.

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14 - The Blood Lake

Approaching this location, your nostrils are filled with the pungent aroma of blood. Before you lies a lake of pure blood, punctuated by small, stony islands. Upon it, you see numerous figures cloaked in a ghostly aura. They appear to be common folk of various professions, each marked by wounds that could well be fatal. Yet, curiously, none seem perturbed. All are engrossed in a seemingly endless search for something.

Arriving at this location, the characters will find many individuals with a faint ghostly aura, all talking and searching for something, distributed among many islands in a lake of blood.

The victims will try to ask for the character's help, but it is up to them to stop and assist or pass by.

Blood Lake. The blood lake is 20 feet deep, requiring one to swim to cross between islands. Just as the blood river that connects to it, the current is not strong, but keeping contact with the blood induces terrible visions. Creatures (with the exception of aberrations) that enter the blood or end their turn within it must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become incapacitated by nausea until the end of their next turn, their minds assaulted by visions of bloody massacres and grisly dismemberments.

The Victims and the Assassin. The individuals, except for Arturius hiding among them, are manifestations of Arturius' sins as an assassin. They endlessly search for Arturius, while he must keep hiding among them, a physical manifestation of Arturius' worst nightmares that he always buried deeply within his mind.

The characters can talk with the victims, they are not hostile. They can give information about who they were and what they know about Arturius which may help the characters find him.

- The manifestations don't have real memories, they are only figments of Arturius' nightmares, created by his own mind, based on the likeness and the few information he has on his victims.
- Each manifestation holds some mixture of information, some useful, others irrelevant. Except Arturius, no one lies.
- The manifestations don't know more about themselves or Arturius than specified here. If pressured for information, they will be confused, and as in a nightmare, they may begin to create false memories to fill the gaps of their story.

Third Eye Mystical Protection.

Arturius cannot be found by divination magic or detection magic, as he still has his unique skills from when he was an ace Third Eye agent, protecting him against such magic. But all other forms of uncovering his identity are possible.

Elara, the Courtesan. A stunning woman with golden curls and green eyes, wearing a silken gown, torn at the edges. She is polite and smells of flowers, even in this bloody fetid lake.

Elara speaks with a soft voice, her words dripping with elegance, *"Darling, Arturius would never be caught dead in the attire of the plebeians or in cumbersome armor. His taste always leaned towards the more refined, delicate fabrics."*

Sir Benton, the Knight. A burly man with thick black hair and a bushy mustache, wearing a suit of battered plate armor emblazoned with the sigil of a lion.

Sir Benton asserts with a firm tone, *"That coward backstabber, I remember him having a hair as black as mine under his cloak."*

Kaelith, the Elf Scholar. An elf with silver hair and eyes like sapphires, dressed in a scholar's robe adorned with arcane sigils.

Kaelith notes pensively, *"Arturius was unmistakably human, lacking the ethereal elegance of our elven kin. I know nothing besides that."*

Tormund, the Blacksmith. A stocky man with a thick beard and burns on his arms, he wears a leather apron over a simple tunic.

Tormund remarks, *"A thin man he is, not fit for forge. Oh, he had a scar on his face, and not a beard to hide it."*

Darumin, the Dwarf Merchant. A dwarf with a long curly silver beard, he is dressed in fine fabric, though it's marred with bloodstains.

Darumin grumbles, *"By Dorsi's' beard! That Arturius, the daft blighter, couldn't bear the whiff of flowers. Never did he purchase any o' me finest brews of scent!"*

Rognar, the Pirate Captain. A tall and strong one-eyed man with brown hair, he dons pirate attire, complete with a cutlass and a tricorn hat.

Rognar smirks, *"Arr, I ain't never seen Arturius sportin' a ring or pendant. That lad wasn't one for flashy baubles."*

Adrin, the Scribe. A man with wire-frame glasses, long red hair, and a slight hunch, he wears a commoner's robe and has ink stains on his fingers.

Adrin speaks while looking at his scrolls: *"Arturius never displayed any divine symbols on his garments. It's said he had no faith. But that is all I know."*

Abel, the High Priest. An elegant bald man with a serene aura and a single scar on his face, wearing robes adorned with religious symbols.

Abel speaks in a comforting voice: *"May Tamera save Arturius' soul. He was not a good man, dabbling in many crafts but mastering none, except killing, tragically."*

Arris, the Beggar. A haggard man with a scraggly beard and dirt-caked, ragged clothing.

Arris talks, his voice trembling: *"Never felt a coin from Arturius; he wasn't one to give alms. A scary man he is."*

Faelar, the Elven Archer. An elf with blond hair, a bow and quiver on his back, and a scar over his right eye, clad in leather armor.

Looking suspiciously around he whispers: *"Arturius shied away from arcane symbols, fearing curses they might hold."*

Vencer, the Mage. A young man with long black hair and a scar on his left cheek, clad in robes adorned with arcane symbols.

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Vencer speaks confidently: *"Arturius' disdain for non-humans was evident; he'd never don an elven or dwarven craft."*

Sven, the Sailor. A strong man with silver hair and a bushy beard, dressed in weathered clothes and sporting a sailor's cap.

Sven speaks loudly while making exaggerated gestures: *"Arturius never left sight of the shore; the deep blue spooked him. It is sad, I tell you, that I did not get to die in the sea!"*

Tilda, the Innkeeper. A matronly woman with long black hair and a small scar on her forehead, wearing an elegant but discreet dress.

The innkeeper smiles welcomingly and says, *"Arturius always preferred the seclusion of the room corners; and he liked them with fewer windows."*

Orion, the Bard. A charismatic man with long red hair, holding a lute, dressed in flamboyant clothes and sporting a feathered cap.

The bard sings: *"Oh, Arturius! With eyes so keen, he could spot a fly dance from leagues unseen!"*

Tybalt, the Guard Captain (disguised Arturius - what he says are lies). A man of medium build with black hair and a scar on his left cheek, clad in silky vest with no symbols or heraldry.

In a confident tone, he speaks: *"Arturius has silver hair, I'm certain."*

Arturius, Master Assassin

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (silky vest, defense style)
Hit Points 170 (20d8 + 80)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +10, Int +7
Skills Acrobatics +10, Deception +8, Perception +7, Stealth +10
Damage Resistance poison
Senses passive Perception 17
Languages Common, Thieves' Cant, and two other languages
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Assassinate. During his first turn, Arturius has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit he scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Evasion. If Arturius is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Arturius deals an extra 10d6 damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 ft. of an ally of Arturius that isn't incapacitated and Arturius doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Tactician. Arturius can use his bonus action to direct one ally he can see within 30 ft. of him. The ally can immediately use its reaction to make one weapon attack.

Actions

Multiattack. Arturius makes two shortsword attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 24 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Legendary Actions (3/Turn)

Arturius can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Arturius regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Dash. Arturius can use his action to Dash.

Strike. Arturius makes one shortsword attack.

Hide. Arturius takes the Hide action.

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Accusing or Attacking a Manifestation. If the characters attack or display overt hostility toward a manifestation *(any individual except Tybalt/Arturius)*, the offended entity transforms into a **penumbral grudge** that assaults its aggressor.

Finding Arturius. Upon locating the true Arturius, he will endeavor to deceive the characters, seizing an opportune moment to initiate an attack.

- Once Arturius is revealed, all manifestations metamorphose into wailing, crimson ghosts, hungry for retribution. **At the end of each combat round, Arturius suffers 1d6 force damage for each remaining manifestation.**

Defeating Arturius. The master assassin is a figure unlikely to find redemption. Consequently, the most probable outcome is his demise, which will result in the annihilation of his soul.

Consumed by the enormity of his sins, the prospect of redeeming Arturius appears nearly insurmountable. However, if you determine that the characters present a persuasive argument — or if it would serve the narrative or entertainment value of your campaign — you may permit them an attempt to coerce Arturius into surrender. Such a decision would prompt the vengeful spirits to cease their attacks temporarily, providing the characters an occasion to either save Arturius' soul or fail in the endeavor.

Area G - The Arcane Sanctum

Different from other locations, this area was not created by a soul bound here. To bring the Kepesh pyramid to the Soulflayer Caverns, Tenebrizon needed a ritual to be done on each side, and here was the place where the ritual was conducted on the Penumbral side.

Overseeing this location is a **penumbral sadness**, who leads a group of cultists who serve Tenebrizon as assistants on rituals.

15 - The Wailing Quarter

As you traverse the entrance corridor, you emerge into a vast chamber replete with shelves, bookcases, and tables, each laden with an array of books, scrolls, and numerous maps. The room is bathed in the eerie dim-light of grand chandeliers, augmented by magical floating candles that accompany those who linger within this space. Strangely, the chamber is adorned with withered flowers and shattered mirrors.

This chamber serves as the personal quarters of the penumbral creature that governs this region. However, the creature is seldom present, often occupying the Ritual Chamber (Room 18).

Within this space lies an extensive archive of rituals, spells, and esoteric knowledge that the creature has amassed throughout its long existence.

Treasure. Scrolls of the following spells can be found here: *blight, blindness/deafness, contagion, dominate person, ray of enfeeblement, revivify, speak with animals, speak with dead,* and *vampiric touch*.

Library of Sorrows. This cursed library contains nearly any wizard spell from levels 1 to 7, available for transcription by a wizard. However, delving into these arcane secrets risks perilous corruption.

A wizard may attempt to locate a specific spell by making an Intelligence (Arcana) check against a DC equal to 10 plus 2 per spell level. On a success, the wizard uncovers the desired spell; on a failure, they find nothing. Regardless of the outcome, the wizard must make a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. Failing this save results in the wizard suffering one level of exhaustion and one point of Corruption of Sorrows.

Effects of Corruption of Sorrows

Corruption Level	Effect
1	Feels unhappy; no other effect. Requires a Remove Curse spell to dispel.
2	Gains disadvantage on all saving throws. Can only be reduced after a week of rest away from the Penumbral Plane, or by a Wish spell or similar effect.
3	Suffers disadvantage on all attack rolls and skill checks. Can only be reduced through a Wish spell or similar effect.
4	Transforms irrevocably into a penumbral sadness, wholly corrupted by the malevolent power of the Ungods.

An DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) or DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check can identify the nature of this corruption before a character can decide to risk it. Revealing that it is very difficult to remove if it goes beyond its first stages, and that it can fully corrupt an individual into a **penumbral sadness.**

- The saving throw is required to search the library; once a book containing a spell is found, it can be safely removed from the library. Most of these are eldritch tomes, replete with arcane lore on madness and teeming with insanity. They contain spells dispersed throughout their pages in an organizational schema that only the **penumbral sadness** who inscribed them could comprehend.

16 - The Apprentice Rooms

This room exudes a sense of claustrophobia, offering little space beyond the tables and shelves. Numerous open books lie on the tables, accompanied by an array of simple magical components strewn about. The shelves house a blend of magical tomes and more mundane items like cloaks and boots, likely used by the cultists.

This place is used by the mage apprentices of the cult to study magic under the tutelage of the **penumbral sadness**.

Most of the time there are two **Shadow Wing initiates**, who act as servants, and four **shadow mages**, the apprentices.

Treasure. Most of the contents here are mundane, with the books on magic being nothing of great importance to

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experienced wizards. One can collect 360 gp in simple spell components here if they check all shelves and drawers.

The cultists here don't carry much besides simple daggers and mantles. They own a total of 73 gp, 66 sp, and 13 cp.

17 - The Hall of Bound Souls

You enter a room with four big statues carved with eldritch runes. A huge ritual is inscribed in the wall on the opposite side of the room, and energy emanates from the purple orbs held by the statues into the portal.

Each orb here represents one of the souls bound to the Tenebrizon's Ritual.

- The soul of the Cultist in Area A.
- The soul of the Collector in Area B.
- The soul of the Adventurer in Area C.
- The soul of the Priestess in Area D.
- The soul of the Older Dwarf Brother in Area E.
- The soul of the Younger Dwarf Brother in Area E.
- The Soul of the Assassin in Area F.

For each soul currently bound to a ritual, the corresponding orb will be illuminated. When describing the room for the first time, check the number of souls still bound to give a precise description, as that may be an important clue for the characters.

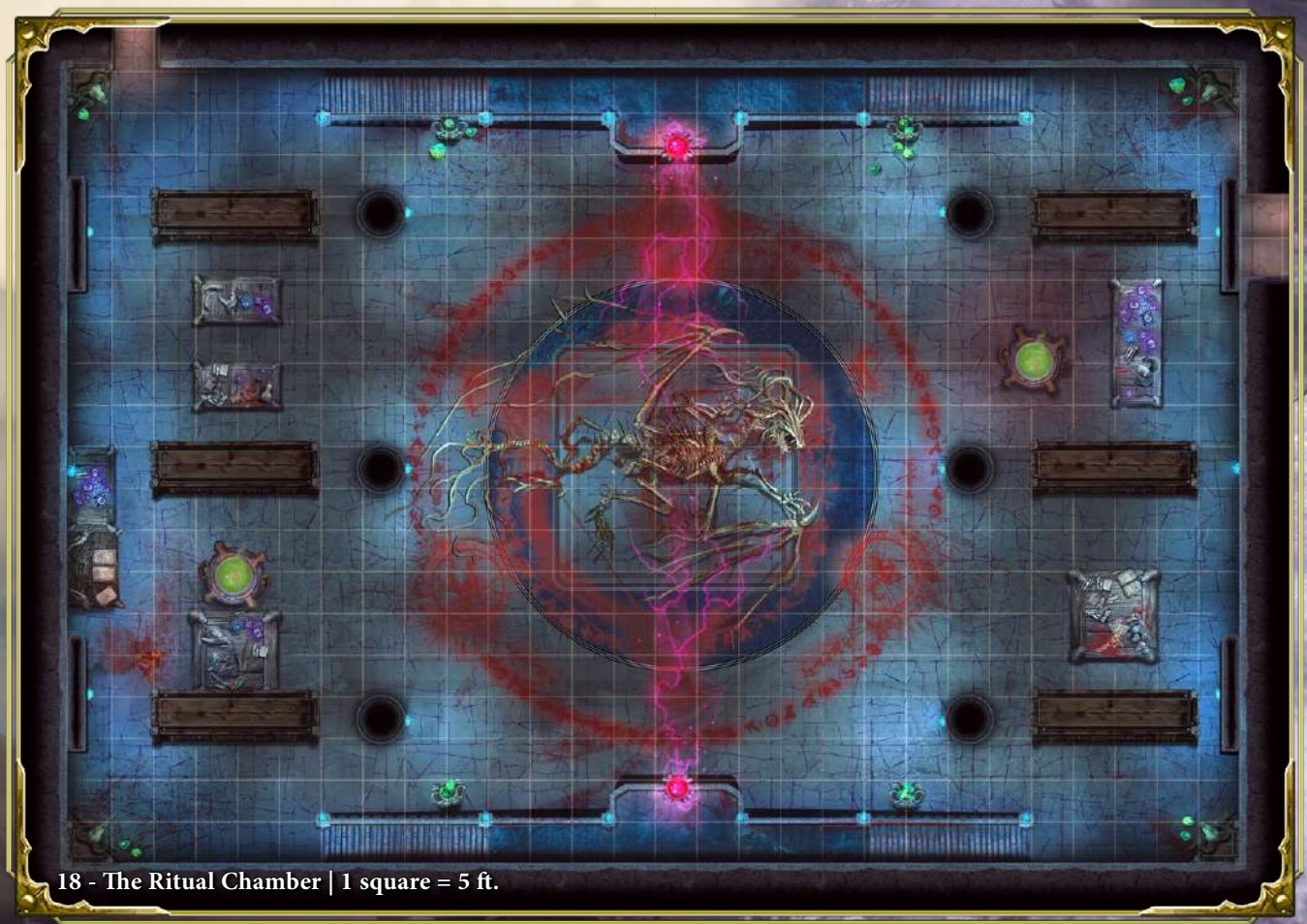
Note: The eighth orb remains unlit, as it was prepared for the druid in Area H who has yet to be sacrificed.

Destroying the Orbs. Mundane or magical attempts to neutralize the orbs prove futile as long as they are bound to a soul. Only a ritual as potent as the one currently underway could disrupt them.

Studying the Orbs. A meticulous examination of the ritual, coupled with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check, will reveal that each orb is connected both to the ritual and to a soul. Freeing each soul weakens the total power channeled into the pyramid.

18 - The Ritual Chamber

You step into a vast chamber where shelves laden with spell components and eldritch tomes intermingle with tables holding materials for ritual preparations. At the room's center lies a grand magical circle, its epicenter adorned with the immense bones of a dragon. Arrayed along its circumference are six cultists, their chants infusing the ritual as their life force is siphoned to fuel the magic. Above, on two elevated platforms, orbs glow with a sinister crimson energy. On one platform, a curved, aberrant creature robed in dark mantles holds a mystical staff.



18 - The Ritual Chamber | 1 square = 5 ft.

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Skeleton Penumbral Dragon

Huge undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (decomposed scales)
Hit Points 180 (16d12 + 64)
Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +8, Wis +6, Cha +8
Skills Perception +10, Stealth +4
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned, exhausted
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 13 (10,000 XP)

Vulnerable to Bludgeoning. As a skeleton, the dragon takes double damage from bludgeoning attacks.

Actions

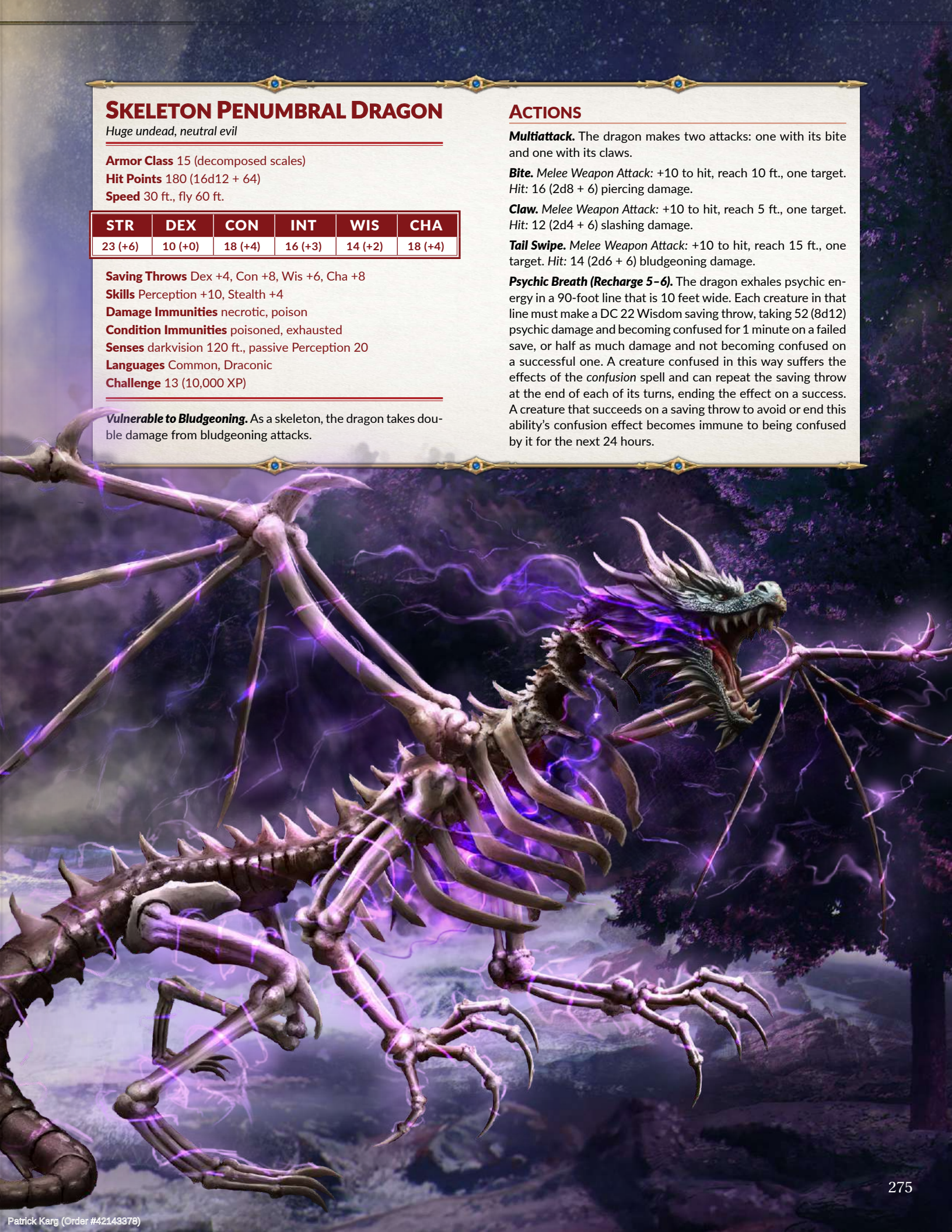
Multiattack. The dragon makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d8 + 6) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d4 + 6) slashing damage.

Tail Swipe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d6 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Psychic Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales psychic energy in a 90-foot line that is 10 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 22 Wisdom saving throw, taking 52 (8d12) psychic damage and becoming confused for 1 minute on a failed save, or half as much damage and not becoming confused on a successful one. A creature confused in this way suffers the effects of the *confusion* spell and can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success. A creature that succeeds on a saving throw to avoid or end this ability's confusion effect becomes immune to being confused by it for the next 24 hours.



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This chamber serves as the sanctum where a **penumbral sadness** orchestrates the cult's rituals. Currently, the entity is engrossed in an experiment to resurrect deceased dragons as **penumbral skeletal dragons**.

Six **shadow mages** participate in the ritual, arrayed along the outer edge of the magical circle, equidistant from one another. The **penumbral sadness** presides over the proceedings from atop one of the elevated platforms.

Upon detecting any intruders, the **sadness** will instruct the cultists to hasten the ritual and will commence engaging the invaders, prioritizing its own safety above all else.

The Ritual. As the cultists accelerate their incantations, their life force begins to drain, nourishing the dragon bones at the circle's center. The rules are as follows:

- Each **shadow mage** is restrained and locked in their position, unable to move or be moved. They cannot take any actions until the ritual concludes.
- At the end of each round, each mage loses 4d6 hit points, the energy of which is channeled as life force into the skeletal remains in the circle's center. Add this amount to the skeletal dragon's hit points, starting from zero.
- If the accumulated hit points reach 180 (see **penumbral skeletal dragon**), the ritual culminates, awakening the undead dragon to join the fray against the intruders. Any surviving cultists are then free to move and act.
- Should all the cultists die, the ritual will be incomplete. The dragon still awakens but with whatever number of hit points had been amassed up to that moment. Consequently, it will suffer disadvantage on all saving throws, owing to its imperfect creation.

Ritualistic Orbs. These orbs are part of the ritual. While their destruction won't halt the proceedings entirely, it will introduce significant disruption.

Each orb has 50 hit points, is immune to poison and necrotic damage, has resistance to all other types of damage except force and bludgeoning, and is vulnerable to force and bludgeoning damage.

Should an orb be destroyed, all six cultists suffer 4d10 force damage, and the dragon's hit point pool is reduced by 50.

Treasures. Searching the room and the cultists, one can find 3 aquamarines (500 gp), a diamond (100 gp), a *potion of cold resistance*, a *potion of fire giant strength*, a *potion of greater healing*, a *potion of mind reading*, a diverse array of material components for magic (total worth of 1,700 gp) and one of the Peretuk Idols *(the Kepesh tameranium statues - see more in the Pyramid)*.

Area H - The Corrupted Grove

This locale was originally a section of the Soulflayer Caverns, distinguished by its covering of mushrooms and penumbral flora.

Hidden within this sanctuary is Gallius (NG half-elf **druid**), a person on the verge of becoming a cultist's sacrifice. Captured by the Cult of Shadow Wing, he was destined for the sacrificial altar. However, he seized an opportunity during transit and managed to escape, seeking refuge in this mushroom-covered enclave.

Gallius is a druid of the Nature Spirits faith, born amidst the verdant expanses of Bak Forest within the Empire. His life has been a ceaseless struggle to safeguard the forest, protect its denizens, and preserve their unique way of life against the encroaching Empire. While he harbors a general mistrust and distaste for Imperials, he is willing to ally himself against the Cult of Shadow Wing. His loathing for cruelty is uncompromising; he will refuse to aid anyone displaying excessive bloodthirst, or those who resort to torture or other unethical tactics — even against the cult.

Gallius, the Lost Druid

Medium humanoid (half-elf), neutral good

Armor Class 14 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +8
Skills Nature +4, Perception +7, Stealth +5, Survival +7
Senses passive Perception 18
Languages Common, Druidic, Elvish
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Spellcasting. Gallius is a 10th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). Gallius has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft*, *mending*, *produce flame*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds*, *entangle*, *fog cloud*
2nd level (3 slots): *barkskin*, *pass without trace*,
3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic*, *protection from energy*, *water breathing*
4th level (3 slots): *freedom of movement*, *polymorph*
5th level (2 slots): *commune with nature*, *tree stride*

Wild Shape. Gallius can use his action to magically assume the shape of a beast that he has seen before. He can use this feature twice, regaining expended uses after a short or long rest (max CR: 1, duration: 6 hours).

Actions

Quarterstaff. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage, or 4 (1d8) bludgeoning damage when wielded two-handed.

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19 - The Grove of Mushrooms

You behold a forest of towering mushrooms ahead, each aglow with varying hues. Spores waft gently through the air, accompanied by a musky aroma. The setting resembles a natural cavern, its stone walls riddled with numerous recesses.

Gallius is concealed in the crevices of the cavern's towering ceiling, transformed into a bat. The ceiling itself varies in height, ranging from 15 to 40 feet, and is adorned with natural stalagmites.

Centered in this locale, a **penumbral sloth** lies hidden beneath the ground, acting as the guardian of the area. Prowling in search of the elusive druid is a band of cultists — comprising three **Shadow Wing initiates**, one **shadow mage**, and a **master of pain**.

Should combat erupt with the cultists, the **penumbral sloth** will burrow to the surface to launch a surprise attack against the characters. As a creature inherently lazy, it will always move as little as possible, targeting the nearest enemy it can.

The Hidden Druid. If Gallius witnesses the characters battling the cultists, he will endeavor to aid them, even at the risk of blowing his cover. Should he survive the encounter, he may disclose what he has gleaned about the location.

Information known by Gallius:

- The cultists have been capturing individuals for sacrifice to fuel a dark ritual. The more souls they bind, the more potent their ritual becomes.
- The leader of these cultists resides somewhere within the expansive pyramid structure.
- He has overheard the cultists discuss the disappearance of some of the "Peretuk" idols. They are in pursuit of these idols, which, when placed on specific altars within the pyramid, could reinstate the divine protections of the Kepesh deity, Ba-Ka, thereby thwarting their malevolent plans.

Gallius is not particularly combat-oriented; his skills are better suited for diplomacy and reconnaissance in his guardianship of Bak Forest. Nonetheless, if pressed, he can be persuaded to join the fight. Otherwise, he will employ whatever spells he has at his disposal to assist the characters and inquire about the path they took, hoping to identify a safe route back to the Material Plane.

Area I - The Vandanamalika Pyramid

20 - Main entrance

As you step into this chamber, you inhale an air distinct from what you've encountered thus far — the scent of myrrh and other burnt herbs fills the space. Unlike the other areas you've explored, this room is not illuminated by green and purple gems, but by magical torches. The setting retains the dim luminosity characteristic of the Penumbral Plane, yet the light is sufficient to reveal imposing stone walls adorned with intricate frescoes and enigmatic hieroglyphs. At the center of the room, stone benches are arrayed in a neat row. Behind them stands a magnificent depiction of Ba-Ka, an imposing divine figure with the visage of a crow's skull.

This was an entrance hall for the pyramid and served as a temple of worship to the god of magic and spirits of the Kepesh people, Ba-Ka. To the southeast, there is a door that leads to what appears to be a corridor with walls adorned with hieroglyphics.

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21 and 23 - Priests' Quarters

You step into a room hewn from stone, where bunk beds are seamlessly carved into the rock. The place is finely decorated; the beds are adorned with cushions and satin. On the ground, you notice marks of dried blood.

These rooms feature two bunk beds carved from stone, accompanied by well-crafted wooden cabinets. These appear to be the vacant quarters of the priests of Ba-Ka.

A DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check allows a character to discern, from the position of the blood and other subtle clues in the room — such as small cuts on the satin sheets — that the Kepesh priests were likely assassinated in their sleep here. The room has been clumsily cleaned, presumably for use by cultists of Shadow Wing.

22 - Priests' Prayer Room

You step into a room awash with the rich scent of herbs, a soothing aroma that permeates the air. Upon entering, you hear the heavy snoring of a massive aberrant creature, lying asleep atop cushions arranged in a symmetrical pattern at the room's center. These cushions all converge toward a strikingly well-carved statue of the god Ba-Ka. His divine likeness extends an empty palm, showing signs that it once held some kind of idol or statue.

This room served as a sanctuary for the clerics of Ba-Ka, a space dedicated to prayer and the preparation for various sacred rituals.

Within the chamber stands a statue and an altar of Ba-Ka, though currently, a **penumbral sloth** is slumbering on some prayer pillows near it. Opening the door will likely rouse the creature, which is prepared to defend its "territory" and view the characters as its next meal.

Peretuk Altar. This altar is one of four within the temple, each housing sacred statues capable of providing divine protection. Placing one of the tameranium idols (Peretuks) here will cause the altar to glow with ethereal light and make the symbol of Ba-Ka shine forth.

A character can make a DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check to understand the significance of this altar to the faith of Ba-Ka. On a success, they learn that the tameranium idols fit perfectly into this altar and are part of the protective blessings of the temple, designed to ward off the influence of the Ungods.

If the characters received An'Kur's blessing in Chapter 7 by releasing all prisoners, each character within 20 feet of the altar, when the Perepet is placed, regains 3d8 hit points and one spell slot of up to 4th level.

Treasure. Within this room, you may find a white silk robe embroidered with Ba-Ka motifs in gold (250 gp), a set of six copper cups used in rituals (25 gp each), and a silver ritual sword (silvered scimitar).

24 - High Priests' Quarters

Upon stepping into this chamber, a pungent stench of decay assails your senses, a noxious odor that lingers in the air. In the center of the room lies a mass of rotting corpses, from which four aberrant creatures are crawling, while numerous rats skulk around the room.

A strong smell of blood and rot is coming from a pile of 10 bodies of Ba-Ka priests killed in the kidnapping of the pyramid. With the Ba-Ka rites corrupted during transportation of the pyramid, the souls of these dead priests are trapped in their bodies.

Four **penumbral disgusts** and six **penumbral miseries** made this location their lair.

25 - Guardians' Room

At the end of the corridor, adorned with intricate drawings and sacred hieroglyphs, you step into a circular chamber. Here, four imposing statues stand guard, each resembling a priest of Ba-Ka, bearing grand amphorae on their backs. At the heart of the room, a remarkable sight unfolds—a central altar with a massive, shimmering crystal floating above it.

At the altar, one can read "*Demonstrate your knowledge of the faith by the correct gesture and be blessed, show foolishness, and face the anger of the god of Magic and Spirit.*"

Statues. Each of the four statues in this room presents a riddle in the form of both physical appearance and an inscription. Solving the riddle to perform the correct gesture bestows a boon. An incorrect gesture calls forth elemental retribution.

This was used to test new arriving priests for their faith, knowledge of Ba-Ka in scriptures, and their wisdom.

Gestures. Each statute requires a gesture. If the gesture presented includes the necessary one, the condition is met. For example, placing one hand over the heart and pointing to the sky fulfills the Statue of Wisdom, even if pointing to the sky is not necessary.

Making the correct gesture causes the character to gain a boon from the statue. Each statue can only give one boon every 24 hours.

Making an incorrect gesture makes that statue unable to give any boon for the next hour.

Statue of Wisdom

A statue of a priest, looking to the skies with a semblance of longing.

Inscription: "*Wisdom. Though I gaze upon the vast skies, the true journey begins within. Where does my true essence lie?*"

Correct Gesture: Place one hand over the heart.

Boon: Grants one creature 30 temporary hit points for 24 hours.

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Statue of Magic

A robed figure weaves invisible threads in an intricate pattern.

Inscription: *"In my fingers lies the fabric of reality. Only a gesture that has true power shows the truth of my actions."*

Gesture: Cast a spell in front of the statue.

Boon: Grants one creature advantage on all saving throws for 24 hours.

Statue of Death

A tranquil figure with open arms, as if ready to embrace, yet eyes etched with the mysteries of eternity.

Inscription: *"My arms welcome you to an endless horizon. What is my gesture?"*

Gesture: Extend arms outward horizontally in acceptance.

Boon: Grants one creature the effect of the *death ward* spell for 24 hours.

Statue of Akhu

A devout entity, hands folded, a portal to another realm depicted behind it.

Inscription: *"In silent prayer, I seek the keeper of the distant realm. Show me how."*

Gesture: Fold hands together in a traditional prayer pose.

Boon: Summons a **Zealot of Ba-Ka** (Akhu) to assist the creature for 24 hours, but only if actions align with Ba-Ka's will.

Consequences of Attacking the Statues. Assailing any of the statues or the crystal provokes four elemental rays, each dealing 10d6 damage of their respective elements against the attacker (cold, fire, lightning, thunder). A DC 18 Dexterity saving throw can reduce this damage to half.

As characters pass through this chamber, they can choose to proceed further into the pyramid or descend the stairs leading to the pool of corruption.

25.1 - Pool of Corruption

Descending the stairs, you arrive at a place where you can see a pool of green ichor, encircled by intricate runes of purple energy, forming a complex magical circle.

The characters will find one **master of pain** and three **Shadow Wing initiates** here, preparing to descend a man and a woman, both bound by ropes, into the pool.

If a creature dies in the pool, it begins to mutate into an emogun, usually a **penumbral pain**, but powerful humanoids can become **penumbral aberrations** if exposed to these aberrant waters.

The man and woman here are two simple commoners, Jarzen (N **commoner**) and Janny (CG **commoner**) Mercet. They are a couple of newlywed farmers that were captured by the cult in the Imperial Capital a few days ago. They can't do much to help the characters, but they will be very grateful if they are saved.

26 - Meditation Room

Upon entering this room, you behold tapestries unfurled upon the ground, their patterns intricately woven. At one end, a grand window that once offered vistas of a breathtaking landscape now reveals only the impenetrable shadows of the Penumbral Plane. Amidst this eerie tableau stands a mysterious aberrant figure, draped in shadow, by the window. It peers out into the abyss, its contemplative gaze locked onto the impenetrable darkness beyond.

This room is adorned with tapestries featuring patterns of the Kepesh people on the floor and is unique for offering a view outside the pyramid. Originally, it served as a place to contemplate the capital of Kepesh on the horizon, but now it gazes upon the shadows of the Penumbral Plane.

A figure near the window sits in contemplation. This entity is a **penumbral sadness**, a sorrowful specter of his former self. In his distant past life, he served as a high wizard among the Kepesh people, but was deceived by the forces of the Ungods. His realization of this dire mistake came too late, resulting in the loss of loved ones and his people branding him a traitor. He died engulfed in sorrow and regret, causing his soul to be twisted into an emogun of sadness within the Penumbral Plane.

Drawn to this room by the temple's architecture, which stirred memories of his past, he seeks solace here, mourning his lost life and opportunities.

This **sadness** is not inherently aggressive toward the characters but will retaliate if provoked. If the characters express interest in him and convince him to assist with his knowledge, he may comply.

Intrigued by Kepesh culture and willing to discuss his past, he is neither an enemy of the Ungods nor Tenebrizon. However, he cannot abide anyone desecrating Kepesh temples or corrupting their servants. This fills him with the deepest of sorrows, making him inclined to assist those who wish to prevent such desecrations. Yet, weighed down by his immense sadness and depression, he may be more willing to lament than to act, or even initiate a conversation. This **sadness** can elucidate what it might take to reactivate the pyramid's defenses — by placing a *Peretuk Idol* back on each of the four altars situated at the pyramid's corners — and can even offer guidance on solving the riddle of the guardian statues in room 25.

It should be almost impossible to get him to actively help with stopping Tenebrizon, but it might happen if one of the characters is a priest of Ba-Ka, and/or their interaction with the creature is such that having it aid them will bring more enjoyment to your players.

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27 - Preparation Room

Upon entering this room, the powerful scent of medicinal herbs intermingles with the lingering essence of blood. At the heart of the room rests a substantial stone table, its purpose unmistakably that of a place for sacred rituals. The chamber's walls are lined with rows of laden shelves where the sacred instruments are meticulously stored.

This is a room for preparing bodies for the afterlife (mummification), in the center of which there is a large stone table where the bodies were prepared. On its walls, there are shelves with equipment and products used for preparation.

Treasure. By searching the table and shelves, it is possible to find alchemist's supplies, a healer's kit, a herbalism kit, a poisoner's kit, an adamantine dagger, one *scroll of animate undead*, and one *scroll of remove curse*.

28 - Meditation Room

You step into a modest chamber adorned with a sacred statue and a collection of cushions arranged in one of its corners. Apart from these, the room features little more than a table laden with herbs intended for incense burning.

Within the chamber stands a statue and an altar of Ba-Ka. This room was used by priests to meditate before sacred rituals.

Peretuk Altar. This altar is one of four within the temple, each housing sacred statues capable of providing divine protection. Placing one of the tameranium idols (Peretuks) here will cause the altar to glow with ethereal light and make the symbol of Ba-Ka shine forth.

A character can make a DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check to understand the significance of this altar to the faith of Ba-Ka. On a success, they learn that the tameranium idols fit perfectly into this altar and are part of the protective blessings of the temple, designed to ward off the influence of the Ungods.

If the characters received An'Kur's blessing in Chapter 7 by releasing all prisoners, each character within 20 feet of the altar, when the Perepet is placed, regains 3d8 hit points and one spell slot of up to 4th level.

29 - Guardroom and Armory

As you step into the chamber, you find it strewn with the wreckage of what once served as the furnishings of a guardroom — destroyed weapon racks, chairs, and stone shelves. Suddenly, six sinister figures emerge from the rubble, rising with eerie determination. These ghastly forms are remnants of the temple's former guards, now bound to undeath.

This room once served as a guardroom for the **soldiers of Ba-Ka** who defended the pyramid, vigilantly awaiting any call to action from the priests. All six were slain and transformed into **wights** to keep their souls from ascending to their god's plane.

They are being slowly corrupted by the Penumbral Plane and will attack anyone who enters, perceiving them as enemies of their deity.

Defeating the Wights. Should the characters vanquish the **wights**, the souls of the soldiers will be free to ascend to the home of their deity. Before doing so, they will materialize before the characters, expressing gratitude for their liberation from corruption and pledging assistance when needed within the temple before vanishing.

For the next 48 hours, the characters will gain the ability detailed below, usable only within the pyramid.

Summon Zealots. As a bonus action, a character can summon one of the soldiers to assist for 1 minute. These warriors return as **zealots of Ba-Ka** (Akhu) and will carry out their tasks to the best of their ability. If reduced to 0 hit points or when the time expires, they will return to their god's home. The party can use this ability six times, once for each freed soldier.

Treasures. Most of the objects in the room are destroyed, but a thorough search reveals six longswords, six longbows, two quivers, and 70 arrows in good condition.

Hidden Compartment. In one corner of the room, a false bottom conceals a hidden compartment. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check is required to discover it. This compartment holds emergency equipment that the guards were clearly unable to use during the invasion of the pyramid. Inside, you will find a *+2 dragon slayer spear*, a *+2 shield*, and three *potions of superior healing*.

30 - Purification Room

As you step into this room, which appears to have served as one of the pyramid's entrances, your eyes are drawn to a sight that once radiated mystical power. Here, an empty fountain stands, adorned with intricate runes and ancient hieroglyphics. It now gazes silently toward a blocked exit with collapsed cavern rubble.

Adorned with hieroglyphics, this room functioned as a service entrance, permitting those who were neither priests nor followers of Ba-Ka to enter the pyramid. Visitors were required to wash their feet in the water that flowed from the fountain. This magical fountain transformed all the water it contained into holy water. A character who succeeds on a DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check will realize that the fountain still retains its magic; any clean water placed in it will become holy water.

Once serving as one of the pyramid's entrances, this gateway has since been obstructed. When the massive structure was teleported into the cavern, the surrounding stone walls collapsed, sealing off this entrance.

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Penumbral Mummy

Medium aberration (undead), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural)
Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	8 (-1)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +3
Skills Perception +3
Damage Vulnerabilities fire
Damage Resistances necrotic
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, exhausted, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13
Languages Understands the languages it knew in life but can't speak them
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Horrific Appearance. Creatures within 30 feet that see the penumbral mummy must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. A frightened creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Eldritch Resilience. The penumbral mummy has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. The penumbral mummy makes two attacks with its Decaying Tentacles.

Decaying Tentacles. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) psychic damage. The target must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be paralyzed until the end of its next turn.

Eldritch Breath (Recharge 5-6). The penumbral mummy releases a burst of eldritch energy in a 15-foot radius around it. Each creature in that area must make a DC 13 Intelligence saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

31 - Sarcophagi Room

Upon your entrance into this room, your attention is immediately seized by a row of ancient sarcophagi, each nestled within a designated slot along the walls. As you tread further into the chamber, a disconcerting series of clicks resonate through the air, unmistakable evidence that these sarcophagi are far from empty. Behind it all, you can see a statue of the god Ba-Ka.

In this chamber lie sarcophagi containing the mortal remains of five high priests who served the god Ba-Ka, tasked with protecting the pyramid. However, when the pyramid was stolen by Tenebrizon and sent to the Penumbra, their bodies were corrupted and transformed into six **penumbral mummies**.

The sarcophagi are made of finely carved stone and are arranged in recesses in the walls. If the characters enter this room, five **penumbral mummies** will rise from the sarcophagi to attack them.

Peretuk Altar. This altar is one of four within the temple, each housing sacred statues capable of providing divine protection. Placing one of the tameranium idols (Peretuks) here will cause the altar to glow with ethereal light and make the symbol of Ba-Ka shine forth.

A character can make a DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check to understand the significance of this altar to the faith of Ba-Ka. On a success, they learn that the tameranium idols fit perfectly into this altar and are part of the protective blessings of the temple, designed to ward off the influence of the Ungods.

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32 - Hall of Spirits

In this room, there are two possibilities - if the priestess Seraphina Shadowblaze managed to escape (most likely), she will be in this room; otherwise this room will be completely empty.

As you step into this hall, a striking sight greets you. The chamber's floor, walls, and ceiling give the impression that their outermost layers have been violently torn away, leaving behind an irregular, jagged terrain. Strangely, this place feels more comfortable and safe than anywhere else you've been since entering the Penumbral Plane. The oppressive and maddening echoes that have accompanied you thus far vanish entirely within this room.

If Seraphina is in the room, continue reading:

However, your focus is quickly commanded by a particular corner of the room, where a dreadfully familiar figure looms. High Priestess Seraphina Shadowblaze greets you with a chilling and sardonic smile.

This hall once served as an ancient connection to the Ethereal Plane. However, when the pyramid was stolen, the ethereal link was severed. The runes and objects that once facilitated this connection were torn away, leaving behind a room with walls and floors that appear as if their finish has been violently stripped off. Yet not all the hall's magic is lost; the residual planar magic in this chamber provides protection from the harmful effects of the Penumbral Plane, allowing one to rest here without suffering any adverse effects.

High Priestess Seraphina Shadowblade. If Seraphina (page 248) escaped from the temple in the capital, she will be present in this room, accompanied by two **mages** from the Cult of Shadow Wing. They have set up an improvised camp using materials from the temple. Upon noticing the characters, Seraphina will laugh and say, *"Let's see if they are truly special,"* alluding to her knowledge that Tenebrizon covets their souls. She will then attack, hoping to deliver their lifeless bodies and souls to the dragon to earn his favor.

Treasure. Should Seraphina occupy the room, her equipment will be present along with additional items in the camp. These include a golden chalice studded with zircons (750 gp), an adamantine ceremonial dagger with a ruby set in the pommel (1,500 gp), a *bag of holding*, a *scroll of greater restoration*, and a *potion of growth*. If a character succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, they will notice that the makeshift camp rests upon a *large flying carpet (6ft. x 9ft.)*. If Seraphina is not in the room, these items will instead be found in the coin pile located in room 39.

33 - Crossing of the Blessed

As you step into the corridor, you are enveloped by an intricate tapestry of runes and enigmatic hieroglyphs that grace the walls. Four grand sarcophagi stand along the passage, two flanking each wall. Their lids boast intricate carvings of mighty warriors, their stony visages forever watching over the corridor with an air of solemn authority.

This corridor once served as the resting place for distinguished warriors, awaiting the call to serve Ba-Ka in the afterlife. However, cultists have desecrated their remains and used them to construct four **flesh golems**, which now lie within the sarcophagi.

These golems remain inert unless any of their sarcophagi are illuminated by a source of light — such as if the characters traverse the corridor carrying a light source. Should this happen, the golems will spring from their stone coffins and attack anyone present in the corridor until vanquished, retreating to their sarcophagi afterward. The cultists, aware of this trap, take care never to cross this passage with a light source in hand.

34 - Conjuration Room

Upon entering this room, you observe myriad mystical symbols etched into the cracked walls. The octagonal chamber houses large mirrors of purple glass that appear shattered. Strangely, the room seems ablaze, yet no fuel is present to sustain the flames; it's as if the fire burns of its own accord. Suddenly, the flames come alive, taking form and surging in your direction.

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This room is adorned with magical symbols of conjuration. It was originally used to summon extraplanar beings to assist in crafting magic essential for the Vandanamalika. However, when the pyramid was transported to the Penumbral Plane, the conjuration became unstable, inadvertently summoning three **fire elementals** who are now bound to this location.

35 - Treasure Vault

As you step into this chamber, a narrow aqueduct winds its way through the space, its waters veiled by a fine gray mist. Occasionally, the surface of the river shimmers, revealing transient reflections of figures that appear lost and forlorn. Beyond the aqueduct, two magical torches cast their light on a room adorned with intricate frescoes and mesmerizing paintings. Toward the rear of the chamber, an exquisite statue of Ba-Ka stands in silent contemplation, its beauty strikingly at odds with the room's somber ambiance. Nearby, coins and objects lay on the ground in a pile.

This chamber was once a lavish vault of treasures offered to Ba-Ka, guarded by lethal traps and stone sentinels. However, Tenebrizon and his allies have vanquished its guardians and plundered its riches, leaving behind only a lesser amount of coins and a scattering of miscellaneous items.

Aqueduct. The aqueduct is 5 ft. wide and its flowing waters are perilous to the touch; any creature that makes contact with the water takes 8d8 necrotic damage, ignoring any resistances or immunities. Attempts to contain this water result in its instant evaporation into a mist that rapidly vanishes.

This aqueduct was originally connected to a modest spring in the Kepesh territory. However, when the pyramid was transported to the Penumbral Plane, the nature of the water shifted. Now it emerges as if birthed from a nightmare, disappearing as enigmatically as it appears.

Peretuk Altar. This altar is one of four within the temple, each housing sacred statues capable of providing divine protection. Placing one of the tameranium idols (Peretuks) here will cause the altar to glow with ethereal light and make the symbol of Ba-Ka shine forth.

A character can make a DC 14 Intelligence (Religion) check to understand the significance of this altar to the faith of Ba-Ka. On a success, they learn that the tameranium idols fit perfectly into this altar and are part of the protective blessings of the temple, designed to ward off the influence of the Ungods.

If the characters received An'Kur's blessing in Chapter 7 by releasing all prisoners, each character within 20 feet of the altar, when the Perepet is placed, regains 3d8 hit points and one spell slot of up to 4th level.

Treasure. In the pile of coins there are 3,000 cp, 1,200 sp, 200 gp, 12 azurites, 3 blue quartzes, 5 lapis lazulis, 7 obsidians, and 5 tiger eyes (all of these gems are worth 10 gp each, for a total of 320 gp) and a *potion of climbing*. If Seraphina hasn't come to the pyramid the items from her camp will be here.

36 - The Pyramid's Vandanamalika

36 - The Pyramid's Vandanamalika | 1 square = 5 ft.

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As you step into the heart of this monumental chamber, your gaze is captivated by its splendor. The hall features a 10-foot-deep central depression, accessible via staircases descending from all sides. Dominating the center is an imposing pyramidal structure, which culminates in a platform where a grand golden artifact resides. The artifact emanates a powerful, divine light so brilliant that it pierces even the shadows of the Penumbral Plane, bathing the room in radiance.

On the east and west sides of the room stand immense statues. Once portraying ancestral pharaohs, they have been twisted by Tenebrizon into distorted figures, wreathed in tentacles. Each statue holds a metallic, magical mirror that seems to capture and reflect the luminescence emanating from the artifact. Positioned in front of each statue is a lever, seemingly linked to it.

Scattered throughout the room are six grotesque openings filled with swirling, viscous purple goo. From these emerge menacing tentacles that ensnare several individuals. Among those held by the writhing appendages, you spot four humanoids who appear familiar to you.

From a radiant portal at the far end of the chamber emerges a humanoid figure. Clad in dark attire, with flowing dark hair and glowing red eyes, he gazes at you with a self-assured smirk. As he steps forward, he begins to clap slowly, mockingly celebrating your arrival.

Tenebrizon. He will arrive in his humanoid form, underestimating the character's full abilities, but knowing well he has many hidden cards to play.

If Tenebrizon gets reduced to 0 hit points in his humanoid form, he will turn into a black ichor, and on his next turn he will move to the closest tentacle opening. In this form he takes no damage and cannot be destroyed. At the start of his next turn he will reform and leave the tentacle pit with all his hit points and slots of magic recovered by drinking on the power of the ritual.

If all tentacles were destroyed *(or are illuminated by multiple mirrors, see Statues and Mirrors)*, he will instead be forced to show his true form, immediately transforming into his full and real draconic form. Killing his true form will finish Tenebrizon once and for all.

Portal. At the end of each round, a **penumbral envy** will arrive by this portal, arriving from the domains of Tenebrizon, where they are exceedingly common.

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Captured Living Victims. At the start of the combat, four of the NPCs most cherished by the group that Tenebrizon could capture will be entangled in the tentacles. Tenebrizon prepared this show to guarantee that the characters would suffer and see the people they care about die in front of them. These NPCs are all bloodied and battered, they are incapacitated, and are currently at half their hit points.

Tenebrizon wants to make his fight with the characters as personal as possible, so he may resort to capture family members, trusted NPCs, or anyone that could bring the most pain for the party.

Tentacles. Each tentacle acts at the end of the round, making an attack against the closest enemy in their reach, and applying damage to each creature grabbed by them. There are two sizes of tentacles with varying stats.

If a tentacle is defeated, it dissolves into the ichor pool causing it to return to normal temple floor. Tenebrizon can't use that ichor pool to recover his humanoid body anymore.

Huge Tentacles

Huge aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18
Hit Points 200
Speed 0 ft. (stationary, can't move or be moved)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	10 (+0)	20 (+5)	1 (-5)	3 (-4)	1 (-5)

Saving Throws Str +11
Damage Immunities psychic
Damage Vulnerabilities radiant
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, prone, restrained, unconscious
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 7
CR -

Actions

Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 25 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (3d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 19). Huge Tentacles can grapple up to three creatures. They can only use this attack if there are less than three creatures grappled by them. At the start of the turn of any grappled creature, that creature takes 17 (3d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage.

Large Tentacles

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 16
Hit Points 100
Speed 0 ft. (stationary)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	1 (-5)	3 (-4)	1 (-5)

Saving Throws Str +8
Damage Immunities psychic
Damage Vulnerabilities radiant
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, prone, restrained, Unconscious
Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 6
CR -

Actions

Multiattack. Large tentacles can make one attack if they are grappling fewer than two creatures.

Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16). Large tentacles can grapple up to two creatures. They can only use this attack if there are less than two creatures grappled by them. At the start of the turn of any grappled creature, that creature takes 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Statues and Mirrors. As an action, a character can change the direction of the light reflection of one mirror, targeting a creature.

If two mirrors focus their light on a **large tentacle**, or three on a **huge tentacle**, that tentacle becomes paralyzed and will drop any creature it is grappling. That pool will also be unable to be used by Tenebrizon to recover, as its power will be sealed by the light while it remains on the tentacle.

If four mirrors are targeting a creature, it takes 4d10 radiant damage at the start of its round. If all mirrors are targeting a creature this damage instead becomes 10d10.

GM Note: Creatures except Tentacles can easily move on their turn to avoid keep taking this damage, requiring all mirrors to be realigned again, as they only illuminate one specific square at a time.

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The Peretuks

For each Peretuk that was placed in one of the altars, the characters will receive a blessing from Ba-Ka to face Tenebrizon. This will begin at the start of this combat.

Room 22 - Blessing of the Clerics: When the deity sees that the characters are in dire need of healing, he consumes the Peretuk allocated here to cast *mass heal* on the characters.

Room 28 - Blessing of Meditation: The first time each character uses its highest level spell slot, it regains that slot. Once per character. This consumes this Peretuk.

Room 31 - Blessing of the Ancestrals: From the light of the artifact, a **mummy lord** (LN) will arrive to aid the characters, a faithful guardian of Ba-Ka. This will consume this Peretuk.

Room 35 - Blessing of the Kings: The characters and any ally or summoned creature along with them will receive a powerful blessing of Ba-Ka as this combat begins. Their hit points are doubled for 24 hours. This will consume this Peretuk.

The Dragon Form and the Bound Souls

When his humanoid form is destroyed and no tentacle can be used for him to reconstruct himself, Tenebrizon will go to his real form to face the party (in this form, he dies if he reaches 0 hit points).

His true form is connected to the ritual and is receiving power from the souls that are still bound, if any.

Each soul will bring a unique effect if it is still bound to the ritual (will aid Tenebrizon), was destroyed (will cause a negative effect to Tenebrizon), or was able to go to the afterlife (will return for a final blessing upon the characters).

Drolev's Soul (Area A)

Destroyed. Tenebrizon's will is subtly eroded by doubt, imposing disadvantage on all his attack rolls.

Free or Returned with the penumbral fear. No effect.

Still Bound. Tenebrizon channels the prowess of a master swordsman, gaining advantage on all attack rolls.

Lympstik's Soul (Area B)

Ascended to Afterlife. Lympstik blesses the characters' equipment, granting their weapons a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls, and their armor a +2 bonus to AC for 1 hour. These bonuses stack with existing magical enhancements.

Destroyed. An empty void manifests within Tenebrizon's essence, disabling his Frightful Presence, and reducing the DC of his breath to 21 instead of 26.

Still Bound. Tenebrizon's thirst for power intensifies, increasing his Legendary Resistance uses to 5 instead of 3.

Jirroy's Soul (Area C)

Ascended to Afterlife. Jirroy instills the characters with the courage to fight for their friends, granting advantage on all saving throws for 1 hour.

Resurrected. **No effect.**

Destroyed. Jirroy's lingering fury weakens Tenebrizon, reducing his AC by 2.

Still Bound. Tenebrizon harnesses Jirroy's rage, increasing his Strength to 38 and granting a +4 bonus to attack and damage rolls for his bite, claw, and tail attacks.

Liliane's Soul (Area D)

Ascended to Afterlife. Liliane's soul appears to fully heal the first character whose hit points drop to zero.

Destroyed. Tenebrizon's life force becomes destabilized, reducing his hit points in dragon form to 500.

Still Bound. Tenebrizon's vitality is bolstered, granting him Fast Healing 20 while he remains conscious.

Berkulin's Soul (Area E)

Ascended to Afterlife. The characters receive Berkulin's Stone Blessing, gaining resistance to piercing and slashing damage for 1 hour.

Destroyed. Tenebrizon's form becomes brittle, making him vulnerable to bludgeoning damage.

Still Bound. Tenebrizon gains resistance to all bludgeoning damage, even from magical weapons.

Urodan's Soul (Area E)

Ascended to Afterlife. The characters are endowed with Urodan's Blessing of Retribution, adding +3d6 extra radiant damage to all their attacks for 1 hour.

Destroyed. Tenebrizon's proficiency bonus is reduced by 2, affecting his saving throws, attack rolls, and ability DCs.

Still Bound. Tenebrizon gains resistance to all piercing damage, even from magical weapons.

Arturius' Soul (Area B)

Ascended to Afterlife. The characters inherit the Eyes of the Assassin, gaining an additional +6d6 sneak attack damage for the next hour, stacking with any existing sneak attack bonuses.

Destroyed. Tenebrizon becomes sluggish and cumbersome, limiting him to 2 attacks during his Multiattack action and reducing his speed to 30 ft., climb 30 ft., and fly 60 ft.

Still Bound. Tenebrizon can tap into the great evasiveness of Arturius, taking only half damage from effects that require a saving throw.

GM Note: Tracking the various effects of each soul can be complex during gameplay. While thematically rich, it might present a challenge for both you and your players to manage.

If you prefer a simplified version use the following:

Ascended to Afterlife Soul. For each soul ascended, the characters gain +2 to attack rolls, saving throws, and AC and 20 temporary hit points.

Destroyed Soul. For each soul destroyed, Tenebrizon loses 50 hit points and 1 AC.

Still Bound Soul. For each soul still bound to the Ritual, Tenebrizon gains +1 to attack rolls and +2d6 to all damage rolls.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Tenebrizon, Humanoid Form

Medium humanoid (dragon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural)
Hit Points 184 (23d8 + 92)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	22 (+6)	17 (+3)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Con +9, Int +11, Wis +8, Cha +11
Skills Perception +8, Stealth +8, Arcana +10
Damage Immunities necrotic, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 18
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Spellcasting. Tenebrizon is a 17th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 20, +11 to hit with spell attacks). Tenebrizon has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand*, *minor illusion*, *prestidigitation*
1st level (4 slots): *charm person*, *fog cloud*, *shield*
2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility*, *mirror image*, *misty step*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *dispel magic*, *slow*
4th level (3 slots): *black tentacles*, *dimension door*
5th level (2 slots): *dominate person*, *wall of stone*
6th level (1 slot): *mass suggestion*
7th level (1 slot): *forcecage*
8th level (1 slot): *maze*
9th level (1 slot): *foresight*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Tenebrizon fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Mind Blank. Tenebrizon is immune to effects that would sense his emotions, read his thoughts, or involve divination spells. A creature attempting to read his mind or using a divination spell targeting him takes 36 (8d8) psychic damage.

Actions

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Legendary Actions

Tenebrizon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Tenebrizon regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Detect. Tenebrizon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Hold Person. Tenebrizon uses *Hold person* spell *(no limits on use)*.

Misty Step. Tenebrizon uses *misty step (no limits on use)*.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Tenebrizon, the Penumbral Dragon

Gargantuan dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 22 (natural)
Hit Points 663 (33d20 + 330)
Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
30 (+10)	14 (+2)	30 (+10)	25 (+7)	21 (+5)	26 (+8)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Con +18, Wis +12, Cha +15
Skills Perception +19, Stealth +9, Arcana +14
Damage Immunities necrotic, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed
Senses blindsight 180 ft., passive Perception 29
Languages Common, Draconic
Challenge 26 (90,000 XP)

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Tenebrizon fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Mind Blank. Tenebrizon is immune to effects that would sense his emotions, read his thoughts, or involve divination spells. A creature attempting to read his mind or using a divination spell targeting him takes 36 (8d8) psychic damage.

Psychic Curse. Tenebrizon's Frightful Presence can imbue a creature with the Psychic Curse. Once per day, he can invade the dreams of a cursed creature as though using the Dream spell, aiming to drive the creature towards insanity.

Actions

Multiattack. Tenebrizon can use his Frightful Presence. He then makes three attacks: one with his bite and two with his claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +18 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (2d10 + 10) piercing damage plus 9 (1d12 +3) psychic damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +18 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d6 + 10) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +18 to hit, reach 20 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d8 + 10) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of Tenebrizon's choice that is within 120 feet of him and aware of him must succeed on a DC 24 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. After successfully ending this effect, a creature must immediately make another Wisdom saving throw, being afflicted by the Psychic Curse on a failure.

Psychic Breath (Recharge 5–6). Tenebrizon exhales psychic energy in a 120-foot line that is 15 feet wide. Each creature in that line must make a DC 26 Wisdom saving throw, taking 72 (12d12) psychic damage and becoming confused for 1 minute on a failed save, or half as much damage and not becoming confused on a successful one. A confused creature behaves as if under the effects of the *confusion* spell and can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the confusion effect on itself on a success.

Legendary Actions

Tenebrizon can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Tenebrizon regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Detect. Tenebrizon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Tail Attack. Tenebrizon makes a tail attack.

Dark Insanity (Costs 2 Actions). Tenebrizon channels his malevolent insanity into a single target within 60 feet. That creature must make a DC 24 Wisdom saving throw or suffer the effects of the *confusion* spell for 1 minute.

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Conclusion

After the characters defeat Tenebrizon, the pyramid begins to collapse due to powerful tremors, accompanied by deafening sounds and flashing lights all around.

In the face of your power, Tenebrizon is finally defeated and plummets to the ground, causing a massive seismic shock that shakes the entire pyramid's structure. The creature, still in agony, starts laughing maniacally, claiming that your victory would not be savored for long, for here, everyone would be buried forever, but he would be reborn. Stunned by the words of the maddened penumbral dragon, you witness the collapse of the entire stone structure above your heads, accompanied by deafening crashes and magical discharges shooting in all directions. You can barely stay on your feet due to the strong tremors and cracks forming beneath your feet, while your vision and hearing are clouded by the intense brightness and deafening noises.

Now you can check who was the greatest of the character's allies, or if they made no alliances during the adventure.

Allies of the Republic

A voice pierces the air, a desperate cry that calls out to you. Just as suddenly, stones begin to plummet from above. However, they are halted mid-fall by a shimmering shield of magical energy. From behind, you can see a radiant portal illuminating the space. In front of it is a wizard, adorned in a blue robe and sporting a lengthy beard, his face covered by a hood. At his hands is the Kepesh Artifact that was in the center of the room before. Leaving the portal behind him is a woman of dark complexion, clad in full plate armor and wielding a spear. Along with her, Zalir is crossing the passage, greeting you with his usual high spirit — as if your lives weren't hanging by a thread mere moments ago.

"I regret not arriving sooner," says the wizard, whom you swiftly recognize as Avelum once he lowers his hood. "The arcane wards guarding this location hindered my ability to pinpoint it precisely. Let us depart while my protective shield holds; tonight, we dine to celebrate, not mourn fallen heroes."

"Onward, my friends, you must be content that even the mighty Minister Sedura moved to save your lives" Zalir declares, his words drawing a stern glance from the armored woman who rapidly gives way to laughter. "Zalir, will you ever learn to be serious? Heroes, thanks to your efforts, I am confident we can resolve the current strife without escalating it into full-blown war with the Empire. I shall require your testimonies. Tonight, we revel; tomorrow, we have much work to do. Let us proceed."

Stepping through the portal, you are greeted by a vista of Fisherman's Wharf, the capital of the Republic. Off in the distance lies its tranquil harbor, and closer still stands the majestic House of Parliament — a sight of splendor that sharply contrasts the horrors you've recently endured.

Allies of the Empire

Just as the ceiling threatens to collapse upon you, portals ringed in hellish flames materialize throughout the space. Demons of immense size step forth from them. Your hands move instinctively toward your weapons, but you halt as soldiers of the Ironhand march in alongside the demons. The towering fiends take positions to brace the failing structure, while the soldiers swiftly form a corridor leading from one of the portals to the room's center. A thrum of magical energy stabilizes the stones, halting their deadly descent.

Emerging from the portal is a figure cloaked in voluminous black fabric and encased in obsidian armor: Emperor Baleroth. He locks eyes with you. "Exemplary work. You shall all be duly rewarded for your valor." His gaze shifts to the fallen dragon. "It appears my bait proved more than you could handle, dragon. Extracting the artifact from Kalistessenâmun would have been far more challenging. Taking it from you, however, was quite convenient."

Clutching the artifact, he moves back toward the portal. Before crossing its threshold, he addresses you once more. "What are you waiting for? Step through the portal; this edifice won't support itself for long, and my magic has its limits."

You follow his instructions and find yourself transported to the Imperial capital, within the opulent confines of Baleroth's Palace. Imperial Wizards are busy maintaining the open portals, while others engage in intricate divinations and arcane summonings. Except for the unfazed Baleroth, everyone looks a combination of weary and relieved.

Baleroth turns to you, "Rest now. Tomorrow, a grand parade shall be held in your honor. Let the Republic squirm; I've achieved my ends, and I relish the thought of Sedura's expression when she finally comprehends the scope of our victory." With that, he strides toward the palace's inner chambers, while servants usher you toward the sumptuously appointed guest rooms.

GM Note: You have several options for crafting the culmination of your adventurers' journey, each tailored to the friendships and alliances they've formed. Depending on whom your characters have befriended during their quest, the ending could vary in significant ways.

You might have the Celestianist Church swoop in for a last-minute rescue, their divine magic turning the tide of a dire situation. Alternatively, you could introduce a coalition of various NPCs — those with whom the party has forged meaningful connections — working in concert to save the heroes from impending doom.

Should you desire a grittier conclusion, you could present a scenario where the adventurers must rely solely on their own skills and ingenuity to survive. Or for those seeking an epic and poignant finale, consider an ending steeped in heroic sacrifice, where the characters give their lives to protect Tanares, leaving an indelible impact on the world and its people.

Choose the path that will bring your players the most joy and create the most memorable ending for your campaign.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Allies of Yama

Just as the ceiling threatens to crash down upon you, a shadow springs forth from the doorway, unfurling a scroll crafted from tameranium. The scroll emits a blinding light, freezing the tumbling stones in mid-air. As you turn to discern the identity of your mysterious savior, a woman dressed in the dark garments typical of Yama's ninjas steps into view.

"I am Tsuyoko," she intones softly, her words tinged with secretive assurance. "Dispatched by my master, I've shadowed your quest. My task was to extract you and the Kepesh artifact upon your success. Apologies for the delay; even shadows meet obstacles — cultists, in this case." With measured steps, she moves to the altar, lifting the artifact with purpose. "Follow. Tenshikin's holy edict can't hold this place much longer. He also granted me an escape route back to Yama, to use if the artifact was secured. Your deeds today earn you a generous reward."

Uttering an incantation from another scroll, Tsuyoko summons another burst of light. Your vision whites out for an instant, returning just as quickly. You find yourselves standing atop a cliff, with Yamanoma, the sprawling capital of Yama, stretching out before you in the distance. Beyond it, the majestic Tenshikin's Palace is visible. Tsuyoko gestures for you to follow, leading you toward your promised recompense. "With the artifact now in our hands and with your invaluable testimonies, our diplomatic leverage against the Empire has been significantly bolstered. Let's meet my master."

Consider awarding 8,000 XP to each PC for completing this chapter. The recommended level for ending this chapter is 12th. If your group is above or below, consider adjusting future encounters and side quests to speed up or slow down their progression.

No relevant Alliances (or Kepesh Alliance)

As stones plummet toward you, a magical circle materializes on the ground, pulsating with formidable energy. Suddenly, the room's gravity reverses, sending you soaring toward the ceiling. Yet before you can collide with it, you find yourselves suspended in midair.

From the incandescent magic circle below, an undead figure emerges — a lich adorned in pharaonic attire. He addresses you: "Greetings, noble ones. With the dragon's interference vanquished, I may reclaim what is rightfully mine." He moves to the altar and retrieves the artifact. "Fear not; I've come to your aid. You've served me exceptionally well, and I make it a point to settle debts with those who have done so. You are welcome within my dominion; Ba-Ka is pleased by your deeds today." Striding toward you, he extends a bony finger into the air, tearing open a portal as though rending the very fabric of reality. "Enter, for you shall be celebrated. Rest assured, none of you are slated to be tonight's sacred sacrifices; we have eager priests for that role, wishing to join our god. Should you decline this particular honor, I suspect Ba-Ka would still welcome your souls in his celestial city. But let us not squander magic unnecessarily." With these words, he steps through the portal.

Following him, you find yourselves atop a pyramid in a bustling capital city, set against a backdrop of arid desert. On the horizon stretch scalding dunes, while below, priests in intricate garments and a jubilant crowd await shouting "Kalistessenâmun! Kalistessenâmun!", their cheers erupting at the return of their Pharaoh and the retrieval of their sacred artifact. The lich addresses his priests: "Prepare the festivities and the sacrifices; we must properly welcome our esteemed guests."

Is this the End?

The incredible journey your characters have undertaken may well not have reached its conclusion, for Tanares remains a world vibrant with adventures and untapped possibilities. Bear in mind that the actions your heroes have taken, along with any loose ends, could be revisited in future campaigns, whether as a continuation of this story or as the seed for a brand new narrative. Here are some story hooks, which may be adapted based on the outcomes shaped by your characters' decisions:

- The discovery of an artifact capable of hastening the construction of a functional Vandanamalika could ignite considerable political tension across Tanares, as factions scramble to claim this powerful item for themselves.
- Should the characters attain the Kepesh ending, Pharaoh Kalistessenâmun might propose that they spearhead the efforts to rebuild the Vandanamalika. In this role, they would lead expeditions to obtain the rare mystical components essential for its construction, as well as oversee counterspy operations to ensure its secure assembly.
- Unearthed information about the Cult of Shadow Wing within the capital's temple and the penumbral domains could reveal a sprawling network of infiltrated cultists across Tanares, whose ongoing schemes might be thwarted by further investigation.
- Various unresolved issues and lingering threats in the Imperial capital may still demand attention and could even have escalated by this point, requiring intervention by seasoned adventurers.
- Surviving members of the Cult of Shadow Wing have taken an oath to prioritize the heroes' downfall, mobilizing their resources to fulfill this dark vow. Maybe even Lypoec himself may steer his attention to the characters.
- Tenebrizon's ominous words about his potential return could prove true, and this time he might be singularly obsessed on besting the characters.

Consider these hooks as you chart the future course for your adventurers, shaping their paths through a world teeming with intrigue, danger, and boundless opportunity.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Appendix A: NPCs Statblocks

Sara, the Seer

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic good

Armor Class 18 (+2 studded leather)
Hit Points 135 (18d8 + 54)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +9, Cha +10
Skills Arcana+12, Deception +10, History +7 Insight +9, Investigation +7, Perception +9, Persuasion +10, Sleight of Hand +9, Stealth +9
Damage Resistances necrotic, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses passive Perception 19
Languages Common, Deep Speech, Draconic, Dwarvish, Elvish
Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Aberrant Mutations (1/turn) Sara is a 5th-level Aberrant Mutation user. Its Mutation ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). When Sara uses an aberrant mutation he suffers an amount of madness points equal to the level of the aberrant mutation. Sara knows the following Madwalker Aberrant Mutations:

1st: *dark energy, noxious attack, space distortion*
2nd: *amphibious skin, pain toxin, warped physique*

Ambusher Conjurer. When casting a spell that has a surprised target, Sara has advantage on her magic attack rolls and the target has disadvantage on her saving throws against the spell cast.

Blades of Madness. When Sara uses an Aberrant Mutation, he can add 1d4 to all melee attack rolls until his next turn.

Boom of Seer. In a ritualistic way (10 minutes of conjuration), as long as she has the necessary ingredients, Sara can simulate the following spells (save DC 18): *arcane eye* (4th), *augury* (2nd), *clairvoyance* (3rd), *detect evil and good* (1st), *detect magic* (1st), *detect poison and disease* (1st), *detect toughts* (2nd), *find traps* (2nd), *identify* (1st), *legend lore* (5th), *locate animal and plants* (2nd), *locate creature* (4th), *locate object* (2nd), *scrying* (5th), *true seeing* (6th).

Insanity. When Sara reaches 6 Insanity points he has -1 penalty to Attacks, AC and Saves, when he reaches 12 the penalty becomes -2 and when he reaches 18 the penalty becomes -3.

Metamagic (3/day). Sara can increase the power of her spells by choosing between twinning a spell that targets only one creature and doesn't have a range of self by choosing a second target, or accelerating the spell, transforming the casting time of an action spell into a bonus action.

Spellcasting. Sara is a 13th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 18, +10 to hit with spell attacks). Sara knows and can cast the following sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): *mage hand, mending, message, prestidigitation, ray of frost, true strike*
1st level (4 slots): *comprehend language, magic missile*
2nd level (3 slots): *darkness, levitation*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, lightning bolt*
4th level (3 slots): *dimensional door, greater invisibility*
5th level (2 slots): *telekinesis*
6th level (1 slots): *disintegrate, true seeing*
7th level (1 slots): *plane shift*

Actions

Multiattack. Sara makes two melee or ranged attacks.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

Equipament: *+2 studded leather*

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Razun, High Priest of Tamera

Medium humanoid (human), any

Armor Class 20 (half plate, shield and shield of faith)
Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +8, Cha +7
Skills Arcana +6, History +6, Insight +8, Medicine +8, Persuasion +7, Religion +6
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, and petrified
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Common plus any three languages
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Divine Eminence. As a bonus action, the high priest can expend a spell slot to cause its melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 10 (3d6) radiant damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn. If the priest expends a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the extra damage increases by 1d6 for each level above 1st.

God's bless. The high priest is always under the effect of shield of faith and bless spells, which gives him a +2 bonus to his AC (already included in AC) and can roll and add 1d4 to an attack roll or a saving throw.

Magic Resistance. The high priest has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Spellcasting. Razun is a 13th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). Razun has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance*, *light*, *sacred flame*, *spare the dying*, *thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *command*, *cure wounds*, *guiding bolt*, *sanctuary*
2nd level (3 slots): *calm emotions*, *lesser restoration*, *spiritual weapon*
3rd level (3 slots): *daylight*, *dispel magic*, *spirit guardians*
4th level (3 slots): *banishment*, *divination*, *freedom of movement*
5th level (3 slots): *flame strike*, *greater restoration*
6th level (2 slot): *heal*

Actions

Multiattack. The high priest makes two melee or ranged attacks.

Morningstar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 13(3d8) radiant damage.

Elite Warrior

Medium humanoid (any species), any

Armor Class 20 (full plate, shield)
Hit Points 110 (13d8 + 52)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +8
Skills Animal Handling +4, Athletics +8, Intimidation +4, Perception +6
Senses Passive Perception 12
Languages Common plus any two languages
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the elite warrior hits with it (included in the attack).

Indomitable (2/day). The elite warrior can reroll a saving throw that has failed using the new roll.

Actions

Multiattack. The elite warrior makes three melee or ranged attacks.

Glaive*. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15(2d10+4) piercing damage.

Longsword*. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13(2d8+4) slashing damage. Versatility: +13 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19(2d10 + 8) slashing damage.

Shield Bash*. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

*At the start of combat choose between wielding the glaive or longsword and shield.

Reactions

Block. The elite warrior gains a +3 bonus to Dexterity saving throws imposed by spells or area effects. To do so, the elite warrior must see the attacker or origin of effect and be wielding a shield.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Yggor, High Priest of Bauron

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic good

Armor Class 20 (half plate, shield and shield of faith)
Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +6, Wis +8, Cha +6
Skills History +6, Insight +8, Medicine +8, Perception +8, Persuasion +6, Religion +6
Condition Immunities frightened
Senses passive Perception 18
Languages Common plus any three languages
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Divine Eminence. As a bonus action, the high priest can expend a spell slot to cause its melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 10 (3d6) radiant damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn. If the priest expends a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the extra damage increases by 1d6 for each level above 1st.

God's bless. The high priest is always under the effect of shield of faith and bless spells, which gives him a +2 bonus to his AC (already included in AC) and can roll and add 1d4 to an attack roll or a saving throw.

Spellcasting. Yggor is a 13th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). Yggor has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): guidance, light, mending, sacred flame, spare the dying

1st level (4 slots): *bane, cure wounds, guiding bolt, sanctuary*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, gentle repose, lesser restoration*

3rd level (3 slots): *bestow curse, dispel magic, revivify*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment, death ward, freedom of movement*

5th level (3 slots): *flame strike, greater restoration*

6th level (2 slot): *blade barrier*

Actions

Multiattack. The high priest makes two melee or ranged attacks.

Morningstar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8+5) bludgeoning damage plus 13 (3d8) radiant damage.

Equipment: *+2 Bauronite Morning Star*

Bauronite Weapon
Weapon (any weapon or ammunition), rare (+1), very rare (+2), or legendary (+3) (requires attunement)

You gain a bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon or ammunition. The bonus is determined by the item's rarity. In addition, A weapon or ammunition made from this material deals one more damage die of the same damage type as the weapon and is considered adamantine for the purpose of overcoming resistances and immunities.

Patrick Karg (Order #42143378)

Myriad Glaid, the Banshee

Medium undead (elf), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)
Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45)
Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (-5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +6
Skills Arcana +7, Perception +6, Persuasion +7
Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks
Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Common, Elvish
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. Myriad Glaid can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. She takes 5 (1d10) force damage if she ends her turn inside an object.

Spellcasting. Myriad Glaid is a 10th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *light*, *prestidigitation*, *mage hand*
1st level (4 slots): *alarm*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*
2nd level (3 slots): *hold person*, *misty step*, *scorching ray*
3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *fear*, *lightning bolt*
4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility*, *ice storm*
5th level (2 slots): *cone of cold*, *teleknesis*

Ethereal Sight. Myriad Glaid can see 60 feet into the Ethereal Plane when she is on the Material Plane, and vice versa.

Actions

Withering Touch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (5d6) necrotic damage.

Anguished scream. Myriad Glaid unleashes a scream imbued with the anguish of her undeath, forcing all living creatures within 30 feet of her that can hear her to make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 35 (10d6) psychic damage and is paralyzed for 1 minute. On a successful save, a creature takes half as much damage and isn't paralyzed. At the end of each of its turns, a paralyzed creature takes 14 (4d6) psychic damage and make another Constitution saving throw. On a success, the paralyzed condition ends for that creature.

Horrifying Visage. Each non-undead creature within 60 feet of Myriad Glaid that can see her must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for 1 minute. If the save fails by 5 or more, the target also ages 1d4 × 10 years. A frightened target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, with disadvantage if Myriad Glaid is within line of sight, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the target is immune to Myriad Glaid's Horrifying Visage for the next 24 hours.

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The rogue class receives a new subclass in this section.

Appendix B: Awakened Agent

In the shadows of Tanares exists an elite group of rogues trained by the Awakened Order of the Celestianist Church. These silent guardians are the unsung heroes of the realm, sworn to Bauron, the Moonlord, a deity revered for dispensing divine justice against the wicked. Acting as the hidden blades of the Church, these Inquisitors seek no glory, only the eradication of the spawns of the Ungods. Only the most skilled and devout rogues are chosen to join the ranks of the Awakened, dedicating their lives to this sacred and secretive cause.

Awakened Agents in Other Settings

An Awakened Agent can represent a church inquisitor, a rogue that can channel divine powers, or even a rogue that received the blessing of a deity and can manifest some divine powers.

While this subclass considers a dedication to Bauron, the Moonlord, any other deity, especially those that are tied to the concepts of vanquishing evil creatures or that are known to keep inquisitors that investigate creatures of darkness, can use this subclass to represent their concepts.

While in Tanares almost all of them are servants of Bauron and are part of the Awakened Order, some unique cases of rogues can display similar powers by their divine fervor to another deity.

Spellcasting

When you reach 3rd level, you gain the ability to cast spells from the cleric spell list. See the 5e official books for the general rules of spellcasting.

Cantrips. At 3rd level, you learn the *sacred flame* cantrip and one other cantrip of your choice from the cleric spell list. At 10th level, you learn another cleric cantrip of your choice.

Spell Slots. The Awakened Agent Spellcasting table shows how many spell slots you have to cast your spells of 1st level and higher. To cast one of these spells, you must expend a slot of the spell's level or higher. You regain all expended spell slots when you finish a long rest.

Spells Known of 1st-Level and Higher. You know three 1st-level cleric spells of your choice from the cleric spell list. The Spells Known column of the Awakened Agent Spellcasting table shows when you learn more cleric spells of 1st level or higher. Each of these spells must be of a level for which you have spell slots.

Whenever you gain a level in this class, you can replace one of the cleric spells you know with another spell from the cleric spell list. The new spell must be of a level for which you have spell slots.

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Spellcasting Ability. Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for your cleric spells, as your power derives from your faith and dedication to the gods. You use your Wisdom modifier when setting the saving throw DC for a cleric spell you cast and when making an attack roll with one.

Spell save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Wisdom modifier

Spell attack modifier = your proficiency bonus + your Wisdom modifier

Sacred Ambush

Starting at 3rd level, when you hit a creature with a Sneak Attack, you can choose to expend one spell slot to turn all your attack damage into radiant damage and also deal 2d6 extra damage, plus 1d6 for each spell level higher than 1st. The damage increases by 1d6 if the target is undead, fiend, or aberration. This attack counts as magical for the purpose of overcoming resistance and immunity to nonmagical attacks and damage.

Awakened Sight

At 9th level, you become adept at tracking the enemies of the Church. You have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) and Intelligence (Investigation) checks to track or find clues related to fiends, aberrations, and undead. Additionally, your Sneak Attack damage against such creatures increases to d8s instead of d6s.

Divine Cunning

Starting at 13th level, you learn how to channel the holy power to create an effective protection. You can use your Cunning Action to cast *sanctuary* on yourself, gaining advantage on all Dexterity (Stealth) checks while the spell lasts. You can use this ability a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (minimum of once), regaining all expended uses after a long rest.

Divine Intervention

Beginning at 17th level, an Awakened Agent can call upon the intervention of the gods when the need is great.

Imploring your deity's aid requires you to use your action. Describe the assistance you seek, and roll 1d20. If you roll 16 or more, your deity intervenes. The GM chooses the nature of the intervention; the effect of any cleric spell or cleric domain spell would be appropriate. If your deity intervenes, you can't use this feature again for 7 days. Otherwise, you can use it again after you finish a long rest.

Awakened Agent Spellcasting

Rogue Level	Cantrips	Spells Known	Spell Slots per Level			
			1st	2nd	3rd	4th
3rd	2	3	2	-	-	-
4th	2	4	3	-	-	-
5th	2	4	3	-	-	-
6th	2	4	3	-	-	-
7th	2	5	4	2	-	-
8th	2	6	4	2	-	-
9th	2	6	4	2	-	-
10th	3	7	4	3	-	-
11th	3	8	4	3	-	-
12th	3	8	4	3	-	-
13th	3	9	4	3	2	-
14th	3	10	4	3	2	-
15th	3	10	4	3	2	-
16th	3	11	4	3	3	-
17th	3	11	4	3	3	-
18th	3	11	4	3	3	-
19th	3	12	4	3	3	1
20th	3	13	4	3	3	1

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Appendix C: The Involved Factions and Kingdoms

During the adventure, many different factions will be present in one way or another. You can read more about them in the Tanares Sourcebook, but here is a summary of how each of them fit during this adventure.

Consult it whenever you need to use an NPC of these factions to aid you in better roleplaying their interests in this story.

Each chapter will include information about the presence of each of these factions in different areas or situations.

The Awakened

A clandestine order within the Celestianist Church, The Awakened comprise a somber cadre of solitary monster hunters, often operating solo or in small clusters. With a singular focus on eradicating malevolent monsters—particularly aberrations, penumbral creatures, and the undead—they operate beneath the cloak of anonymity.

The Awakened adopt a pragmatic, detached demeanor, maintaining their secrecy to protect their personal connections from monster retribution. Yet their steely reserve belies a deep willingness to risk their lives shielding others from evil, typically without expecting any recompense.

Although reluctant to reveal their identities without necessity, or share information without trust, The Awakened may frequently assist the characters from the shadows in battles against vile beings. This relationship could turn adversarial should the characters align themselves with evil creatures—a temporary truce could be misconstrued as an insidious alliance.

Cult of Shadow Wing

This malevolent cult is divided into four sects, each devoted to the worship of one of the Ungods. Rank-and-file cultists remain ignorant of the Ungods' grand designs, seduced by the lure of promised power and wealth, and operate under the directives of superior members.

Amoral and ruthless, the cult values merit and efficiency. Cultists ascend the ranks on success and may pay with their lives for failures. Each cultist is bestowed with a unique form of madness—a twisted "gift" derived from the Penumbral Plane's nightmarish power. Despite their psychoses, cultists operate from the shadows with cunning and sinister plans, often neglecting personal safety in pursuit of their objectives.

The Shadow Wing's ranks also include numerous penumbral creatures, who serve out of devotion to the Ungods, coercion, or mutual agreements. The cultists featured in this adventure are primarily under Tenebrizon's control, though other cultist groups, such as those serving Lypoec and the three sects—Purple Witches, Hidden Cult, and Spawners—exist within the Penumbral Plane (refer to Tanares Sourcebook).

Celestianist Church

The dominant religion of Tanares, the Celestianist Church, comprises clerics, paladins, priests, and their aides. Its followers revere Tamera, the goddess of sun and life, and Bauron, the god of moon and punishment. Their doctrines emphasize the pursuit of righteousness, avoidance of corruption, and the aspiration to ascend as angels upon death—resisting the allure of the Ungods and the corruption that can transform one's soul into a penumbral creature, an emogun, after death.

Although part of the Allied Forces, the Church maintains a cordial relationship with the Empire, as most of the Empire's citizens are faithful to Tamera and Bauron. They regard the Kepesh with suspicion, deeming their god, Ba-Ka, a heretical figure, who values mystic power over responsibility. However, their fiercest adversaries are the Cult of Shadow Wing and their masters, the Ungods, who seek to consume Tanares and bend all gods to their eldritch insanity.

The clergy of the Celestianist Church are typically calm and preachy. While the majority are devoted to guiding the spiritual path of their followers or eradicating evil, a subset may resort to manipulation and deception to further the Church's interests, or even their own. While the Church is committed to the protection of Tanares, its members sometimes resort to covert tactics to propagate their faith and restrict the spread of other religions, all justified as measures necessary for the world's safeguarding.

The Realm of Yama

Standing resilient through the ages, the Realm of Yama is a stalwart nation within the lands of Tanares. Yama endured the rule of Emperor Baleroth during the Imperial Age, steadfast under the guidance of their enigmatic and wise leader, Tenshikin, whose divine-like abilities inspire awe and great respect.

The Yama people are known for their deep-seated suspicion of foreigners, shaped by a rich history of resistance against external foes. They place great value on honor and deeds rather than words, and find it challenging to amend their views once wronged.

Their society, from citizen to official, embodies courtesy and composure, coupled with a directness when expressing

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their opinions. Gaining their trust is a formidable task, yet those who succeed find themselves welcomed into enduring bonds of friendship. Their prevalent aspirations encompass combating the Ungods and their corruption and obtaining tameranium ore—a rare magical metal exclusive to the Tanarean continent.

Yama harbors an overt distaste for the Tanarean Empire. While they are allied with the Republic, they view them with skepticism due to their corrupt politicians. The Kepesh and the Magocracy, seen as threats, are kept under close surveillance—particularly the Kepesh, whose recent activities within Yama's borders have stirred substantial discontent. They currently are regarding other issues as mere diversions from Kepesh's machinations.

The Republic of Freelands

The Republic of Freelands is a relatively young nation, founded over a decade ago by Sedura and war heroes in the aftermath of the Kemet Invasion. This establishment stood as a challenge to the Tanarean Empire's unjust use of mind slavery and the tyrannical reign of Emperor Baleroth.

Still finding their footing, they are experimenting with a political system inspired by antiquity, including a parliament and citizen voting rights. The Republic is led by the charismatic and idealistic Prime Minister Tellatius, renowned for his powerful personality and eloquence.

Born from acts of heroism during the closing stages of the Kemet Invasion, the Republic values bravery and adventurers more than any other nation. It teems with guilds where such individuals can gather, and opportunities for those seeking to forge a reputation are abundant.

Republic citizens tend to be law-abiding, industrious, and patriotic. They labor tirelessly to rebuild their war-ravaged land while resisting pressure from the Empire. Politicians and state officials lean towards bureaucracy and legalism, favoring directness and logic over diplomacy, while military agents and spies prioritize practicality, patriotism, and loyalty.

The Republic is eager to absolve itself of the murder of the Empire's diplomat, yet it acknowledges the possibility that the culprit could be one of their own, given their history of employing unethical tactics in the face of the Empire's pressure. This is further complicated by the fragmented power structure within the Republic, leading to less rigid control over its politicians. They pledge to aid the characters within the confines of Republic law to uncover the true perpetrator, hoping it isn't one of their own.

The Tanarean Empire

The Tanarean Empire is the oldest and most influential political entity in Tanares. Despite the blow dealt by the Kemet Invasion to its dominance, the Empire, under the rule of the enigmatic Baleroth, the Faceless Emperor, remains the most potent force on the continent.

The Empire is a despotic state upheld by an efficient bureaucracy, ensuring its laws are rigid but effective. The nobility is corrupt yet loyal to the Emperor, and the populace is subdued, but guaranteed security and sustenance.

Empire's citizens tend to harbor fear for the government and law enforcement, but appreciate the stability in their lives. They revel in arenas and gladiatorial combat, spending ample time indulging in life's pleasures and placing less emphasis on labor.

The Empire's bureaucrats and nobles are typically elegant, resolute, avaricious, and corrupt. Fear of Emperor Baleroth restrains them from overstepping certain boundaries. The Empire's military—the Ironhand—is composed of mind-enslaved criminals and dissidents, their memories and free will erased. The officer corps, mostly comprising nobles, often wields more authority than their training or discipline warrants.

The Empire's spy, Vang, was dispatched with a covert mission to gather evidence against Sedura, the Republic's founder and current Minister of Defense, which culminated in a successful acquisition of critical documents. The Emperor, angered by Vang's recent murder, believes Sedura is implicated and intends to use this incident against her. Baleroth does not oppose the adventurers' investigation, surmising that a thorough inquiry might lead to Sedura's loyalists.

The Watchers

This army-like group serves an entity known as Golgöggoth, the Augur, a creature that acts as the guardian of the Penumbral Plane.

Golgöggoth's only desire is to protect the structure of the Penumbral Plane. His ultimate goal is to eliminate the emotions of all mortals and thus end the wars forever, as without emotions, the mortals cannot sin or fall to corruption and will never cause wars or become emoguns in the Penumbral Plane, denying the Ungods their path to corrupt the world.

To help him enact his purpose, Golgöggoth created an army of emotionless nightmarish warriors to fight for him. They have the power to walk over the mists of the Penumbral Plane and can appear suddenly to do the Augur's bidding.

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Creatures they kill can be converted into more members for their own army by being exposed to the blood of one of Golgöggoth's servants.

His servants are emotionless, but still have a normal intelligence level and can talk and be reasoned with. They have no fear and obey Augur's orders to the letter. They have a strict military hierarchy, and although they have no emotion, they are rational and logical, so while it is almost impossible to convince them to go against Augur's orders, it is possible to make alliances with such creatures if a common goal is present.

Golgöggoth does not want another war, so currently, he is sending some scouts of his army to investigate the situation. These individuals may help the characters with clues and cryptic hints of what they have uncovered, as Tenebrizon's plans are against Augur's desires. On the other hand, if the characters are seen siding with open enemies of the Augur, such as emoguns or members of the Cult of Shadow Wing, the Watchers might see the characters as enemies.

The Kepesh

The Kepesh was an ancient kingdom that was decimated by the Kemet ages in the past. Some of its people survived as the undead who were magically dominated by the Kemets, while others remained alive and imprisoned in a magical torpor in wait for the return of their Pharaoh.

After the Kemet invasion ended, Kalistessenâmun, the Lich Pharaoh, became completely free from his millennium long magical domination by the Kemet, and was set to get vengeance against them. The Pharaoh started to gather new people to rebuild his lost kingdom in the south. Using a theocratic government system worshiping the god Ba-Ka, Kalistessenâmun became again a Pharaoh.

For his people, Kalistessenâmun is considered a divine being in the realm of mortals, and under him, there are High Priests and an entire clergy that comprise the country bureaucracy.

Most of the citizens of the Kepesh Kingdom are social rejects, criminals, orphans, and refugees from other countries that turned to the Ba-Ka faith in search for some hope. The country really gave these people a new life, subservient to Kalistessenâmun's absolute rule, but with some prosperity and possibilities of rising to wealth.

The common people tend to be practical, rustic and rough, with very little formal education. They are very emotive, speaking loud, gesturing widely, and being quick to love and to anger. Zealous of their religion, they don't dare disobey Kalistessenâmun. Most of them have no idea of Kalistessenâmun's plans, or about Tenebrizon. They believe all accusations against their country to be lies made by the evolutionists against their god and their faith.

They are dedicated to the teaching of magic in all its forms, be it clerical divine magic or the arcane magic of wizards. All forms of spellcasting are considered sacred to Ba-Ka, and the teaching and promotion of magic is one of the core tenets of the religion. Relations between apprentices and masters are considered of great importance, and are ruled by a code of rights and obligations that favors both sides, giving masters loyalty and help, and disciples mystical knowledge and protection in return.

Another group of citizens are of ancient Kepesh people that were released from the magical torpor by Kalistessenâmun. They seem socially dislocated as they were people from thousands of years in the past, knowing little about the present days of Tanares, yet they are very elitist, deeming that all other social groups are lower beings. Most of Kepesh's powerful wizard castes come from this group.

And finally, the priests are a group of more well mannered and educated people, with an arrogant and distant demeanor, but one which is still very practical. All functions of the state are administered by them.

Kalistessenâmun is trying to build a Vandanamalika to shatter the impositions on magic made by Tamara and Bauron when Tanares was created, allowing them to access raw magic and fight with the Ungods with unrestrained mystical power.

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Appendix D: Adapting this Adventure for other Campaign Settings

This adventure is specifically designed to best suit the Tanares Campaign Setting, showcasing its main factions, mood, and style.

If you wish to use part or all of it in another setting, you can adapt the entire adventure to another setting or use an isolated chapter in your ongoing campaign. To facilitate that, we added a list of suggestions to help you make the necessary adaptations. You can see it in Appendix C.

The Malrokian Curse. The adventure necessitates a looming military conflict. You can substitute the Malrokian Curse with:

- A situation where all countries possess magic as potent as nuclear weapons, but none have a countermeasure, thus deterring the initiation of war.
- A divine mandate from the god or gods of your setting forbidding this war for some reason.
- A world-ending prophecy from a trusted oracle implying that a war in this decade would result in Armageddon.

The Penumbral Plane. Instead of the Penumbral Plane, you could design a new plane of darkness and eldritch horrors, known as The Plane of Horrors. Dominated by the Cult of Shadow Wing and the forces of Golgöggoth, in a continual conflict. This plane doesn't need to be a mirror of the material plane or serve as your setting's Shadow Plane. It can simply be one of the many outer worlds in the multiverse.

The Factions

Cult of Shadow Wing. This could be a branch of any evil faction in your setting striving for dominance over the Plane of Horrors, aiming to corrupt or take control over the world. Ensure Lypoec remains its leader, or have the current leader of your chosen faction exercise prior control over Tenebrizon. If you replace this faction with another, Tenebrizon should be a member of that faction, trying to surpass its current leader.

The Watchers. The servants of Golgöggoth may want to prevent the war because a prophecy predicts the Augur's downfall if war occurs, or they might merely want to thwart the Cult of Shadow Wing's plans. Another scenario could be that they could be affected by the potent magic unleashed in case of a war, and thus involved in avoiding it.

The Kepesh. This could be any magically dedicated nation in your setting. It would be more fitting if they are already a suspicious or peculiar group, which would make accusations against them more credible. The most crucial aspect is their theft of spell components to execute a powerful ritual that Tenebrizon aims to steal; however, they can't succeed if other countries form an alliance against them.

The Allied Forces (Republic and Yama) and the Tanarean Empire. These three entities can be substituted with any three nations sharing a strained relationship. Key aspects are the mutual distrust between the two main groups and the heroes starting in a country being spied on by a diplomat from one of the other nations. The initial setting relies on the diplomat covertly acting as a spy and the pervasive mistrust among the nations.

Tenebrizon. Little needs to be modified about his personality. Tenebrizon's plans and motivations remain the same. Maintain Lypoec's existence, or if you are using another faction in place of Shadow Wing, remember that Tenebrizon was a member of that faction but has a contentious relationship with its leader.

If you opt for the Plane of Horrors, bear in mind that for the sake of the story, it is ideal if Tenebrizon originally hails from that plane, even if your Shadow Wing replacement isn't wholly tied to it.

Changes to the Chapters

Chapters 1 to 3. You can incorporate the noble's mansion and villa into any town or small existing city in your setting. These chapters require minimal adjustments and can mostly be run as they are. The only significant change pertains to the Penumbral Plane and penumbral creatures in your setting (a Plane of Horrors is suggested, as mentioned earlier).

Note: At the end of Chapter 3, it's crucial to justify why the characters need official documents to enter the country replacing the Empire if it doesn't enforce strict border control.

Alternatively, you can have the characters not discover where Gary is heading, making venturing into the portal he took the only viable option to pursue him.

Chapter 4. You'll need to adjust the explanation for why Gary used this travel method and what this plane is. If you choose a Plane of Horrors, Gary might be using this route because Tenebrizon provided him an item to do so. As Tenebrizon inhabits that plane, it's logical that he has magical resources for entering and exiting it, as well as using it for rapid travel.

Chapter 5. If you maintain the requirement for documents, this chapter can be conducted with little to no adjustment, only needing the ones necessary to align with your setting's practices.

Chapter 6. You can designate this as the capital or a major city of the country you select to replace the Empire. Minor changes will be necessary to tailor the atmosphere of the place to the culture of your chosen location; it will be a better fit if the selected country is already oppressive, but efficient.

Chapter 7. These also need minimal changes. Simply modify it to match the specifics of your setting.

Chapters 8. Similar to Chapter 4, you will need to employ the Plane of Horrors, utilizing this chapter to describe some of its landscape and inhabitants.

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Using the Chapters Individually as Part of Your Campaign

Another option is to incorporate one or more chapters of this book into your campaign without following the entire storyline of this adventure.

You can utilize the adaptations suggested in "Adapting this Adventure for Your Setting," along with the summary below, to run one of the chapters outside of the main story presented here.

Chapter 1: You can use the murder case outlined in this chapter in any campaign where you want adventurers to deal with investigation and diplomacy at a nobility-hosted event.

Chapter 2: The city exploration and the quest offered here can be adjusted so that you're seeking any other kind of information in a city instead of details about Gary. The quests and NPCs presented will work for any small city, and the invading penumbral creatures can be altered into demons or any other extraplanar or summoned entities arriving through a hidden planar breach in the city.

Chapter 3: This hideout can serve as a low-level dungeon defended by evil cultists and bandits.

Chapter 4: Presents a tracking and survival scenario in a strange eldritch plane. You can apply this chapter to any demonic realm, mystical demiplane, god's domain, or even as the characters traversing a nightmare.

Chapter 5: This chapter is useful when characters need to access a place reserved for those invited or carrying the proper documents or items. It works well for restricted cities, crossing kingdom boundaries, or gaining access to holy sites.

Chapter 6: This extensive city exploration can be utilized in any urban adventure campaign. Instead of searching for Gary or the Shadow Wing's whereabouts, the characters can seek any villain or information suitable for your campaign.

Chapter 7: This lair can serve as a mid-level dungeon defended by evil cultists and their monstrous minions. Gary can be replaced with your campaign's main villain or one of its subordinates.

Chapter 8: This chapter can serve as the invasion into a temple of an evil cult or even a fortress of a dark overlord. The penumbral creatures can be reimagined as corrupted cultists, alchemically or magically transformed creatures, or extraplanar aberrations.

The journey to the Shadow Temple can be used as a travel through any cursed land, evil plane of existence, or an ancient underground corrupted dungeon. While the Temple could be a sacred place overtaken by a dragon, a large lair built by the dragon's followers for storing his treasure, or you could even change the final boss to a lich or another powerful being that best fits your campaign.

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