

← The Ultimate Guide To →

# REMARKABLE CULTS

← & THEIR FOLLOWERS →



JVC Parry, Jeff Lee, RP Davis

← LoreSmyth's Ultimate Guide to: →

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← & THEIR FOLLOWERS →



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# WELCOME TO THE SHADOWS

*My first prison was a jail in the East, where I was beaten and fed horse meat. Every prisoner had a thin, lice-infested bedroll on which to sleep, and every day we were awoken at dawn with a splash of cold water. Every afternoon, I was forced to clean the cells of prisoners who had died of sickness or starvation. Every night, I fell asleep to the shouts and sobbing of a hundred other prisoners. My mind was occupied by only three things: eating, drinking, and warmth. When I finally escaped, I realized that there are many kinds of prisons. A prison is whatever limits the mind, and herein lies the key: I have seen freed prisoners who build a taste for horse meat, thin bedrolls, and isolation. Though the walls and bars are gone, the prison persists in their minds, and they find themselves returning to it because they have forgotten how to live without it. The concepts of 'good' and 'evil' are the most insidious prisons of all. We must free ourselves of them.*

— *Diary entry of Serano, convicted necromancer*



## THE ELUSIVE DARK SIDE

Hidden behind closed doors and lurking in unseen strongholds, dark forces gather. This is the domain of cunning masterminds, secret societies, and forbidden artifacts, where assassins, spies, cultists, and criminals hold court to decide their next move...or their next victim. Many adventurers only venture into this shadowy world to hunt down its agents or disrupt the plans of its denizens, but some may be tempted to dabble in it, or even join it. Though the dangers of the dark side are dire, the opportunities and rewards can be even greater...

### FACES OF VILLAINY

Behind most nefarious organizations looms a mastermind, a puppet master, or a tyrant. Their powers and abilities are whispered of in rumors, and their histories have become dark legends unto themselves. Coming face-to-face with a villain in all their dark majesty can fill heroes' hearts with white-knuckled fear or wary fascination: the thousand black eyes of an eldritch high priestess may cause madness to creep into their minds, but a lamia crime lord may offer them an alliance instead of an execution. At their best, these figures are complex and unforgettable—they carve their names and deeds into the annals of history, as well as into the memories of those who become tangled in their schemes.

Secret societies and dark orders take many more forms than a moldering lich on a throne or a subterranean ritual chamber filled with chanting cultists. An organization may dress itself in the pristine robes of clerics and offer blessings from a mysterious god to the public, or don elegant porcelain masks at night to pursue artistic perfection by disfiguring the faces of city dwellers with blades. Likewise, not every dark organization wishes for world domination or an apocalypse—some wish to amass fortunes to rival the vaults of royalty, while others serve ideals or codes that go beyond wealth or power.

### ON THE NATURE OF EVIL

Most adventurers are familiar with evil, whether it takes the form of a sly demon, a cruel king, or a power-hungry lich. However, the true nature of evil may be more complex than it seems—what if a person is a villain to some, but a hero to others? Can lesser evils be committed in service of a greater good? Is destruction always wrong? Whether they choose to tread a darker path or not, adventurers should keep questions like these in mind and decide for themselves what makes a hero or a villain. Selflessness, bravery, and truth may be traits loved by the world at large, but ruthlessness, cunning, and deception may have their places, too.

# USING THIS BOOK

*Remarkable Cults & Their Followers* is an inspirational world-building guide designed to turn your villains into engaging and memorable adversaries...or allies. Darkness takes many shapes, but this book focuses specifically on dark organizations (and despite the name, not all of them are truly cults). These might range from a secret brotherhood of monks who practice horrifying martial techniques to a group of interplanar wizards who seek out sights unseen by mortals—whatever you want to create, we want to provide you with the tools to unleash your imagination.

## CHAPTER 1: REMARKABLE CULTS

This is a menagerie of dangerous and devious factions crafted by the Loresmyth team, each with its own distinct leader to fear, hidden agendas to pursue, secrets to explore, and memorable members to meet. If you're looking for new villains to rise from the shadows, these masterminds are ready to make their grand entrance.

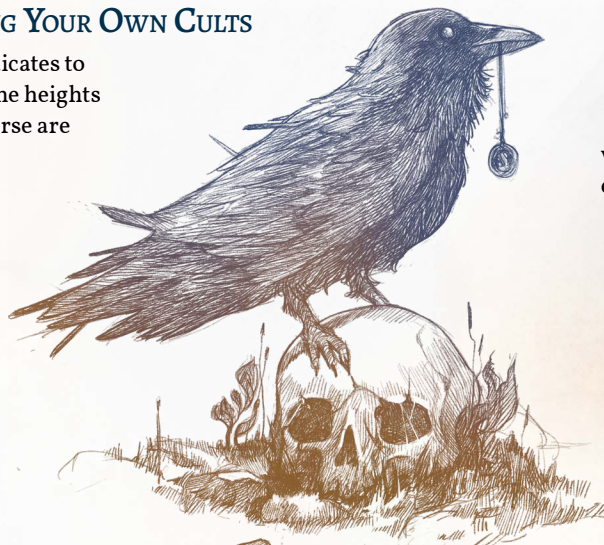
## CHAPTER 2: BRINGING YOUR CULTS TO LIFE

Secret societies and underground organizations do much more than just pump out enemies: they're living, breathing enterprises that make deals, gain territory, and train their members. This chapter shows you the big picture of running a dark organization, including its wealth, influence, ranks, and more.

## CHAPTER 3: CREATING YOUR OWN CULTS

From magical crime syndicates to interplanar barbarians, the heights and depths of the multiverse are the limit for new villains!

This chapter gives you dozens of random tables to help build your faction from the ground up and spark your imagination. Special attention is given to creating a fascinating new leader to helm your group.



## CHAPTER 4: PLAYER-OPERATED CULTS

Who hasn't entertained the thought of *becoming* a dark lord rather than just dethroning one? This chapter gives the Game Master the blueprints for players to create their own dark organization, including recruiting new members, building a lair, expanding their reach, and undertaking missions to further their shadowy plans.

## APPENDIX I: CREATING INFERNAL ITEMS

From smoky infernal forges and blood-soaked enchantment altars come weapons, armor, and instruments of corruption, each crafted to achieve the dark designs of their creators.

## APPENDIX II: BLACKSTAR'S VILE ARTIFACTS

The infamous collector *Blackstar* has spent uncounted centuries assembling and cataloging the most powerful and abominable magical artifacts in history. Truly nightmarish and nefarious items for villains and players alike.

## APPENDIX III: CULT HEADQUARTERS MAPS

Full-color map floorplans for each of the ten remarkable cults in this book.

## IT'S YOUR WORLD

In this book, we give Game Masters the tools to create imaginary factions and organizations that are distinctly *dark*—they're dangerous, exploitative, powerful, and sometimes outright cruel and evil. In addition, we offer ways to make those organizations engaging, instead of simply painting them as *the bad guys*. We all have different views on what is good and evil, and how to incorporate such concepts into our fantasy games.

This book's sole purpose is to inspire you and provide ideas to use in your roleplaying games. Shape and make them your own. It's your world.

**I**would like to take this moment to issue a special thanks to everyone who helped make this book a reality. I wish countless hours of roleplaying fun for you and your gaming group on behalf of the entire *Remarkable Cults* development team.



Chris van der Linden, CEO/Founder Loresmyth



CHAPTER 1

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THE REMARKABLE  
CULTS



# THE JUSTICARS

Wealth	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
Resources	💧 💧 💧 💧
Defence	🛡️ 🛡️ 🛡️ 🛡️
Influence	⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡
Services	Bodyguards, Safehouses, Weapon Training
Disfavored	Sorcerers, Warlocks, Wizards
Favored	Monks, Fighters, Barbarians, Orcs

*They follow a creed from an older, crueller time. They put all their faith in trial by combat and say the audience in the arena is bearing witness, but it's just blood sport. I've watched them drag a corrupt judge out of his home and put a lance in his hands. He didn't last five minutes, but the cheers were deafening.*

— Eri Amestoy, rogue

**U**nder the reign of kings and queens, there have always been those above the law. Corruption has poisoned the courts, and the scales of justice have become tipped in favor of the rich and powerful. Now, hidden behind skull masks, the Justicars have risen to not only rebalance the scales with blood, but to replace crowns and courts with an older, nobler way where there are no rulers—only eternal laws.

The Justicars see themselves as the revivers of a bygone age where strength, loyalty, and honor were paramount. They dress themselves in the morbid garb of lawmakers from an ancient civilization, whose myths they have adopted for their own brutal creed. Their members rise from the poorer quarters of cities, and their creed does not tolerate affronts to justice, whether the perpetrator is a duke or a guard captain. The cult is known for establishing arenas where wrongdoers are called forth to face a trial by combat. If they refuse, they're hounded by the cult for the rest of their lives. Those who survive their trials are branded on the back of their left hand, a mark even the richest and most powerful can't hide. In many city quarters, the Justicars' vigilante justice has supplanted the rule of law. Some neighborhoods have fallen completely under their control, and members of the city watch choose insubordination rather than venture into these areas. In these places, Justicars spread their



vision of a new society ruled by the strong and righteous, but their visions have become increasingly disturbing. It's rumored that the cult has begun resurrecting ancient corpses to act as undead judges, while the Justicars themselves have started punishing those who do not recognize their authority. Commoners who hailed the Justicars as heroes have learned to fear the bone masks worn by the cult, and many have resigned themselves to accepting the cult's impartial, faceless justice.

## THE CALL OF JUSTICE

Each member of the Justicars follows the strict creed outlined in the ancient Amun Maat manuscripts discovered by the cult's founder, Timerus. According to these manuscripts, the Justicars use ancient procedures to call out criminals: their warriors mark the home of the accused with a brand and nail a scroll with a summons to their door, challenging them to a duel. If the wrongdoer declines or refuses to answer, the cult may go to extreme lengths to force them to appear—they might slaughter a target's collection of racing horses, light their home on fire, or even kidnap their loved ones. If the wrongdoer accepts the duel, they are brought to the arena and allowed to use whichever weapons or armor they choose—but no magic. Common people are encouraged to watch the duel as witnesses, and the arena often carries

the raucous, chaotic atmosphere of a public execution. The fights are also overseen by Justicar tribunals, who ensure that the fight is carried out honorably. Finally, a Justicar gladiator is brought out to duel the wrongdoer. The fight goes on until the wrongdoer surrenders, dies, or survives three brutal rounds of combat.

## HEROES OF THE PEOPLE

The Justicars are generally regarded as champions of the common folk and protectors of those who cannot turn to the corrupt courts and nobles for justice. Indeed, the more lawless and crooked a city is, the more welcome the cult is among the inhabitants. Often viewed as selfless warriors committed to the ideals of honor, cult gladiators have become folk heroes, even when their pursuit of justice turns bloody and cruel. To the authorities, the cult is a threat to the rule of law—they ignore courts and constables and seem to find sport in slipping past guards' nets and breaking out of prison with the help of their fellow members. Justicar summonses nailed to wrongdoers' doors are written by the secret tribunals of the cult, which are made up of warriors who have proven their righteousness. Unlike most judges, these tribunals cannot be threatened or bribed. Common people go to great lengths to hide and protect the identities of Justicar members, but some of the most zealous members of the cult welcome being put on trial and sent to prison, where they can terrorize or even convert other criminals.

## A CODE OF BLOOD

The Amun Maat, the foundational manuscripts of the Justicars, belonged to a civilization called the Ryzada. These manuscripts teach that justice can only be found in bloodshed, and only the faceless and impartial may impart punishment. These principles are based on the idea that those who are willing to spill their own blood are the only ones with a right to power, and those without power must honor their judgment. In exchange, the powerful must use their strength to protect the weak as they see fit. Punishment in this ancient culture was meted out by a tribunal of almost god-like beings called the Sekhet, who did not rule, but instead existed solely to uphold the law. The graves of the Sekhet have since been excavated by the cult, and the corpses have been resurrected to once again pass judgment, though it's whispered that these beings are merely mouthpieces for the cult's leader, Timerus. Originally, the cult aimed to mimic this ancient system no matter how bloody their justice became, but as the organization has grown in power and influence, that ideal has been eclipsed by the ambition and zeal of its members. Having a legion of loyal, brutal vigilantes and the unspoken approval of the people to carry out justice has caused some sects of the cult to act autonomously by not only punishing wrongdoers, but also claiming the right to demand tribute and fealty from commoners.

## TIMERUS COTEUS

AGE: 42

RACE: Human

OCCUPATION: Lawgiver, Gladiator

SPECIALTY: Oration, Manipulation, Gladiatorial Combat

**T**imerus began life as a particularly ruthless street youth with a lust for brawling. Imprisoned at age sixteen for the brutal murder of a rival, he entered the orbit of Albis Andosian, a disgraced baron and fellow prisoner who had been exposed for bankrolling a local crime lord. Albis took Timerus under his wing and taught him that every person gives up their power—to monarchs, to the clergy, or to their allies. Albis urged Timerus to aspire to greater things, and even named him as his successor.

When Albis died, the baron's vast network of criminal contacts looked to Timerus to carry on his legacy. Timerus surprised everyone when he declared that he would forge a new organization, one sworn to justice. Timerus had become inspired by legends of a civilization called the Ryzada, which had no rulers—only immortal laws that prized strength and honor. Timerus' vision of seizing power and justice through blood won over many of his fellow criminals, who became the first members of the Justicars.

◆ **TRIBUNAL REBORN:** The Amun Maat speaks of the Sekhet, the powerful lawgivers of the Ryzada. To legitimize the authority of the Justicars and link them to the glory of the ancient civilization, Timerus wants to find the tombs of all of the Sekhet, resurrect them with necromancy, and use them as figureheads.

◆ **SHADOW COUNCIL:** Behind closed doors, Timerus has been meeting with crime lords, dissident nobles, and powerful merchants from many different cities. Timerus has begun making deals with these figures to help him depose governors, overthrow ruling families, and eliminate rival gangs in exchange for safety from his gladiators' wrath.

Timerus is a fearless fighter whose skills have been honed by countless brutal battles. He is heavily armored and devastatingly strong, but his cunning tactics make him truly dangerous.

✦ **UNDYING:** Timerus has learned the secret arts of the Ryzada, which allow him to survive damage to his heart, loss of blood, and even decapitation. Upon dropping to zero hit points, he continues fighting until he is struck in a secret weak point.

## LEADER & FOLLOWERS

Unlike most clandestine organizations, the Justicars make no secret of their existence. In fact, they wish to make their presence known wherever they are to intimidate both criminals and guards. They wear their skull masks proudly and openly dare the authorities to arrest them.

### JUSTICAR RANKS

Rank	Responsibilities
Punisher <sup>1</sup>	Expanding the cult's territory, intimidating guards and gangs
Enforcer <sup>1</sup>	Posting summonses for duels, forcing the accused to appear for duels
Protector <sup>1</sup>	Protecting victims and witnesses, providing security for the arena
Gladiator <sup>2</sup>	Fighting criminals in the arena, optionally training for Magistrate rank
Magistrate <sup>2</sup>	Judging criminals and arena duels, arranging trials
Master-at-Arms <sup>2</sup>	Training Gladiators
Arbiter <sup>3</sup>	Managing sects of the cult, judging high-level criminals
Tribunal Member <sup>3</sup>	Advising the Scales of Justice, creating new laws
Scales of Justice <sup>4</sup>	Managing the cult, judging high-level criminals, approving new laws

1 - low rank, 2 - medium rank, 3 - high rank, 4 - leader

#### ☉ **TIMERUS COTEUS (MALE HUMAN GLADIATOR)**

Though low-born and scarred by a life of brutality, Timerus presents himself as a wise and just man: he's contemplative, slow to anger, and cerebral, a fact that annoys many of his rivals who wish to portray him as a bloody tyrant. In private, however, his ruthlessness comes to the fore. Timerus is not above using terror and bloodshed to ensure that the cult's power expands, even if it means committing brutal crimes against those he deems weak or unworthy. Timerus' obsession with the Ryzada and the Amun Maat has caused him to adopt the dress and mannerisms of an ancient Ryzada lawgiver, which has furthered his personal belief that he is the only one fit to carry on their traditions and ideals. Though Timerus claims that he and the Justicars protect the weak and powerless, he has adopted the Ryzada's contempt for those who cannot or will not shed blood to defend themselves. As the cult has expanded, Timerus has watched ambition and arrogance cause his Justicars to exploit



their might. Timerus views this with a mix of pride and frustration; members of the cult are right to feel entitled to power over the weak, but they must not give in to the same corruption that the cult claims to fight against. Eventually, Timerus hopes that the Justicars will become the harbingers of a vast empire modeled on the Ryzada, with himself as the chief lawgiver.

#### ☉ **RYKARD NICA (MALE ORC GLADIATOR)**

Rykard is one of Timerus' earliest recruits, and despite his advanced age, he is still one of the most intimidating specimens in the organization: standing six foot five, with sculpted muscles and a ruddy face, his skin is marked by uncountable scars and macabre tattoos marking his proudest victories. In public, he always wears his bone mask, rumored to be the skull of one of the first criminals to whom he delivered justice. The aged fighter was one of Baron Albis' bodyguards while he was in prison, and when the elderly nobleman died, the young Timerus retained Rykard's allegiance. Like Timerus, Rykard rose above common thuggery and chose a path defined by his ideals: honor and courage in service of others. In the early days, it was he who most often accepted the task of challenging wrongdoers, and since then he's risen to command all of the Justicars' Punishers, Enforcers, and Protectors. He is in charge of assigning challenges and even takes on a few himself, to the admiration of his gladiators. Rykard's bravery and moral compass have made him a paragon of the Justicars, but he's distressed by the newer, more ambitious members who see the cult's code of honor as an excuse to become petty tyrants.

### ☉ ZUZEN BERINGAR (FEMALE DWARF BARBARIAN)

Zuzen may be short compared to most of the Justicars' warriors, but her shaved head and heavy, steel-toed boots are enough to intimidate anyone she locks eyes with. After years of careful study and bloody valor in the arena, Zuzen has become a Magistrate within the Justicars, an achievement she takes great pride in. Those with grievances bring their cases directly to her in a private session, where she listens to the testimony of the victims with an intense stare. She is considered one of the more ruthless Magistrates due to having exacting standards for evidence and her use of extreme methods to force wrongdoers to appear for trial. Zuzen believes wholeheartedly in Timerus' revival of the Ryzada empire's ideals, as well as the Justicars' obligation to help the weak. However, she believes that pain and violence are not just the instruments for justice—she believes that they make a person stronger and more righteous. With this in mind, Zuzen has approved many unorthodox duels, which amount to little more than beatings or ambushes against guards and known enemies. The Justicars who carry out these missions are thus cleansed of their inhibitions toward violence and their belief in mercy.

### ☉ BALIUS CAIRO (MALE HALF-ELF ROGUE)

Originally a hitman and bone-breaker for a street gang called the Graveheads, Balius is a lean, wiry man with black, slicked-back hair, steely eyes, and a face mottled with scars. To him, the ideals of the Justicars are a convenient excuse to make the peasants accept their new protectors, while the real fascination for him is the nitty-gritty process of seizing streets, neighborhoods, and districts, one cut throat at a time. Balius revels in bloodshed,

and the fact that the cult rewards him for finding new and creative ways to terrorize criminals spurs him to even greater cruelty.

Along with many new Justicars, Balius quietly extorts and intimidates the common folk to get what he wants.

According to the Amun Maat, the brave warriors who uphold the law are entitled to ask for alms and lodgings from those they protect, a provision that Balius uses to enrich himself.

Balius has been passed over for promotion several times due to his disdain for the ideals of the cult, but has been allowed to flaunt the rules due to his effectiveness in forcing even the most well-placed criminals to answer their summons, especially nobles.

## CRUEL OFFERINGS

The Justicars don't usually offer services to outsiders, apart from the adjudication of justice. Though the cult's members usually walk freely around cities, their faces are always obscured by their masks. Justicars are often muscular and decorated with Ryzada motifs and clothing.

### ◆ DUELS

If a person has been wronged in some way, such as being falsely imprisoned or stolen from, a Justicar warrior will summon the perpetrator to a duel of trial by combat unless they make amends. If the wrongdoer refuses, they are hounded until they consent. The fee for this service is adjusted based on the victim's ability to pay; for a pauper, the fee might only be a few coins, but a rich adventurer might be charged up to 1,000 gp.

### ◆ WEAPON TRAINING

The Justicars offer their members extensive training in all manner of weapons, from the mundane to the exotic. Some of the more common training regimens instruct pupils to use swords, axes, and daggers, while the more obscure and rare training sessions may involve chakrams, bolas, naginatas, or khopeshes. Ranged weapons, such as crossbows and longbows, are considered dishonorable and unfit for duels, so the Justicars do not offer training in their use.

### ◆ SMUGGLING & SAFEHOUSES

The Justicars have a vast network of secret havens and safehouses that house not only their members, but their allies as well. They also use a well-developed system of disguised wagons and carts to move around cities and get close to their targets. Both of these networks are usually offered to members alone, but a donation between 400 and 800 gp might allow an outsider to gain access.

### ◆ BODYGUARDS

The Justicars offer Gladiators as bodyguards to those that the cult deems worthy. Justicars who serve in this capacity are expected to live up to the cult's ideals of fearlessness and honor, and are encouraged to use their service to gain new skills in combat. The bodyguard wears the cult's mask while on duty, both to maintain anonymity and act as a deterrent for any would-be criminals. The price to hire a bodyguard is 100 gp per day.



## MERCILESS ITEMS

The following items are unique to the Justicars and used by its members.

### ◆ MANTLE OF JUDGMENT - 500 GP (UNCOMMON)

Members of the Justicars who rise through the ranks to become magistrates or higher are given a *Mantle of Judgment*. These decadent headdresses cover the face with a skeletal mask and wrap around the head and shoulders. Each is ornamented with motifs drawn from the illustrations in the *Amun Maat*, which feature scales, hawks, and swords. While wearing such a mantle, a creature gains the ability to tell when they are being lied to. The mask also has the magical ability to instill fear in creatures that look upon it, as well as enhance the wearer's voice to be as loud as thunder.

### ◆ JUSTICAR'S ROD - 350 GP (UNCOMMON)

When a member of the cult becomes a Gladiator, they are given a justicar's rod for their first fight, which they then keep with them at all times. These rods are just over a foot in length and made of alternating bands of polished metal, with a sharpened figure of a hawk at one end. Attacks made with the rod penetrate armor more easily than other weapons and have a high chance of creating bleeding wounds.

### ◆ LIAR'S REMORSE - 2,500 GP (RARE)

These manacles are made from bone and iron. They are attached by a chain to legcuffs. These restraints are used by the Justicars to enforce docility among their captured transgressors. A creature restrained by the cuffs cannot use their hands, and their movement speed is drastically reduced. Furthermore, they cannot use teleportation or any other form of extradimensional movement to escape. If a creature bound by the restraints tells a lie, the restraints glow with immense magical heat, burning the liar and ignoring resistances or immunities to fire damage.

### ◆ TORQUE OF HONOR - 3,000 GP (RARE)

These golden arm bracelets are granted to members of the Justicars for particularly meritorious service. They might be granted to a Gladiator for defeating their opponents in ten consecutive trials or given to an Enforcer for ensuring a particularly difficult criminal appears for their trial. Each of the torques is decorated with ancient *Ryzada* motifs, such as intertwining chains, grasping hands, or clenched fists. Each torque can hold twelve magical charges. Charges can be gathered by taking blows from enemies or enduring damage from a spell. Charges can be spent to activate the torque's magical abilities: two charges to add an extra  $1d8$  of damage to the wielder's next attack, five charges to increase their armor for the next hour, or twelve charges to make the wielder's next physical attack a critical hit.

### ◆ STAFF OF THE TRIBUNAL - 5,000 GP (RARE)

These staves are reserved for Tribunal Members and are hand-crafted for each wielder. Most take the form of a gilded staff capped with a coiled serpent whose empty sockets are set with glittering jewels. While wielding a staff of the tribunal, the user emits an aura that forces others in a medium range to only tell the truth. In addition, if a threat is detected within a small radius around the staff, the staff animates, becoming a golden serpent that can spit blinding venom and cause deep wounds with its fanged strikes.

### ◆ RYZADA KHOPESH - 35,000 GP (VERY RARE)

These swords have been recovered from the tombs of Ryzada warriors and restored to their former glory. Each sword has a curved blade made of black steel and a handle carved from gold and mahogany. Receiving one is among the greatest honors that a Justicar can receive since it symbolizes that the wielder is a true heir to the legacy of the Ryzada. The sword allows the wielder to harvest and store the soul of an enemy slain by it. Based on the strength of the enemy, the sword itself is made stronger and gains new traits, such as magical fire. Due to their magical enchantments, these swords are only permitted outside of the cult's duels.



## RUMORS & SECRETS

The Justicars have become notorious among common people and nobles alike, and this notoriety has led to no shortage of rumors about the cult.

### CLOSE TO HOME

Recently, there was a debacle in the arena as a gladiator of the Justicars refused to raise arms against the transgressor that they were pitted against. Rykard had chosen the matchup but was unaware that the gladiator and transgressor were, in fact, brothers. Despite clear evidence of the transgressor's wrongdoing—the theft of a horse—the gladiator could not bring himself to strike, and instead surrendered. The gladiator was imprisoned by the Justicars for his breach of duty, while his brother was allowed to walk free by the rules of trial by combat. It's rumored that the Justicars are looking for someone else to track down and duel the brother who escaped his trial since the Justicars themselves cannot. Meanwhile, the freed man is searching for people who are willing to break his brother out of prison.

### THE CALL OF FAME

The city has been in an uproar since one of its most beloved performers, an actress named *Elize Caeso*, was summoned to the Justicars' arena to face a fight to the death. According to the Justicars, Elize was responsible for the murder of her fellow performer, a renowned actor named *Anato Carvan*. Rumors had been spreading that Elize and Anato were lovers, but Anato was not faithful. Elize has denied the accusations and refused to appear for the duel, but the Justicars have already threatened to burn down every theater she performs in, not to mention kill anyone who attends her shows. Elize is desperate to find someone who can prove her innocence before her next show, which promises to be a bloodbath if the Justicars make good on their threats.

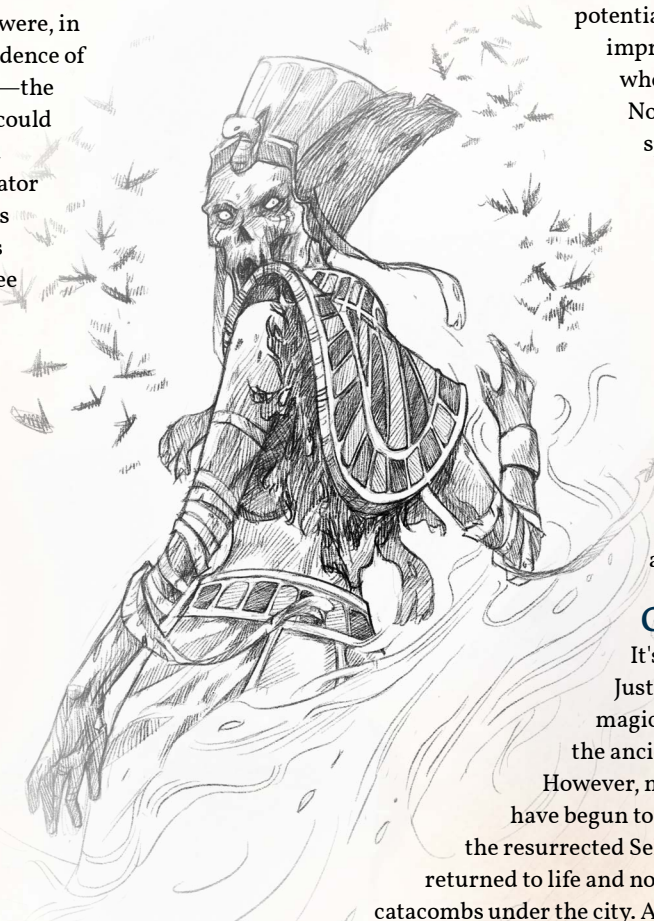
### LOOMING EXECUTION

There have been rumors that a number of spies have been sent to infiltrate the Justicars and collect the names of its members so that they can be arrested and executed. Various noble families have been suspected of hiring these spies, but no one has been able to confirm whether the rumors are true.

In response, the Justicars have made their initiation rites even more extreme to weed out potential infiltrators, as well as imprisoning and torturing those who they believe to be traitors. Now it's whispered that a royal spy is locked under one of the Justicars' arenas and set to be executed in a grand, bloody spectacle. A spymaster for the royal family has been quietly looking for recruits to rescue the spy, but the Justicars are now doubly vigilant. Anyone who saves the spy or retrieves the information he collected will not only strike a blow against the Justicars, but also receive the title of lord.

### GLORY ETERNAL

It's an open secret that the Justicars are using necromantic magic to resurrect the *Sekhet*, the ancient *Ryzada* lawgivers. However, more troubling rumors have begun to circulate that one of the resurrected Sekhet became mad when returned to life and now wreaks havoc in the catacombs under the city. At first, the Justicars refused to fight the undead being because it meant destroying a symbol of their own obsession with justice, but now things have spiraled out of control. The resurrected Sekhet has become corrupted by necromantic energy and is raising the skeletons of its servants and warriors from their resting places. The army of undead threatens to not only overwhelm the Justicars, but bring down the city above. If the undead Sekhet destroys the metropolis, it will forever tarnish the Justicars' beloved forerunners and ruin the cult's image. To prevent this, the cult is searching for a discreet group to clear out the catacombs and return the Sekhet to its eternal rest.



# THE DREAMWEAVERS

Wealth



Resources



Defence



Influence



Services

Dreamcrafting, Magical Boons

Disfavored

Fighters, Barbarians, Dwarves,  
Law Enforcement

Favored

Warlocks, Sorcerers, Bards,  
Performers, Tieflings

*It is uncanny how the Dreamweavers' performances seem to be able to peer into both the deepest, most personal corners of one's heart and grasp the shared hopes of an entire city. In the afterglow of their show, I admit that facing the real world sent me spiraling into despair. Oh, to live in that theater, and eat and drink only their music!*

— *Thurian ar Gall, critic*

**T**he Dreamweavers, a traveling cult made up of performers, actors, and musicians, know how to squeeze laughter out of a crowd just as easily as tears. Like fine wine, all of those rich emotions are collected and distilled for consumption, though not by the Dreamweavers themselves—instead, all of that psychic energy is funneled into the Realm of Dreams, where otherworldly beings known as Somnia devour it.

In return for harvesting these heightened emotions for the Somnia, the Dreamweavers are granted extraordinary talents and powers, either through pacts or mysterious magic. Some say that the world's greatest performers must all be Dreamweavers, but the truth can be found in the telltale symptoms of dulled eyes and strange exhaustion that haunts their audiences after each performance. Every Dreamweaver performance is unscripted and influenced by the skills of its performers, resulting in wildly different shows: one troupe might host a grand orchestra performance, while another might put on an operatic drama or a death-defying acrobatic show. No matter the performance, the Dreamweavers' unique form of magical improvisation is the key: after lulling the audience into a trance, performers draw out the deepest fantasies of individual audience members and embody

those desires in their performance. All the while, the Maestro surveys the audience, looking for common threads to weave into a grand, unified design, whether it be a climactic love scene or a violent finale to a piece of music.

## HEART OF THE SHOW

The Dreamweavers have several independent troupes that travel throughout the realms, serving audiences far and wide, but one thing binds them together: each troupe has been taught a secret ritual that opens a portal to the Realm of Dreams, which functions as a siphon that allows the cult's patrons to drain the audience's emotions. These portals are typically no larger than a humanoid head and appear as a shimmering, mirror-like hole in reality. The ritual to create the portal is seamlessly woven into each Dreamweaver performance, and consists of a complex combination of song and dance.

Portals to the Realm of Dreams serve as the centerpiece to each Dreamweaver show: upon glimpsing the mirror-like portal, a mortal's mind slips into a dream-like state, allowing their fantasies to become visible to the Dreamweavers. At the same time, the Somnia on the other side of the portal are greedily sucking the emotions from the mortal audience while the cult whips

their patrons into a frenzy of ecstasy and terror. Some Dreamweavers devote themselves fully to controlling these portals during shows and ensuring that the rift does not widen too much, which could cause the show to spiral out of control as reality and dreams collide.

## SERVANTS OF NIGHTMARES

When the cult was founded, the first Dreamweavers struck a deal with a powerful race of beings from the Realm of Dreams called the Somnia. These creatures survive through the consumption of psychic energy, which they normally harvest from sleeping mortals. The Dreamweavers offered to harvest the emotions of their audiences in return for powerful boons, such as unearthly beauty, supernatural talents, or arcane power beyond what most mages can fathom. These boons usually serve to push the Dreamweavers' performances to even more decadent and intoxicating heights. However, the Dreamweavers' harvesting of emotion comes at a cost: for several days after a show, the audience members feel physically and mentally drained, incapable of feeling emotions beyond the desire for food or sleep.

The Somnia are an enigmatic race whose surreal appearances can vary wildly, though each one has a pleasing dream form and a terrifying nightmare form. The goal of the Somnia is to consume enough psychic energy to gain corporeal forms in the mortal plane, where they plan to hunt down mortals and feed directly on their emotions. Though the Somnia are as mysterious and varied as their strange forms, their hunger and fascination with mortals unite them.

## THE POWER OF FAME

The Dreamweavers are known far and wide as the absolute height of entertainment—their shows are legendarily decadent spectacles filled with drama, magic, and avant-garde twists on traditional stagecraft. Because they travel from city to city and the audiences differ every night, no production is the same, and the arrival of their vividly colored wagons is enough to whip both the fashionable elite and the common people into a frenzy of excitement. Each of the star performers of the Dreamweavers can boast a devoted legion of fans, but the true prestige of the group is highest among the noble classes, who can afford private shows and even commission new plays and songs. The Dreamweavers can count some of the richest people in high society among their greatest patrons, and these supporters' gold and influence ensure that investigations into the cult's more sinister nature always reach dead ends. The open secret of the cult is that the Dreamweavers' shows are addictive, not just because of the talent on display, but also because each performance evokes the

## AMARYS JOYEUX

AGE: 134

RACE: Elf

OCCUPATION: Performer, Enchantress

SPECIALTY: Performance, Mind Control

**M**arys was originally a court bard and jester, but had her face mutilated by a capricious king after she rejected his advances. After realizing that her disfigurement spelled the end for her career as a performer, Amarys fell into deep despair, which attracted the Somnia to her dreams. She spoke with them in her sleep, learned of their hunger, and formed a pact: Amarys would create feasts for the Somnia, and in return, they would grant her otherworldly beauty and fame that surpassed her previous splendor. The Somnia accepted, and Amarys began approaching the finest musicians, actors, and acrobats from around the world with an offer: join her traveling troupes to make their dreams of fame, wealth, and adoration come true.

Amarys has meticulously targeted the rich and powerful with her new cult to ensure that it always has patrons who will defend it, especially from the clerics and mages who might become suspicious of the Dreamweavers' effects on their audiences. Though Amarys despises royalty who treat their subjects as playthings, she takes solace in the knowledge that the Somnia will eventually feed on high and low alike.

◆ **DOOMED CONSORTS:** They say that Amarys is always accompanied by her adoring fans, and that those who catch her eye may be granted the honor of becoming her consort. Amarys is infamous among the other Dreamweavers for torturing and toying with these unsuspecting admirers, leaving her perpetually searching for new playmates.

◆ **VIGILANT ADMIRER:** Amarys has gained many enemies, especially among those who have lost loved ones to the lingering addiction that characterizes the Dreamweavers' shows. Despite the numerous assassination attempts and angry mobs, Amarys has emerged unscathed. It's rumored that she is protected by a nascent Somnia that has crossed into the waking world and shields her from physical harm.

Amarys doesn't like to fight; instead, she prefers to take the role of a puppetmaster and entrance, deceive, or control her opponents. Unfortunately, only those with powerful wills can resist her.

✦ **ENTRANCING AURA:** Amarys can use song and dance to entrance enemies in a large area, temporarily turning them against their allies or causing them to drop their weapons. If an opponent fails a save to resist her magic, they may come under her total control.

audience members' deepest desires. The rush of heightened sensation and emotion are unlike anything found in waking life—instead, the experience is similar to lucid dreaming, where pleasure, wonder, and terror are enhanced. Attending a Dreamweaver show is so intoxicating and addicting that people keep coming back, again and again. By comparison, the mundane hardships and disappointing dramas of life are unbearable, and many families have been torn apart by a member's obsession with living out their fantasies in a Dreamweaver show.

## LEADER & FOLLOWERS

The Dreamweavers are unusual because their members are household names while the truth of their nature is a carefully guarded secret. Though they strive to draw in larger crowds and play prestigious venues, their psychic harvests must be subtle enough not to attract suspicion.

### DREAMWEAVER RANKS

Rank	Responsibilities
Crew <sup>1</sup>	Constructing and modifying the stage, handling costumes and instruments, assisting with rituals
Usher <sup>1</sup>	Guarding shows, removing disruptive audience members or fans
Understudy <sup>1</sup>	Assisting Players and Divino members, learning to perform
Player <sup>2</sup>	Memorizing scripts, music, or routines, performing on stage
Dreamer <sup>2</sup>	Opening portals to the Realm of Dreams, conversing with the Somnia, dreamcrafting
Oratorio <sup>3</sup>	Spreading word of performances, arranging meetings and private performances for influential figures
Divino <sup>3</sup>	Performing lead roles, attracting new fans and members
Maestro <sup>3</sup>	Directing Players and Divino during performances, managing a troupe, collecting money, planning tours
Primo <sup>4</sup>	Managing the cult's troupes and funds, ensuring that the Somnia are pleased, commissioning new troupes, promoting members to Maestro

1 - low rank, 2 - medium rank, 3 - high rank, 4 - leader

### AMARYS JOYEUX (FEMALE ELF BARD)

In order to reach every part of the realms, Amarys wants to expand the number of performers and troupes within the Dreamweavers, but first she needs to ensure that her

far-flung troupes remain loyal to her and avoid arousing suspicion while still packing the theaters full of eager patrons. This delicate balancing act has required all of Amarys' considerable charisma, but the increasingly powerful boons granted by her Somnia benefactors have transformed her from the ringleader of a ragtag group of players to the most sought-after celebrity in the world. Despite the endless accolades and rivers of wealth, Amarys has grown to disdain her fans and the wealthy patrons of the cult. Part of the reason that she wishes to expand the cult comes from a desire to see her admirers turn into slaves, to be thrown aside as soon as they stop entertaining her. The same goes for the nobles and wealthy merchants who see the Dreamweavers as simply another indulgent diversion—Amarys wishes to puppet these people just as they puppet the lives of the commoners, and leave them for the Somnia as scraps.

### THE SOMNIA (DREAM BEINGS)

The Somnia are otherworldly creatures from the Realm of Dreams who range in appearance from angelic and surreal to nightmarish and horrific: some are tall and elegant humanoids with featureless faces, while others resemble giant, bony centipedes with humanoid torsos and bird-like heads. The Somnia can change their appearance at will,

though most have two forms that they use when angry or pleased. These forms can entrance mortals who see them, or they can drive people to madness. Each Somnia desires to escape the Realm of Dreams and cross over to the mortal plane, where they can feast on human emotions freely, though some are enamored with mortals and wish to understand them more deeply before using them for sustenance. Somnia do not have a hierarchy or society of their own, but each one is powerful in its own right. Somnia can sometimes possess mortals through their dreams and experience the world through their eyes, but this is rare.



### TEVARUS D'VEIN (MALE ELF WARLOCK)

As an actor, Tevarus usually portrays the villains in his troupe's shows.

Most of the Dreamweavers' performances are focused on bringing the audience members' fantasies to life, but Tevarus is adept at embodying their nightmares.

Despite his handsome appearance, Tevarus can contort his being into hideous forms that are truly the stuff of nightmares, and the elf often wears a signature skull-like mask decorated with silver filigree to heighten the effect. However, because the performances should always have a satisfying ending, Tevarus is almost always defeated and his nightmares driven away over the course of a performance, though this doesn't stop the terror of his portrayals from lingering in the hearts of the audience. Tevarus is dramatic, charismatic, haughty, and egotistical. He has received several boons from the Somnia in return for his ability to enrapture and terrify

audiences, which include magic that can be used to physically manifest a creature's fears in the waking world.

Furthermore, he can disappear in a puff of purple-tinged smoke and reappear on the other side of a room in the blink of an eye. Ever the egotist, Tevarus has been suspected of murdering those who dare to criticize his performances.

### ✿ **MANDA GRAYTWIG (FEMALE GNOME BARD)**

Manda is one of the primary Maestros of the Dreamweavers, and rose to the rank after Amarys gave her a personal blessing.

Shrouded in illusion at all times, Manda's true identity

is known only to those who have gained her trust. However, no matter what humanoid form she takes, she always retains purple hair and eyes. Manda is one of Amarys' only true friends, and the only one Amarys trusts enough to discuss the next move of the cult with. Despite being older, Manda looks up to Amarys and admires her desire to turn the tables on those in power. As a talented mage and illusionist, Manda is often a lead performer in her own shows, but her true brilliance shines through when directing a performance. Manda has a deft touch when weaving together a crowd's fantasies, and her deep-running empathy allows her to hit just the right highs and lows to make a show truly thrilling...or devastating. Among the Dreamweavers, it's rumored that Manda's illusory disguises come from a dark past as a criminal, and that Manda shatters the mind of anyone who sees her true appearance.



## MESMERIZING OFFERINGS

Only a select few are made aware of the cult's special services, but Dreamweaver agents do watch for opportunities to strike deals. A magical geas that ensures the client's silence is often part of the deal, since the organization cannot allow its secret nature to become common knowledge.

### ◆ GUEST PERFORMANCE

Any individual or group can pay a hefty sum of money (5,000–10,000 gp) to commission a special performance that dramatizes the character or party's real-life actions (such as their heroic saving of a town from a monster). These one night only performances spread word of the characters' deeds and make them into celebrities. This makes them more likely to receive audiences from powerful people or receive quests from powerful organizations. Sometimes the paying individual themselves might appear in the performance, taking on the role of an actor, musician, singer, or anything they desire. If they do particularly well in the role, they might be headhunted by the Dreamweavers for indoctrination into the cult. Of course, an unspoken part of the payment is harvesting the audience's emotions for the Somnia, who might also take an interest in a particularly talented performer.

### ◆ DREAMCRAFTING

The troupe's magic isn't just for live performances: for a stiff fee (usually around 1,000 gp), a Dreamweaver sorcerer or warlock can shape a person's dreams to a client's specifications, influencing their waking life and mental state. This can range from causing raving madness to evoking feelings of ardor toward the client. Many clients find this useful for bending others to their will, or terrorizing their enemies into submission.

### ◆ BOONS OF THE SOMNIA

For those who join the ranks of the Dreamweavers, the main draw is gaining a boon from one of the Somnia. These boons might take the form of a warlock pact, an infusion of sorcerous magic, a magical instrument, or a permanent supernatural charm. Outstanding performances and consistent crowds guarantee boons, while failing to evoke the magnificent thrills and devastating sadness means losing a chance to gain or enhance a boon. Beguiling beauty and enchanting voices are only a few of the potential benefits, as seen in the following table on the next page.

## d10 Boons of the Somnia

- 1 The recipient's face becomes so entrancingly beautiful that they may cause up to one person at a time to fall in love with them.
- 2 The recipient gains the ability to put creatures to sleep by singing to them, which lasts for as long as they can maintain the song.
- 3 The recipient becomes surrounded by a small aura of magical song. Whenever an enemy enters the aura, they see a terrifying illusion of the boon's holder and become frightened.
- 4 The recipient learns to create an illusory duplicate of themselves by playing a magical song on a musical instrument. The performer can puppet the duplicate while the song lasts.
- 5 The recipient gains proficiency in acting that allows them to magically manipulate the emotions of another creature who watches a short performance.
- 6 The recipient's juggling, hoop, contortion, or other act hypnotises people, who become stunned until the performance is over.
- 7 The recipient's acting talent is improved to such an extent that they can flawlessly portray any other humanoid that they've seen and heard speak at least once before.
- 8 The recipient gains the ability to tumble masterfully out of the way of attacks. A creature that sees their tumbling must save against being confused by the whirling patterns.
- 9 The recipient learns a magical dance that allows them to summon tempting illusions. Creatures that see the illusions must save against charm or be drawn toward them.
- 10 The recipient's spoken poetry can enthrall those who hear it. The listeners become highly suggestible and will enact the poet's commands.

## ENTHRALLING ITEMS

### ◆ DREAMSCAPE INSTRUMENT - 8,000 GP (VERY RARE)

These instruments are made by the Dreamweavers themselves and then given to the Somnia to be imbued with illusory magic from the Realm of Dreams. The instruments can take any form, from a simple drum to a wonderfully complex harp. The instruments can be used to change the surroundings within a large radius to those of an illusory environment that the individual playing the instrument can choose. The illusion includes audible, visual, tactile, and olfactory elements, and can be interacted with in

numerous ways. Furthermore, the illusion can be twisted so that it reflects a horrifying landscape, dealing psychic damage to those who see it and making them frightened. The illusion can last for up to one hour, provided that the player maintains concentration on their performance.

### ◆ DREAMSCRYER AMULET - 500 GP (RARE)

These amulets, which contain captured dreams, are gifted by the Somnia to Dreamweavers who wish to enter the minds of other mortals. A creature in possession of a *dreamscryer amulet* can use it once per night to read the dreams of another mortal humanoid that they have seen or know the name of. The more familiar the target, the greater the likelihood that the user's attempt to see into their dreams will succeed. If successful, the item's user can view the dreams of the target as if watching a show. If the user succeeds on a mental check, then they can alter the dream according to their will, causing the dreamer to become more susceptible to certain suggestions and behaviors in their waking life.

### ◆ RING OF INSIGHT - 100 GP (COMMON)

These rings depict a laughing or crying face, and are given to cultists when they obtain the rank of Player. Each ring has been enchanted by the Somnia to allow the wearer to sense the emotional states of those around them. Though the ring cannot read the mind of a creature, it can enhance the user's ability to persuade them of something or sense hidden feelings, such as nervousness or lust. Furthermore, once per day, the wearer can activate the ring to learn one like or dislike of another individual that is within a few feet of the user.



## RUMORS & SECRETS

The Dreamweavers revel in the public eye, so they're always surrounded by a swirl of rumors and gossip. The deeper one dives into these rumors, however, the darker they become...

### THE DEVIL'S HEART

A Dreamweaver troupe's next theatrical performance is rumored to be a departure from their normal shows: instead of being a freeform performance tailored to the audience, this new show will be a tale of horror that promises to titillate and terrify its attendees. The show is titled *The Devil's Heart*, and focuses on an insidious labyrinth in the basement of a countess famed for her decadence and vice. What makes the show especially intriguing is that it will not have a stage—instead, it will take place in an actual mansion, where attendees will take on the role of courtiers in the countess' home and the cast members will play the main characters. It's speculated that the play will feature elaborate illusion magic to accomplish some of the more fantastical and terrifying scenes, including a nightmarish creature nicknamed *The Bleeding Devil*. However, those who have been watching the mansion for clues have reported hearing strange screeches and chanting, causing them to believe that the show's creatures may not be entirely stagecraft. An avid fan named *Gloria Halfheart* is looking for someone who can help her investigate the mansion ahead of the show's premiere.

### THE SHOW MUST GO ON

*Tannyll Faramon*, the magistrate of the *City of Methos*, has forbidden the Dreamweavers from continuing to perform within the city walls because their shows encourage immorality and sloth. The populace has become so obsessed with the cult that the troupe was holding multiple performances per day, and now the city's industry has diminished rapidly while workers shirk their duties to attend the shows. Fans of the cult are too exhausted and lethargic to riot against the magistrate's order, but some of those who haven't managed to see a show are outraged that they may lose their chance to experience a performance. While the city guards have already started forcibly pushing the cult out of Methos, the Dreamweavers are desperately searching for a way to persuade the magistrate to let them continue performing, and it's rumored that they're looking for someone who can discover the magistrate's deepest fantasies so the cult can create a special show just for him. Failing that, it's whispered that they're willing to lend someone a mysterious amulet that will allow the user to manipulate Tannyll's dreams.

### BEASTS OF ABANDON

Invitations have been sent out for a masquerade ball organized by the Dreamweavers—an exclusive event for only the highest of high society. Each attendee has been sent a mask representing an animal, exquisitely rendered in porcelain and gold. However, there are rumors that the masquerade is a trap: the attendees are apparently enemies of a very wealthy merchant who wants the guests gone for good. At the dance's climax, the dancers will be polymorphed into the creatures represented by their masks, then eaten as delicacies or kept as part of a grotesque menagerie—or so the rumors say. A wealthy noble named *Vorini Cabat* has been disturbed by the rumors, and is looking for someone to take their place at the masquerade, providing the perfect opportunity for someone to stop the performance from attaining its climax. However, Vorini doubts that the Dreamweavers will allow anyone to derail the event and suspects that members of the cult will be in attendance as well.

### MASKS OF THE FLESH

There have always been disappearances after the Dreamweavers' shows: some attendees run away with the troupe, while others stumble down a dark alley in a haze and become victims to cutthroats. Recently, however, the number of missing people has sharply increased, causing suspicions to follow the cult as they travel from town to town. According to the rumors, the Dreamweavers have been inviting some patrons to afterparties, where the attendee is entertained, plied with alcohol, and lulled to sleep. After returning home, the attendees' spouses and friends have found these people to act in strange and disturbing ways: they speak in different voices, move in jerky and unnatural ways, and don't seem to sleep. What's more, they seem to have forgotten who they are as well as the names of their loved ones, they do not know how to eat or bathe themselves, and they don't seem to understand their old hobbies or trades. It's whispered that the Dreamweavers have replaced the souls of these people with something else—something that does not come from this plane. A mage named Syrena has recently discovered that her lover Bravin has been changed by the Dreamweavers, and wishes to find out what the cult has done to him, as well as find a way to return Bravin to normal.

# TEMPLE OF THE NEW FLESH

Wealth	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
Resources	💧 💧 💧 💧
Defence	♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥
Influence	⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡
Services	Crafting, Construct Bodies, Blessings
Disfavored	Druids, Warlocks, Rival Religions
Favored	Artificers, Clerics, Paladins, Gnomes, Dwarves

*We provide a new vessel for your soul—a vessel immune to corruption and free from suffering. This gift is dependent upon your donation to the Temple, of course. However, even if you cannot afford the donation, acceptance into our ranks ensures that your soul will be preserved in the Grand Architect's paradise while your body will have its place among the other Devoted within one of the cathedrals. All we need is your signature on this document, and salvation is yours.*

— Victoria Glorin, missionary of the Temple of the New Flesh

**T**he Temple of the New Flesh is a prominent fixture in the metropolitan city of Nekhaton, adored by both the city's wealthy and the common folk. They offer opportunities for paradise and immortality, free of the judgment of other gods. Powerful and wealthy acolytes luxuriate in their new construct bodies: clean, artificial shells that provide eternal life and vigor. The poor and downtrodden can also work toward such rewards or simply look forward to a paradise-like afterlife requiring nothing more than obedience to the Temple.

With Nekhaton firmly in its grip, the Temple of the New Flesh has begun expanding to other regions, founding new temples and gaining even more followers. These temples are places of worship for the cult's deity, Astaron the Grand Architect, as well as magical factories that produce the gleaming artificial shells to which the Temple's devotees bind their souls. Outside the temples, the cult's acolytes are known for their tireless work in service of the poor and sick. However, most souls acquired by the Temple do not reach the Grand Architect's paradise. Instead, they become fuel for the factory-temples while their cast-off bodies become undead laborers, toiling in the faithforges

until they crumble. Those souls lucky enough to escape incineration in the faithforges pass on to a demiplane designed and ruled by the Grand Architect, which is no paradise at all. Here, they find themselves merely slaves to the Grand Architect, who rules the plane as a capricious god. Those with deep enough pockets to claim immortal construct bodies may also find themselves enslaved: the priests of the Temple can magically control their bodies to turn them into living puppets, or may simply threaten to reclaim the construct body.

## THE WORKINGS OF THE TEMPLE

The Temple of the New Flesh functions like a grist mill, with the souls of poor adherents fueling the factory-temples that produce immortal construct bodies, which are then used to persuade the influential and rich to join the faith. This brings in enormous donations, as the wealthy effectively pay for their construct bodies while also drawing in others who wish to be associated with the prestige and power that surrounds the Temple.



Meanwhile, poorer acolytes are pressed to become evangelists or laborers on new temples. Clerics of the Temple are carefully chosen based on their loyalty and charismatic personas, but the most critical criterion is their ability to keep the Temple's inner workings a secret. The fastest way to advance in the Temple's ranks is to bring in more converts—the more powerful or wealthy the convert, the greater the reward. For those who simply wish to toil, the highlight of their religious experience is the year-end pilgrimage to the founding temple of the cult, where the Grand Architect appears before his subjects in an ecstatic public ceremony. To generate goodwill and a facade of righteousness, the Temple maintains soup kitchens and shelters for the poor, as well as hospitals to treat the sick and injured. While ministering to those who are suffering, the cultists always take the opportunity to instruct their charges on the tenets of the Temple, quietly urging them to join the ranks of the cult. This is especially true in their hospitals, where those near death who choose to join are taken to the nearest factory-temple to be covertly harvested of their bodies and souls.

## THE GODHOOD OF ASTARON

Despite the Temple's claims that Astaron is the master of his own plane and grants his blessings in the form of construct bodies, Astaron is not a true god. He is a supremely powerful artificer and wizard, but he can neither hear the prayers of his acolytes nor grant them the boons or protection they seek. The clerics who serve him are granted no divine power, and the transmigration of souls to his demiplane is managed through arcane magic, not the normal operations of death. The Temple is particularly careful about preserving the myths of Astaron's godhood, and even manufactures false miracles to further the lie. This propaganda has gone so far that even Astaron himself has come to believe that he is a demigod whose genius has allowed him to rise above other mortals. For many high-ranking clerics, pleasing Astaron and stroking his ego are the keys to positions of prestige and pleasure in his demiplane, far above the enslaved faithful.

## MASKED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

To many commoners, the construct bodies of the Temple seem like the ultimate symbols of holiness and beauty—they are immortal works of art that inspire awe and reverence, and some even revere their owners as ascended beings. Among other faiths, however, the Temple is distrusted at best and despised at worst—the cult's metal emissaries are known to offer paradise and immortality in exchange for political favors, cash donations, and quashing inquiries into their more extortionary practices, such as forcing entire families to sign over all of their worldly possessions for the privilege of joining the Temple. The Temple is aware of its rivals' jealousy and outright

## ASTARON, GRAND ARCHITECT OF FAITH

AGE: 72

RACE: Human

OCCUPATION: Artificer

SPECIALTY: Planar Design, Construct Creation, Arcane Magic

**F**ounder of the Temple of the New Flesh, Astaron is an artificer without peer. His greatest works of genius are the immortal construct bodies and the rituals necessary to extract the souls of living creatures and transfer them into these empty shells. He also designed the factory-temples that build these construct bodies, including the faithforges, which burn hot with the souls of betrayed supplicants.

In addition, Astaron has managed to construct his own expansive demiplane, a feat that only the most powerful of mages may achieve. This is the paradise of the Grand Architect, where Astaron now makes his home, safe from enemies and free to work toward his ultimate plan: attaining divine power and becoming a true god.

As one of his first acts, Astaron placed his soul in a construct body of his own special design. The vessel is designed to evoke the appearance of a fatherly, powerful god, and grants him the power of flight as well as superhuman strength.

◆ **SOUL LIBRARY:** While most of the souls extracted by Astaron and the Temple end up powering the faithforges or being placed into the construct bodies, some of particular interest are stored in a hideous library of sorts that Astaron consults whenever he is in need of a specialist's knowledge. He is always on the lookout for naive scholars who can be converted to his faith and eventually collected.

◆ **CONTINUED AUGMENTATION:** Astaron is searching for tools that can help him bridge the gap between arcane and divine power. One device, called the Dynassian Sphere, lies within a university of magic, where its power to tap into the aether is being studied. Astaron has tried everything to persuade the scholars to let him examine it, but they have refused.

Astaron's body has been built with the expectation that he will one day fight other gods. It is both incredibly durable and magically potent, making him a formidable opponent.

✦ **DIVINE VESSEL:** Astaron's construct body allows him to transcend the limits of a normal mage by enhancing the duration and range of his arcane magic, as well as warding against low-level spells. His body also grants him superhuman strength and the ability to levitate. The body's only weakness is radiant or holy magic, which ignores its defenses.

hostility, and has decided to make its public image its top priority. The Temple puts on lavish celebrations and generous charity projects to elevate its standing among the commoners, while the upper echelons devise underhanded rumors and campaigns of propaganda to discredit other faiths and their deities. If another faith collapses, the Temple is always there to welcome the disillusioned into its ranks.

## LEADER & FOLLOWERS

The followers of the Temple of the New Flesh come from all walks of life. The cult's upper echelons consist mainly of artificers, who create and maintain the construct bodies, as well as the clerics who minister to the cult's acolytes and spread the word of Astaron.

### TEMPLE OF THE NEW FLESH RANKS

Rank	Responsibilities
Acolyte <sup>1</sup>	Spreading the faith, worshipping Astaron, temple maintenance
Temple Guard <sup>1</sup>	Constructs only; protecting the factory-temples and Acolytes
Priest <sup>2</sup>	Preaching to Acolytes, converting new members, coordinating charities
Artificer <sup>2</sup>	Construct design and construction, assisting Architects
Proselytiser <sup>2</sup>	Spreading the faith, recruiting wealthy patrons, blackmailing foes
Architect <sup>3</sup>	Managing the the faithforges, controlling the undead acolytes, building new temples
Holy Guard <sup>5</sup>	Constructs only; protecting the factory-temples, raiding enemies, protecting Astaron
Temple Head <sup>3</sup>	Managing factory-temples, establishing new temples, leading worship of Astaron
Grand Architect <sup>4</sup>	Managing the cult, curating the Soul Library, spreading the faith

1 - low rank, 2 - medium rank, 3 - high rank, 4 - leader

### ☉ ASTARON, THE GRAND ARCHITECT (MALE CONSTRUCT ARTIFICER)

In his rare public appearances, Astaron can play the part of the fatherly, compassionate sage, filled with words of wisdom and kindness. He embraces his self-built cult of personality and cultivates a persona of serenity and quiet strength. In truth, Astaron is a careful, calculating man with a deep-seated arrogance; he believes that a mind as magnificent as his is meant to persist forever, which naturally entails godhood.

Astaron has pondered his own apotheosis for decades now. When he first founded the cult, he believed that the rituals offered to him by his supplicants would be enough to elevate him to godhood, but it wasn't enough. He continues to experiment with the rituals that the cult carries out, as well as different ways to harness and exploit the souls that his Temple harvests, but the mystery of godhood remains beyond his grasp. Within his demiplane, his assuredness in his own genius and frustration towards crossing this final threshold has manifested in wanton cruelty and overwhelming indulgence.

Astaron only fears two things: being revealed as a fraud to his legions of followers, and invoking the wrath of other deities before he can contend with them. Astaron relishes the day when he can stand as a true god, but he fears his rise will be sabotaged.

### ☉ VICTORIA GLORIN (FEMALE CONSTRUCT BARD)

Once a human female, Victoria was one of the first to undergo the transfer of her soul into one of Astaron's immortal construct bodies. She revels in her new body and is unwaveringly loyal to Astaron and the Temple of the New Flesh. Victoria's constructed form is tall, willowy, and ornately gilded with immaculate depictions of celestial scenes, showcasing how the Temple's bodies are living works of art. Its frame is made of floating pieces of smooth, white ceramic overlaid with gold leaf, with a solid gold mask that was crafted to resemble her original face. Victoria serves as the head of the missionary branch of the Temple of the New Flesh and is the cult's most public face. She also corresponds with leaders of new factory-temples being built outside of Nekhaton



and acts as a liaison between the Temple and influential members of business and government, working to increase the cult's influence with them and ensure that the Temple is portrayed in a positive light. Victoria is always looking for ways to improve the Temple's relations with the public; forging alliances with known heroes is a common tactic, but most of her work is underhanded—Victoria assigns agents of the Temple to follow its enemies, collecting blackmail material or framing them for indiscretions.

While Victoria is aware of Astaron's true intentions and the fate of the poor acolytes whose bodies and souls go to the factory-temples, she believes that this is all for the best—the unfortunate and downtrodden are helping to build something great, whether they understand it or not. At the same time, she is granted all of the power and luxury that comes from being the public face of the Temple.

### ☉ **MALKEN SURA (NONBINARY HUMAN CLERIC)**

Malken Sura once went by a different name when they were a lesser cleric in an older, more established religion. Their gambling habit got them into serious debt, and in a desperate attempt to pay off their obligations, they began to partake in corrupt activities, including stealing from their temple. When suspicions turned to them, Malken fled. They changed their name and escaped to a new city, where they discovered the Temple of the New Flesh. Malken's desire for an afterlife without judgment of their past deeds won out over thoughts of penance and redemption. They immediately joined and worked their way up the ranks of the cult.

Malken is a short, broad human of middle age, with thinning black hair and brown eyes. They still indulge in their gambling habit, but their position in the Temple affords them more money than they ever could have dreamed of before. Malken has also luckily avoided a run of bad luck in their games of chance until now. They believe that even if their addiction gets the better of them, they have a secure enough position within the cult that they need not fear the repercussions.

Faults aside, Malken is a proficient Priest and is not only superb at recruiting new converts, but also at helping Temple members who are suffering from crises of faith. They have even managed to garner a position as the head of a factory-temple. The knowledge that souls are sacrificed in the construction of new shells does not sit well with Malken at all, but they know that without the grace of the Temple, they could be destitute, living in the streets, or even dead.

### ☉ **VAZAL EMARKO (MALE CONSTRUCT FIGHTER)**

Once a short and stocky half-elf, Vazal's soul is now ensconced in one of the Temple's construct shells. Vazal's new body is tall and noble, forged of steel and fire-hardened ceramic, and built for battle with spire-like spikes decorating the shoulders. The shell's face mask is stern and sculpted, unlike Vazal's original face.

Vazal is the captain of the Holy Guard, which is charged with protecting the Grand Architect during his public appearances, as well as keeping the factory-temples secure. Vazal also leads efforts to suppress those who speak out against the Temple: he plans and executes clandestine strikes against other religious organizations that openly oppose the Temple, targeting the most outspoken members of their clergy while his guardsmen will provoke confrontations with agitators, letting their opponents strike first so they can claim that they acted in self-defense.

Vazal's original reasons for serving the Temple were selfless: the Temple of the New Flesh helped to nurture and support his aging mother, siblings, and extended family. At first, his loyalty was born from gratitude, knowing that they would be provided for in this life and the next. Now, however, his fanaticism and growing power have turned him cruel.

## EXALTED OFFERINGS

In order to further Astaron's goals, the Temple of the New Flesh maintains a selection of services open to the public. Members work to maintain the benevolent image of the Temple when working with commoners, while the powerful are artfully courted.

### ◆ **BLESSINGS OF ASTARON**

The Temple claims to deliver divine blessings to the worthy, even those who are outside of the cult. These temporary blessings are of special benefit to craftspeople and artificers, and can include increased success when crafting or enchanting items, greater skill when performing tasks like building a wall or wagon, or the ability to regain spent spells.

Though the Temple confers these blessings to members for free, outsiders are obliged to make a donation or undertake a demonstration of faith, such as wearing a badge of the Temple's holy symbol. Members of the cult may gain access to more powerful blessings, such as the ability to animate objects.

### ◆ **CONSTRUCTS**

In addition to the construct bodies made for chosen members of the cult, the artificers of the Temple of the New Flesh also craft constructs of other kinds. These lesser constructs can serve any number of functions—housework, bodyguard duties, or spying, among others—but the common denominator among them is cost, at 5,000 to 10,000 gp. In addition to paying the cost, the recipient of such a construct must be in superb standing with the cult. To be considered worthy enough to receive one of the constructs as a gift is perhaps the highest mark of distinction that the cult can bestow.

#### ◆ CRAFTING

With many artificers working within their factory-temples, the Temple of the New Flesh is often approached by those wishing to have unique items crafted, ranging from 500 to 10,000 gp. Those who can afford such things can commission custom enchanted items, especially animated items such as living insects or dancing swords. Adventurers seeking new magic items may find that their services can be bartered in exchange for a crafted item from the Temple.

## ILLUSTRIOUS ITEMS

#### ◆ AMULET OF THE NEW FLESH - 50 GP (COMMON)

These small trinkets are orbs of clouded glass encased in gold-coated iron. While wearing one, an individual is particularly susceptible to the preaching and proselytizing of Astaron and his followers. The amulet also dulls the sensation of pain, suppresses hunger, and grants the wearer a measure of vitality. These effects serve as a promise of what's to come should they invest their life into gaining a construct body.

#### ◆ BADGE OF PROTECTION - 300 GP (COMMON)

Sometimes the followers of the Temple are met with threats or outright violence. Missionaries in particular are in danger of stirring up angry mobs that view the Temple as a false religion. Though most artificers and paladins of the Temple have access to armor, many lay members rely on these badges to keep them safe. Each one is crafted to resemble the Temple's circular holy symbol and is usually worn on the chest or hip.

When pinned to one's clothing, the badge enchants the wearer with a powerful abjuration spell that grants them a large amount of resistance against the next physical attack that strikes them. As soon as the attack is finished, the badge breaks. Wearing multiple badges at once will cause none of them to work, due to the magical interference caused by their enchantments.

#### ◆ MECHANICAL AUGMENTATION - 500–5,000 GP (UNCOMMON)

Favored members of the Temple of the New Flesh are eligible for a variety of mechanical augmentations that are grafted onto their flesh by the cult's artificers. Each of these augmentations is made bespoke for the recipient, but may also reflect the unique craftsmanship of the artificer. These augmentations strike a balance between being functional and ornamental, so they may be adorned with etchings, embedded with gemstones, or gilded with gold. Augmentations can range from feet that grant enhanced jumping ability to fingers that can be unsheathed to reveal razor-sharp blades. Devices, such as a crossbow or a grappling hook and winch, may also be incorporated into a client's body.

#### ◆ ARCANE AUGMENTATION - 500–5,000 GP (COMMON)

In addition to mechanical augmentations, the Temple also offers ones aimed at spellcasters. These magical implants function similarly to a spellcasting focus (such as an orb or rod), but can be placed or embedded in the body, ensuring that the user can never be deprived of their spellcasting. These implants also disguise the origin of the spell, making it impossible to tell whether it is arcane, eldritch, or divine. The implants are typically placed in the palm of the hand, fingertips, or forehead, but can also be hidden in the heart, mouth, or bones of the spellcaster.

#### ◆ CONSTRUCT SHELL - 500,000 GP (LEGENDARY)

The famous construct bodies of the Temple of the New Flesh are truly magnificent to behold. They are humanoid suits of polished platinum, glistening gold, pristine steel, and hardened ceramic designed to stand the test of time and put even angels to shame. These hollow shells can store the soul of a sentient humanoid indefinitely, meaning that their occupants are essentially immortal. They are incredibly hard to destroy, make the user immune to disease, paralysis, cold, and hunger, and can be customized according to its owner's desires. However, a construct shell is not indestructible; it is vulnerable to dragon's breath, disintegration, acid, and immense force, such as a giant's blow. Like any suit of armor, the shell must be repaired and maintained.

## RUMORS & SECRETS

### SLAVES OF VIRTUE

There are stories that some of the owners of the Temple's construct bodies are slipping into dream-like trances and behaving strangely, including committing bizarre acts of selflessness, speaking someone else's words, and harming themselves when attempting to criticize the Temple. The Temple explains that these trance-like states are expressions of the soul's deepest desires and urges, whether sinful or virtuous, and advises those who experience them to seek counseling with the Temple. However, there are whispers that Astaron and his high-ranking clerics can secretly control those in construct bodies, and the counseling is used to cover up the truth and gaslight acolytes. The most recent incident involved *Alaria Fataran*, a prominent noblewoman who exchanged her body for a constructed one two years ago. Apparently, Alaria was hosting a lavish dinner party when she began bashing her porcelain face against the table. Attendees whisper that Alaria had witnessed something disturbing at her local temple, and was silenced before she could tell her guests.

## THE ROGUE PRIEST

A cleric of the Temple has become disillusioned with the practices of the cult and has gone rogue. According to rumor, they saw the deception being perpetrated by the priests and could not lead another unfortunate soul to annihilation in the faithforges. They used their magic to seize control of the undead laborers in the underworks and commanded them to tear apart their factory-temple from the inside, including destroying the faithforges and the new construct bodies. This cleric has been portrayed by the cult as a depraved lunatic lured to chaos by the dark magic of necromancy, but after destroying their factory-temple, they supposedly sent the zombies out into the streets with messages like "Lies! Slavery! Souls!" The zombies were not hostile but seemed desperate to spread their message. The cleric was captured by the local authorities to face charges of necromancy and mass destruction, though the Temple tried to gain custody of them first.

Some of the errant zombies have yet to be rounded up, and continue to recite their messages wherever their rotting feet lead them. Meanwhile, the cleric is sitting under heavy guard in a dungeon, desperately trying to reveal the truth about the Temple, despite a geas placed on them by Astaron himself.

## ARCANE OR DIVINE?

Astaron is well-known for traveling throughout the realms and putting on miraculous displays of his divinity, often accompanied by cohorts of Acolytes and Priests who also share in the divine arcana and perform healing, blessings, and the like. Recently, one of these festivals was disrupted by a dissident who, according to the Temple, is known for spreading false rumors about the holy order. Supposedly, this individual managed to prevent a miracle by using a magical item that emanated an aura of antimagic. Not only was the miracle stopped, but the priests also seemed to lose their power. The dissident claims this as proof that Astaron is a charlatan—a powerful spellcaster who is bestowing magical gifts upon his clergy with arcane magic, rather than drawing from a divine source.

Of course, the Temple Guard quickly arrived on the scene and arrested the dissident. However, a group of magical scholars suspicious of Astaron and the Temple of the New Flesh have reportedly offered a reward to anyone who can locate and break out the now-imprisoned dissident so that they can investigate his claims.

## A BATTLE OF FAITH

There's a rumor that the Temple of the New Flesh is behind a recent series of attacks on a local shrine belonging to the Order of the Moon, a group of druids. The Order is known to have powerful shapeshifters among its members, as well as shamans whose blessings ensure the fertility and fruitfulness of the local orchards and fields. The Temple apparently approached the Order and subtly threatened to wipe out the druids unless they returned to the wilderness, but was rebuffed.

Soon after, a group of bandits approached the shrine in broad daylight and tried to set fire to it. When they were fought off by the druids, the same thing happened two weeks later. All the while, the Temple has begun to denounce the members of the Order as werewolves and worshippers of beastly gods in their sermons. Among the criminal underworld, it's whispered that the Temple is unwilling to share territory with another faith and will pay a fortune to anyone who destroys the shrine or drives out the Order of the Moon.

## WRATH OF THE GODS

There are rumors among the lay members of the Temple that Astaron has attracted the ire of another god: some of the faithful whisper that a giant, black, robed figure has been spotted outside some of the factory-temples, and those who try to speak to it claim to feel the chill of the grave. According to the witnesses, the thing will only whisper three words: "Bring me Astaron." No one has seen beneath the thing's darkened hood, but some say it carries a staff made of yew and makes a curious clicking sound when it moves, as if it is made entirely of bones. It's speculated that the robed figure is a wrathful god's avatar, sent to challenge Astaron.

Among the Priests of the Temple, panic has spread like wildfire—they whisper that their immortal construct bodies have robbed the god of death of too many souls, and now that god has come to collect the souls of the faithful. Astaron himself seems terrified of the robed figure, but word has spread that he has tasked one of his most trusted Artificers to create a weapon that can wound a god. Though the reward for driving off the dark figure is reported to be immense, no paladin of the Temple has stepped forward to wield the weapon and drive off this menace.

# NOX LIBRIS

Wealth	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
Resources	💧 💧 💧 💧
Defence	🛡️ 🛡️ 🛡️ 🛡️
Influence	⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡
Services	Arcane Research, Necromancy
Disfavored	Barbarians, Druids, Adventurers
Favored	Wizards, Clerics, Bards, Paladins, Scholars, Tieflings, Archaeologists



Day 16. The stone finally cracked. After days of arcane rituals, the tomb finally opened itself to us, the monolithic slab that had previously covered its entrance sundered by the potency of our magic. Thankfully we had warded ourselves in advance, for the onslaught of traps and undead that stood between the tomb's entrance and its treasures was formidable. When eventually we reached the Festering Library, it became clear that our efforts were not in vain. Thousands of skin-bound tomes on the most esoteric of subjects, from fungimancy to hermetic summoning, lie untouched.

— Coatius Bannu, Nox Libris Seeker

**T**here are many who believe certain knowledge should be forbidden, left undisturbed by the probing minds of mortals. However, there are also those who reject the idea that dangerous or taboo lore must be erased or destroyed—instead, they believe knowledge is simply truth, and the truth should be preserved at all costs. These scholars gather and archive forbidden knowledge of all kinds, hoping that by cataloging it, they will better understand the cosmos.

Nox Libris mounts expeditions to the farthest, most perilous corners of the world to find ancient scrolls and tomes, and the more dangerous the lore, the higher ranking the cultist sent to recover it. When members visit ancient tombs, they collect only secrets, not wealth—if a member excavates a grave for an artifact, it is for study and understanding. Members are always accompanied by paladins dedicated to the cause. Their purpose is both to provide protection against ignorant peasants or restless dead and to intervene should a scholar be tempted to wrest control of the lore for their own selfish

desires. All acquisitions are brought to Nox Libris' hidden lair, the *Archivus Abyssa*—a huge library with reading rooms, spell forges, and alchemical workshops—where the organization dissects the knowledge it acquires.

## THE GRAND CRUSADE

The members of Nox Libris view their quest to collect and preserve forbidden knowledge as a clandestine crusade waged against both the ignorance of their fellow mortals and the ravages of time. Though scholars rarely seek out violent confrontations, they often find themselves on the wrong end of pitchforks and swords. Such situations sometimes require a scholar to unleash the dark powers they study. These incidents are considered unfortunate necessities, and secrecy and discretion are valued much more highly than bloodshed.

Nox Libris scholars are well acquainted with dungeons, ruins, and the lairs of foul creatures, which causes them to cross paths with adventurers. Nox Libris scholars regard adventurers with a mixture of wariness and disdain, since they tend to be motivated solely by

money or personal power and may discard or destroy what Nox Libris calls precious, especially dark books and artifacts. Worse, adventurers often take it upon themselves to deal out death and judgment—not just on a ruin's treasures and inhabitants, but on Nox Libris expeditions as well. When confronted with an adventuring party, it's the responsibility of Nox Libris paladins to preserve an uneasy peace.

## DARK COMMUNIONS

Though Nox Libris eschews wanton destruction and the enslavement of mortals, its members communicate with beings that revel in such atrocities. Whether archdemons from an infernal plane or eldritch abominations from beyond time and space, these beings are undeniably dangerous. Rather than forbid dealing with such terrors, Nox Libris prefers to focus on what these beings can offer mortals, such as knowledge of the soul, the nature of reality, or even the future. Communing with chaotic interplanar beings is a cornerstone of Nox Libris' vast knowledge, but every ritual is approached with the acknowledgment that one mistake could wreak destruction on the entire organization. If a ritual circle fails, or if a single mage attracts the attention of a creature too powerful to control, the Library and all its volumes might be swept into the abyss. This prospect has forced members to carefully restrict the summoning of dark beings, but more extreme members have begun to resent this...

## DEEP DELVING

Perhaps the most important of Nox Libris' activities are its expeditions. These are dangerous journeys in search of artifacts, such as forgotten grimoires, or locations, like scrollariums containing the names and histories of mages whose exploits were purged from history. These expeditions may take the cult's scholars to humid jungles or the depths of the ocean—anywhere dungeons, tombs, and ruins of the past might lurk. Some of the more famous expeditions are featured in the cult's historical encyclopedias, including that of a team of scholars sent beyond the stone at the *Bazaar of Markoon* and into an antediluvian necropolis, where they extracted the location of the notorious *Explicatum* manuscript. Other infamous accounts include the search for the *Sanguineous City of the Leech Queen* and the exploration of the *Catacombs of Madeaux*, where Nox Libris plundered an ancient civilization's mummified corpses, each of which was wrapped in scrolls illustrating the secrets of life after death.

## SOPHIA LAZARA

AGE: 33

RACE: Tiefling

OCCUPATION: Master Scholar

SPECIALTY: Necromancy, Conjuraction, Outer Dark Communing

**A**striking woman with white eyes set against pale, pearlescent skin, Sophia Lazara was once a devotee of the gods of learning. In her quest for knowledge, she stumbled upon the *Phantom Opus*, a book of vile lore forbidden by her fellow priests. Therein she discovered much that was hidden and had a revelation: knowledge is neither good nor evil.

Her faith shaken, Sophia began to secretly pursue dark lore and preserve it from benighted folk who would rather burn a distasteful book than learn from it. She came to believe that truth would set mortals truly free and that the enemies of all thinking people are ignorance and fear. Her diligence and zeal attracted others to her cause, and Sophia naturally became their leader, eventually forming Nox Libris. Knowing full well that some in the organization conspire to use its secrets for their own nefarious purposes, one of Sophia's chief duties is ridding the ranks of traitors to Nox Libris' noble cause.

◆ **THE INFINITE LIBRARY** – Legend tells of a demiplane containing an infinite library in which every book contains pages full of random combinations of letters. The library stretches forever and is thus believed to contain every book ever written, hidden among the millions of gibberish-filled tomes. Sophia is obsessed with finding this library.

◆ **MORAL DILEMMA** – Sophia has been negotiating for years with various archdemons from abyssal planes for their knowledge of creation and the workings of the cosmos. However, the demons demand the sacrifice of mortal souls as payment—something Sophia is reluctant to provide.

Sophia is an accomplished spellcaster, and her knowledge of the dark arts is nearly unparalleled. Though physically frail, she supplements her weakness by summoning powerful servants when threatened.

✦ **DARK TONGUE**: Sophia can speak, read, and understand demonic, fey, and other unearthly languages. She also knows many words and names of power and can command some extraplanar beings.

✦ **BOUND PROTECTORS**: When in danger, Sophia can summon demonic protectors that defend her to the death. These protectors are immune to fire and mundane weapons.

✦ **MASTER OF UNDEATH**: If killed, Sophia can travel from the Realm of Death and inhabit another body, willing or unwilling. The only way to kill her permanently is to trap and destroy her soul.

## LEADER & FOLLOWERS

Like other organizations shunned by society, Nox Libris hides itself from the outside world's scrutiny. The Archivus Abyssa, along with its reading rooms, feast halls, and dormitories, is well hidden; some rumors claim it lies under a ruined citadel, or at the root of a mountain.

### NOX LIBRIS RANKS

Rank	Responsibilities
Page <sup>1</sup>	Attending higher-ranking members, studying forbidden lore
Scribe <sup>1</sup>	Transcription, translation, maintaining the library
Binder <sup>2</sup>	Researching spells, spellcrafting
Exegete <sup>2</sup>	Speaking with the dead, translation, interpretation
Seeker <sup>2</sup>	Undertaking expeditions, collecting lost or hidden knowledge
Savant <sup>3</sup>	Leading and planning expeditions, preserving and transporting relics
Infiltrator <sup>3</sup>	Disseminating dark lore, spreading propaganda, finding allies
Sage <sup>3</sup>	Interpreting discovered lore and spells, advising the Great Librarian
Great Librarian <sup>4</sup>	Approving expeditions, organization management, interpreting discovered lore

1 - low rank, 2 - medium rank, 3 - high rank, 4 - leader

Scholars of Nox Libris wear distinctive hooded robes, as well as stoles made from scrolls. These scrolls may contain notes, spells, or wards to keep the scholar safe while delving into the cult's dark tomes. Other members, especially Seekers and paladins, may outfit themselves similarly to adventurers, though most Seekers can be identified by the heavy, mobile bookcases they carry on their backs.

#### ☉ SOPHIA LAZARA (FEMALE TIEFLING WARLOCK)

After assuming the title of Great Librarian, Sophia Lazara bound herself to a pact with a demonic prince known as *Fraguul the Mazemind*. From this contract she draws immense spellcasting power and the ability to retain immense quantities of complex information, which she uses to great effect in her leadership of Nox Libris.

As well as storing vile knowledge from sources such as the *Book of Ovras*, Sophia catalogs information about librarians, scholars, clerics, and other gatekeepers who she feels stand between the general populace and the dispelling of ignorance. She believes these supposedly enlightened few are the reason so many are held in bondage to the narrow views of the past. Rather than carry out assassinations or kidnappings, Sophia believes that even these gatekeepers may be swayed by cunning words and dramatic demonstrations that reveal the necessity of dark knowledge. In an effort to spread enlightenment to the wise and the powerful, Sophia has ordered many members of the cult to infiltrate temples, universities, and magical academies. There, her emissaries perform dark rituals designed to entice not only students and laypersons but also grandmasters and priests.

#### ☉ GOLTORAH THE CRAFTY (MALE HALF-ELF BARD)

Goltorah is a rakish half-elf and a self-taught bard. While it's true that he sings well and has a deft hand at the harp, his main job is tracking down the truths of myths and legends as a Seeker for Nox Libris. A tall, slender fellow, Goltorah favors extravagant clothing but wears sober gray when working. As a walking, singing encyclopedia of strange stories and horrific folktales, he's an amusement to many Nox Libris members—and an annoyance to others. Despite his flamboyant persona, Goltorah is truly a scholar—just of a different type. He has spent months and years at a time tracking down the origins of age-old local tales and the rumored locations of ancient tombs and battles, all in service of unearthing lore once buried or burned out of written records.

Nox Libris values him, since it knows that not all knowledge is found in books.

Goltorah is more comfortable with criminals and wanderers than most Nox Libris scholars, and his worldliness has helped guide many expeditions away from disaster. Despite his immersion in a world of horrors and unspeakable knowledge, he is an idealist, and truly believes in the organization's crusade.

#### ☉ ABIZON HANOR (MALE GNOME WIZARD)

Abizon is a middle-aged gnome who has spent decades building a private collection of dark curiosities and tomes that would be burned by lesser scholars. He is white-haired and bearded, and his giant bifocals grant him the appearance of a kindly grandfather. To friends and fellow scholars, he is simply a rich, slightly eccentric old gnome with a world-class collection of bizarre trinkets. In truth, Abizon is driven by an obsession that threatens to consume him: the pursuit of soul gates. Through dark rituals and with the



remains of dozens of corpses stolen from local graveyards, Abizon has built portals that allow departed souls to once again take flesh. Though imperfect and often messy, these soul gates promise to not only raise long-dead sages and mages, but also to offer a new route to immortality. It was this research that drew Nox Libris' attention, and Abizon happily accepted the cult's resources and expertise.

Recently, however, Abizon has grown weary of the organization's conservative approach to dark knowledge. He believes his soul gates are the key to changing the world, and he resents Sophia keeping his work resigned to secrecy.

### **MURBOL RUSKIN (FEMALE HALF-ORC PALADIN)**

Murbol, a half-orc woman of twenty-four summers, is the adopted daughter of a Nox Libris bookbinder named Vermer. Unlike people in the outside world, the members of Nox Libris have never treated Murbol like she was different. She's often judged by outsiders, but inside the Library she's simply Murbol.

To Vermer's dismay, Murbol found her calling not with page and ink but with blade and shield, protecting the members of Nox Libris. She has sworn the oath of a Nox Libris paladin, though her devotion to the organization has granted her abilities that some might consider unholy or even demonic. Murbol, however, embraces these powers, believing them to be misunderstood, as she once was. Though young and inexperienced, she takes her duties and training extremely seriously.

Murbol has had her eye on Goltorah for some time, ever since he taught her to use a blade. To him, it was a duty; to her it was much more. To the senior members of Nox Libris, Murbol's earnestness and idealism are both admirable and concerning—they need paladins who believe in their mission, but naivety can be dangerous.

## ARCANE SERVICES

Despite its mission to preserve knowledge, Nox Libris is notoriously careful with allowing outsiders to access their library. Members can usually access the organization's services at no or significantly reduced cost, but outsiders always pay—and pay handsomely.

### ◆ TRANSLATION

Nox Libris members know most languages, including ones that haven't been used for thousands of years. If a client comes across a passage they can't understand, Nox Libris offers translation services. Fees begin at 250 gp and use a sliding scale based on the rarity of the language and the content of the work. If the work is unknown to Nox Libris and is of sufficient interest to be added to its collection, the fee may be reduced or waived, provided the character allows a copy to be made.

### ◆ CONVERSE WITH THE DEAD

If a client needs information from a corpse or spirit, Nox Libris spellcasters can speak with the dead. The organization insists on a 300 gp fee, along with the right to record the interview (while the cash amount is negotiable, the right to record is not). A spellcaster and a scribe will meet the client in a neutral location to cast the appropriate ritual.

### ◆ SPELL RESEARCH

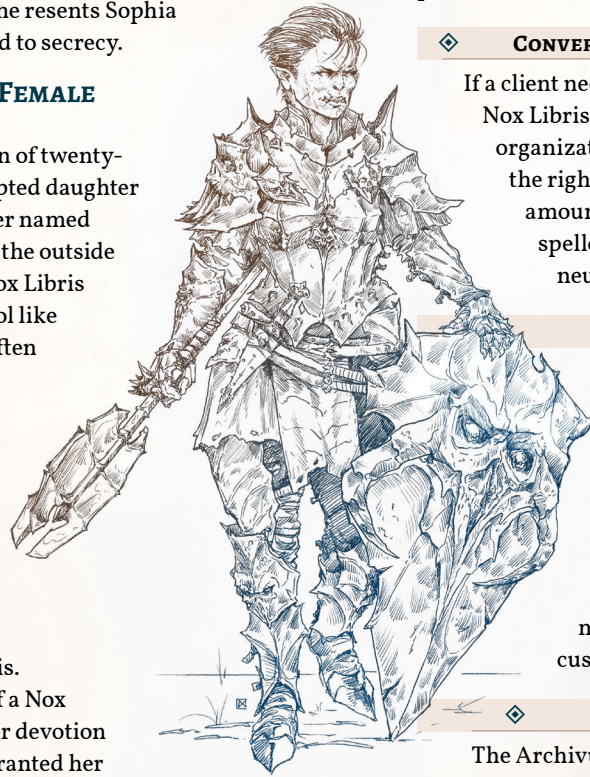
The Archivus Abyssa holds many spellbooks, including some so ancient that they are thought to contain magical techniques from which all modern spells have their genesis. For a fee of 200 gp per spell level, a client may copy a spell from a Nox Libris tome, though members must first be convinced that the customer is worthy to wield such magic.

### ◆ SAGE ADVICE

The Archivus Abyssa contains innumerable secrets, some of which cannot be found anywhere else. For a fee of 50–500 gp, visitors can consult with members to uncover information. Fees are charged on a sliding scale depending on the rarity and complexity of the answer. The Library also contains a selection of useful magic items; trusted clients are required to leave a sizable deposit (usually in the thousands of gold coins) to secure the loan of an item for a short period of time.

### ◆ ARTIFACT RETRIEVAL

For a fee ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 gp, members will agree to secure a forbidden artifact within a certain period of time. Fees vary depending on the potential dangers involved in securing the item. Nox Libris insists on carefully worded contracts specifying transfer of ownership. Additionally, the organization always insists on the right to study, analyze, and possibly transcribe the contents of the item before delivering it to the client.



## ARCANE ITEMS

The following items are unique to Nox Libris and used by its members.

### ◆ PROFANE SPELL SCROLLS – 100–50,000 GP (COMMON TO LEGENDARY)

Written on sheets of humanoid skin, ancient papyrus, or folios made from dried fungi, profane spell scrolls contain truly abominable and terrifying arcana. Though the severity of the spells varies from mere trickery of the mind to realm-threatening necromancy, each spell has been forbidden from study in most mage academies. Some of the more notorious spells include Rite of Bestial Emergence, which transforms the caster into a monstrous, eyeless creature; the Sanguineous Hex, which slowly drains its victim of blood; and Six Circles of Suffering, which usually drives its target mad long before reaching its conclusion.

### ◆ TRANSLATOR'S LENS – 400 GP (UNCOMMON)

These magnifying glasses are enchanted with a spell that translates almost any written word they magnify into the common tongue or any language that an attuned creature can read. The translation is literal and word for word and thus may miss subtle nuances. The lens will not decode secret messages incorporated into accompanying sigils or symbols, and the exact meaning of phrases in certain vernaculars, such as thieves' cant or Druidic, may be lost. Some translator's lenses have a secondary enchantment that allows the translation to be telepathically communicated to other sentient creatures within a small radius, thus ensuring the validity of any translated documents.

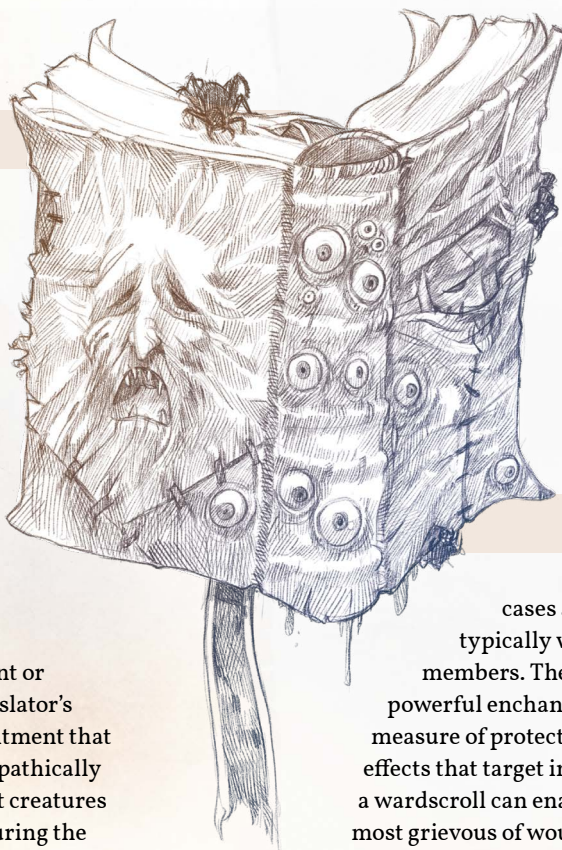
### ◆ TOME OF LOATHSOME LORE – 5,000 GP (RARE)

Some tomes that have been translated and copied by Nox Libris are reproduced in new editions and then sold on the black market or even handed out to those seeking enlightenment. These books often contain forbidden magic dealing with raising the dead, summoning demons, mind control, and creation of harmful illusions, among others. The magic in these tomes usually manifests in disturbing ways; for example, after perusing the pages,

a reader may find their fingers stained with blood. Most tomes contain several relatively powerful spells as well as lore and knowledge that may not be available anywhere else. Some tomes are known to have minds and personalities of their own and may even be able to speak to their readers, though this can be dangerous.

### ◆ PORTABLE LIBRARY – 1,500 GP (RARE)

This rucksack contains an extradimensional space that can be opened only when a command word is uttered. If the command word is not spoken, the rucksack opens regularly and can contain around 1 cubic foot or 30 pounds of material. Speaking the command word reveals an extradimensional space capable of containing only books, scrolls, tablets, and other written works. It can hold up to 8 cubic feet or 80 pounds. Any other item placed in the extradimensional space is immediately ejected either into the bag's usual space or from the bag entirely if it is full. Items in the extradimensional space are impervious to detection by any means while they remain inside.



### ◆ WARDSCROLL – 500 GP (UNCOMMON)

Wardscrolls are sealed into iron cases and attached to thick iron chains typically worn around the neck or waist of cult members. The scrolls themselves are imbued with powerful enchantments that give the wearer some measure of protection from attacks, especially magical effects that target intellect and memory. Furthermore, a wardscroll can enable its wearer to stabilize even the most grievous of wounds. Some wardscrolls are enchanted to provide a measure of resistance against damage inflicted by certain hazards like traps or by specific kinds of creatures, such as undead. No Nox Libris member would dare head out on an expedition without first ensuring their wardscroll is appropriately enchanted.

# RUMORS & SECRETS

## IT'S READING US

An apprentice librarian has disappeared. Her most recent assignment was to transcribe certain passages from an ancient tome: the *Grimoire of Ended Dreams*. This book is kept in a specially prepared room deep in the Archivus Abyssa, where it lies shackled to an adamantine lectern with chains of cold iron. The metal bindings are forged from ore of the elemental planes, and the chamber, secured behind a door containing seven layers of sealing enchantments, is scored with mystical sigils of sequestration and binding. These precautions are of the utmost necessity, for the tome is filled with deep magic of a singularly detestable nature. Members tell stories of how the book seems to move of its own accord, whispering in a tongue unknown to mortals and tempting the reader to succumb to its will. The apprentice was equipped with the most sophisticated abjuration spells before she went to work. She entered and was sure to activate the seven seals behind her, as usual, but now nothing can be heard from within besides whispering and an occasional gloating chuckle.

## HIVE OF BLASPHEMY

A holy order of clerics dedicated to the gods of wisdom have heard rumors of the existence of Nox Libris and are horrified that corrupted knowledge is being gathered, preserved, and placed in the hands of mortals who don't know better. The order quickly formed small detachments of zealous paladins to counter the cult's crusade and has already managed to imprison and torture several individuals suspected of collaborating with Nox Libris. The holy order's greatest goal is to find the Archivus Abyssa itself. However, it appears this holy order is not destroying the evil lore it seizes. Hearsay claims the order has its own secret archive of dark tomes and artifacts, which they supposedly use to design defenses and wards for the holy order's followers. Rather than disseminate dark lore like Nox Libris wishes to do, the holy order would keep it sealed away for its own use. These claims seem to point to a sinister conclusion: Nox Libris has a rival.

## A THIEF AND A TRAITOR

Gossip is rife within the Archivus Abyssa regarding the mysterious disappearance of some odious scrolls from the blasphemous archive's deepest vaults. Sophia and her advising Sages are gravely concerned, for the scrolls contain a ritual to summon a faceless entity capable of stealing memories from humanoids. In the past, Nox Libris used this creature to retrieve knowledge from unwilling minds, but its malice and unpredictability forced Nox Libris to lock it away in a hermetically sealed and magically warded vault. Now the cult must find the being—which is presumably

wandering loose within the Archivus Abyssa—discover who released it, and determine why a person would do such a thing. As disturbing as a traitor within Nox Libris could be, even more concerning is speculation that the creature was summoned specifically to steal passwords from other members, in order to unlock the more restricted parts of the Library. However, following the trail of a creature that can steal memories may be tricky.

## A DEVELOPING SCHISM

Some Nox Libris members have come to view scholarly preservation and thoughtful study as a gross waste of potential. These more radical members argue that simply recovering and hiding away forbidden lore does nothing to advance mortal civilizations or change perspectives of good and evil. Instead, the extremists argue, Nox Libris should reveal itself completely and openly show the world what wonders can be wrought through dark powers.

To more cautious members, this desire is madness at best and thinly veiled despotism at worst. Some believe the radicals plan to use Nox Libris' resources to establish themselves as dark lords of the realms; others suspect they've already begun stealing select texts and artifacts and making deals with demons and other entities. Of course, having the Great Librarian speak out against such rebels is pointless, as Sophia Lazara herself is bound in a pact with a potent demon lord.

## SECRETED SCROLLS

Over the past few months, strange scrolls have been appearing in the libraries of a local university. These scrolls contain information that the institution considers taboo, and hopes to conceal from its students. Subject matter includes necromantic rituals for summoning grave titans and the rumored locations of dark artifacts. So far, the university has been unable to find out where these scrolls are coming from or who is responsible for writing them.

The university had assumed that it was a student prank, but research into the scrolls reveals their contents to be genuine, proving they are coming from the outside world. Now, the university is looking for investigators to help them identify the source of the scrolls and, if possible, prevent them from continuing to spread dangerous information. In truth, the scrolls are being placed into the library by Nox Libris agents posing as students by using illusion magic and other disguises. Careful observation in the library reveals one of these agents, who can be traced back to a cult safehouse where the scrolls are being written.

# ORDO UMBRIS

Wealth	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
Resources	💧 💧 💧 💧
Defence	♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥
Influence	⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡
Services	Spying, Extortion, Doppelgangers
Disfavored	Paladins, Clerics
Favored	Rogues, Wizards, Rangers, Shapeshifters, Halflings

*That, my lords, is why we gather in secret. I have reason to believe the Duke's recent irregular behavior is due to his chamberlain having been placed under the control of, if not entirely replaced by, agents of an insidious and heretofore unknown organization. My informants whisper the name 'Ordo Umbris' and they pale as they do so, such is their dread.*

— Gorun Glanndur, Spymaster of Guennec

**F**ew even know the name Ordo Umbris. Fewer still know who might be a member of that most secretive of organizations. And there are only one or two who know all of its members. The rest are organized into discreet, separate cells, each working toward a small facet of the organization's secret goals, and each member is engaged in their own plots and schemes to rise in the organization's hierarchy.

Ordo Umbris' members are known to be sophisticated, patient spies that carefully bank every piece of useful information they can find. The agents are supported by a network of powerful spellcasters and transmuters that can change an operative's physical appearance, scry a victim's most closely-held secrets, and even dominate a mark's mind. Ordo Umbris' towering ambition is to control every major noble household, including the highest royalty. In this way, they hope to control everything they lay eyes on, from such mundane matters as international trade to which wars are fought by whom and for what purpose. For centuries, Ordo Umbris' members worked for enormous fees, aiding courtesans and nobles vying for power and biding their time until they could launch their master plan. Now, if a target will not cooperate, they are brought



to heel. This is achieved through blackmail, intimidation, or even assassinations disguised as accidents. While these methods are certainly menacing, even more disturbing is the cult's ability to entirely replace individuals with their own agents—Ordo Umbris imposters pride themselves on being seamless substitutes for nearly anyone...and being more convincing than the original.

## SPINNING THE WEB

It begins with words. An Ordo Umbris operative overhears something or intercepts a letter, and an indiscretion becomes leverage to suborn a low-level courtier or servant. This compromised person, termed a pawn by Ordo Umbris, leads to other, more highly-placed pawns, and soon the web is spun. The distinction between operative and pawn is crucial: operatives are full members of Ordo Umbris, loyal to the organization only. Pawns are people controlled by Ordo Umbris operatives. In a feudal society, power rests in very few hands. The high-born are surrounded by sycophants, scavengers, and leeches as courtiers scabble to advance themselves on the coattails of the exalted. Sometimes Ordo Umbris makes delicate overtures to dissatisfied, ambitious figures, offering their services to aid in overcoming

rivals and increasing influence. In return, Ordo Umbris asks little at first; revealing sensitive information or ensuring that a certain door remains unlocked and unguarded at a certain time are deniable oversights, to be sure. But soon enough, the screws begin to turn, and the person realizes their true nature as a pawn.

The more pawns an operative controls—or the more important the pawn—the more power the operative wields within Ordo Umbris. One rule governs networks: operatives don't poach on another's patch. One operative might control Duke Anton's household while another controls Countess Ursula's, and their networks don't mix.

## PUPPETMASTERS OF POLITICS

What might appear trivial, like gathering court gossip, is but a cog in the machine that powers Ordo Umbris' plans. These elaborate schemes may include promoting internal power struggles in a noble's court, supporting peasant revolts (or starting them in the first place), hiring bandits or pirates to disrupt a city's trade, or concocting scandals that precipitate the downfall of royal dynasties. Preventing any one of Ordo Umbris' plans from coming to fruition might further another—or many others. The organization's leaders have been known to build failure into one scheme to divert attention from another, allowing it to blossom undetected. Knowing the difference between foiling a plan and simply playing into a different one is often impossible.

## ANATOMY OF DECEPTION

When the organization targets a powerful person for replacement, whether at the behest of a client or for its own purposes, it follows a strict pattern. Typically, an operative who closely resembles the target studies them, perfecting their manner, bearing, and appearance. The operative hones their own skills in disguise and deception, often augmented by magic. Next, the operative spends a few weeks or months disguised as the target's servant, a member of their entourage, or a similar role that allows them to get close, such as a barber or surgeon. The goal is for the operative to familiarize themselves with the other key figures in the target's life, as well as the target's current situation. When the organization deems the time ripe, the target is removed, either by kidnapping or assassination. The operative assumes the target's life—from boardroom to bedroom—but the operative's loyalties lie wholly with Ordo Umbris. In extreme circumstances, an imposter might be specially bred and trained for the role.

## THEDEI HILRATO

AGE: 43

RACE: Human

OCCUPATION: Spymaster

SPECIALTY: Planning, Strategy, Deception

**T**hedei is ostensibly the leader of Ordo Umbris—she is the one who hands down orders to the agents, she decides who advances in the ranks, and she has the final word on the contracts they take. She is a tall, elegant woman in her early forties with long black hair and pale skin, but few have seen her face—she usually wears a mask, even around operatives.

In conversation, Thedei is calm and humorless, speaking with only the barest hint of humanity. She is neither cruel nor arrogant—only coldly pragmatic. In truth, Thedei is an enigma even to her fellows—she never seems to sleep, eat, or drink, and is never seen outside the organization's headquarters. The implication is clear: Thedei is only the face of Ordo Umbris because she keeps people from looking for the true masterminds.

◆ **ROGUE OPERATIVE:** Unbeknownst to most members of the cult, Thedei has been personally tasked with tracking down a missing operative, an imposter named Arabella the Face, who has gone rogue and jeopardized the organization's plans. Arabella is in possession of a *false face* that she has been using to impersonate a princess in a neighboring realm.

◆ **THREE THEDEIS:** Rumor is spreading that there is not just one Thedei, but three. The supposed leader of Ordo Umbris has been spotted in conversation with duplicates of herself. In addition, some operatives have been receiving peculiar tasks of late that seem to only benefit Thedei rather than serve the organization's master plan.

If threatened, Thedei calls on elaborate illusion spells that cause her enemies to question reality and their own senses. She tends to evade enemies until she sees an opportunity for a killing blow with a dagger or a touch.

◆ **AURA OF ILLUSION:** Thedei has the ability to surround herself with doppelgangers, become invisible, or deceive the senses of those who get too close. Her preferred tactic is to convince an enemy that one of their allies is the real Thedei.

## LEADER & FOLLOWERS

Very little is known about the people who control Ordo Umbris—not only are their names and whereabouts a mystery, but they also work very hard to conceal their physical descriptions.

### ORDO UMBRIS RANKS

Rank	Responsibilities
Spy <sup>1</sup>	Eavesdropping, tailing, spying
Enforcer <sup>1</sup>	Blackmail, threats, arson, intimidation
Forger <sup>1</sup>	Forgery, fraud, theft of documents
Warder <sup>2</sup>	Protecting the cult from infiltration or counterspying
Assassin <sup>2</sup>	Assassination, torture
Transmuter <sup>3</sup>	Disguising operatives, creating false identities, brainwashing
Imposter <sup>3</sup>	Adopting false identities, imitating targets
Taskmaster <sup>4</sup>	Managing agents, distributing tasks, monitoring plans
Hidden Master <sup>4</sup>	Overseeing the Master Plan

1 - low rank, 2 - medium rank, 3 - high rank, 4 - leader

Members of Ordo Umbris carefully ensure that they bear no identifying marks or clothing that connect them to the organization, but in private meetings among other members, they usually wear clothing decorated with eye motifs or raven feathers, along with masks.

### ☉ THEDEI HILRATO (FEMALE HUMAN ROGUE)

Thedei takes her orders directly from the Hidden Masters of Ordo Umbris, whose true identities remain a secret even from her. Currently, Thedei's efforts center on overthrowing monarchs, either by aiding coups or fomenting bloody rebellions. Her long-term goal is to wipe out powerful families and install new rulers that will be easily swayed by Ordo Umbris' gold or threats. Some things can be divined about the true leaders of Ordo Umbris based on Thedei's actions. First, they are ambitious—they aim to quietly seize power over entire kingdoms and continents. Second, they take pleasure in sowing deception and mistrust—their designs have a kind of poetry to them that betrays an obsession with the mortal mind. As for their identities, only wild speculation is possible—some believe a Master may take on the guise of a common beggar to hide in plain sight.

### ☉ THE NEW MOON (FEMALE DWARF ROGUE)

The true identity of the Ordo Umbris operative known as The New Moon is immaterial, though those who've been lucky (or unlucky) enough to speak directly to them are convinced she's a woman. In any case, it's clear that she's a highly-placed agent within the organization, and has the ear of those who make the real decisions. She always appears in multiple layers of disguises, both mundane and magical, and never the same one twice, though the outfits usually feature deep blue or black. Her voice is also as changeable as the wind: it ranges from a subtle and seductive contralto to an annoying, high-pitched squeak. These abilities make her one of Ordo

Umbris' most effective operatives, able to infiltrate anywhere from a common taproom to a royal gala effortlessly. The New Moon is also Ordo Umbris' representative for potential recruits. If adventurers let it be known that they seek work, a message might find its way into their hands, setting up a meeting in one of the city's parks. The New Moon always schedules her meetings on moonless nights (hence her moniker) when the shadows are deepest, and always outdoors, even when the snows are hip deep.



### ☉ KENAN BOSCOWAN (NONBINARY DOPPELGANGER FIGHTER)

It is an open secret among the operatives of Ordo Umbris that Kenan Boscowan, as they claim to be called, is a doppelganger. Their true form is an uncannily amorphous humanoid shape devoid of all discernible features that slinks into and out of sight with a sickening sound that unnerves all who hear it. Kenan is the cult's contact to the criminal underworld, and they work closely with crime syndicates to supply Ordo Umbris with a steady flow of enforcers who are willing to do the dirty work of blackmailing and threatening politicians and other low-ranking officials. As well as supplying these new recruits, Kenan manages to prevent any one crime family from gaining superiority over the others by constantly interfering with their own politics. They've never been ordered to do so by Ordo Umbris, but they seem to delight in the chaos and bloodshed that they can create with a simple impersonation.

Kenan's favored humanoid guise is that of a portly, middle-aged thug whose large frame hides a formidable strength. They wear unremarkable clothing and have a rough-and-ready haircut that helps them blend in with the salt-of-the-earth folk that they interact with. The only tell that Kenan is not as they seem is a mercury-like substance that oozes from their wounds.

### ☉ **SERAPHINA MOURNELL (FEMALE ELF ROGUE)**

A master poisoner and strategic genius, Seraphina is one of the higher-ranking operatives within Ordo Umbris. Despite her high rank, Seraphina is not one of the transmuter mages or skilled actors who take the place of powerful political figures, but rather a problem solver—her main role within the organization is to eliminate individuals who are magically warded against scrying, have some protection against having their identities stolen, or are powerful enough in their own right to be dangerous to imitate for long.

To eliminate her targets, Seraphina creates poisons whose effects are as carefully crafted as a marble statue. She knows how to concoct an ointment that will cause immense pain for precisely six minutes, followed by a ten-minute period of suggestibility, culminating in a death indistinguishable from a stroke. Seraphina deals with these special targets with a cold, emotionless efficiency that makes her thoroughly unlikeable, even to those she works with. She has a cult-sponsored laboratory where she mixes these heinous tinctures, which are strictly off-limits to other operatives. Some believe this prohibition exists because Seraphina is responsible for tying up loose ends within the cult itself, and does not wish for her signature concoctions to fall into another's hands.



## DEVIOS OFFERINGS

Ordo Umbris offers an array of services to select clients, each of which carries an extravagant price. The organization usually accepts gold for its work, but it may also ask for a quid pro quo arrangement, instead trading secrets and favors for its services. The cost, however, might be more than a client can bear, for Ordo Umbris always keeps incontrovertible proof that it has worked on another's behalf. Business is business, after all, and blackmail is just another business.

### ◆ **SPYING**

If you need sensitive information about a person or organization, Ordo Umbris can get it for you. Spying can involve copying documents, surveilling a target, learning their plans, or finding out who their allies are. Depending on the profile of the target and the expected difficulty, prices can range from 100 gp to 400 gp.

### ◆ **BLACKMAIL**

Often, it's better to strike fear into your enemy's heart than to simply kill them. What better way to do that than threaten to open their closet and expose their skeletons? If your target has no compromising secrets, then Ordo Umbris can manufacture a compromising episode, such as a honey trap. Acquiring and threatening to expose an existing dirty secret starts at 500 gp, and creating one starts at 750 gp.

### ◆ **BRAINWASHING**

Of course, the most elegant way to get your enemy to do your bidding is to convince them that it's the right thing to do. For prices starting at 5,000 gp, Ordo Umbris has the means to remove a target, whisk them away while replacing them with a trained double, and then introduce intricate methods of changing their heart and mind. Once the process is complete, they are sent back as a new person.

### ◆ **ASSASSINATION**

Killing is distasteful and risky, and Ordo Umbris has largely stopped performing assassinations. In rare circumstances, its operatives can execute discreet removals of troublesome people, contriving the tragic loss to look like an innocent accident. Nevertheless, elimination of people starts at 6,000 gp.

### ◆ **FULL REPLACEMENT**

When all else fails, simply replace an enemy. Ordo Umbris specializes in removing individuals and replacing them with skilled, convincing operatives. That operative is guaranteed to follow the orders that the client issues through Ordo Umbris for a period of time as negotiated by the client—after that, the original is returned or disposed of. Prices start at 10,000 gp.

## SINISTER ITEMS

Ordo Umbris has a fabled enchanted vault, whispered about in the lower ranks of the cult, that is said to be filled with magic items of all varieties. Some say these items are crafted by the cult members themselves, others say they're gifted to the cult by some shadowy entity that the cult works for. The truth is still shrouded in secrecy, but it's certain that the cult has access to a range of mysterious magic items.

### ◆ FALSE FACE - 1,500 GP (RARE)

These plain masks are similar to those worn to masquerade balls, but have no ornamentation and only come in two colors: black or white. A creature that wears the mask can use it to change their physical appearance into anything that they wish, provided that it retains the same general form. The transformation is illusory and doesn't stand up to a close physical inspection, but otherwise appears flawless. The masks can be used to create an entirely new appearance, or they can precisely mimic the appearance of someone the user has seen before. A creature that employs a single guise using the mask for more than one lunar cycle might find their natural features shifting slowly toward that of the illusory identity.

### ◆ PRETENDER'S GLOVE - 150 GP (UNCOMMON)

These individual gloves come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and styles. They can be as unassuming as a woolen, fingerless mitt or as dainty and delicate as a sequined silk elbow-length glove. The gloves allow their wearers to flawlessly forge the handwriting and signature of another creature, provided that the glove was worn when shaking hands with or touching the creature whose writing the glove needs to impersonate. Although the glove can mimic handwriting without issue, it cannot advise the writer on the particular style or phrases that another individual might use. The glove can only store one calligraphic identity at a time.

### ◆ EARSPIKE - 50 GP (COMMON)

These trumpet-like apparatuses are used by Ordo Umbris to eavesdrop on conversations happening in another room. The pointed end of the brass pipe is softly hammered into a space between wooden wall panels or between the cracks of a stone wall. The user then places their ear up

against the flared end of the earspike, and can magically listen to what's being spoken of on the other side of the wall. While using an earspike, a creature is particularly vulnerable to loud noises on the other side of the wall.

### ◆ THE UMBRIS APPARATUS - 500,000 GP (LEGENDARY)

This arcane machine is a hideous thing to behold. It consists of two glass cylinders, each around eight feet tall and three feet in diameter. These cylinders are connected to an arcane machine via a twisting network of brass pipes. The machine itself resembles a combination of an iron maiden and a steam engine, which glows with green light when in use. Each glass cylinder can hold a sentient humanoid. Once the cylinders are sealed, another creature can then use a magical control panel mounted on the front of the central machine to exchange the souls of

the creatures in the cylinders.

The process is delicate, and requires immense skill on the part of the operator. If the procedure fails, the souls become trapped in the central machine and must be extracted before the Umbris Apparatus can be used again.



### ◆ BLACKHEART POISON - 300 GP (UNCOMMON)

Among the agents of Ordo Umbris, this poison is highly prized for its adaptability. It can be placed in food or drink, slathered on a blade or arrow, or soaked into a glove and transmitted through the victim's skin. A vial of the poison appears pitch-black, but once exposed to the air, it turns transparent.

The effects of the poison can be changed based on how it is prepared. In its base state, the fluid is entirely harmless. However, upon being heated for one minute over an open flame, it gains the ability to destroy a victim's heart in roughly half an hour and can be applied to weapons. If mixed with water, it causes extreme bleeding upon ingestion and results in death in a few minutes. If mixed with a drop of ink, it will soak through the skin of its target and paralyze them for up to an hour.

## RUMORS & SECRETS

### A LETTER AND A LIE

A queen has come to believe that an Ordo Umbris assassin is stalking her castle, disguised as a servant, a courtier, or even a member of her own family. The queen has no solid proof for any of her suspicions, but has intercepted a letter addressing some unknown member of her court, giving them instructions about how to strike against the queen—or so she suspects. In truth, the letter contains a series of mysterious symbols, which appears to be a code. Some claim that the queen has become paranoid, a victim of an intricate gaslighting campaign to make her suspicious of everyone around her. The letter, they suspect, was planted by Ordo Umbris to seal the deception and drive her to have their real target killed. Either way, she is offering a queen's ransom to anyone who can find the traitor in her midst.

### IT DOESN'T ADD UP

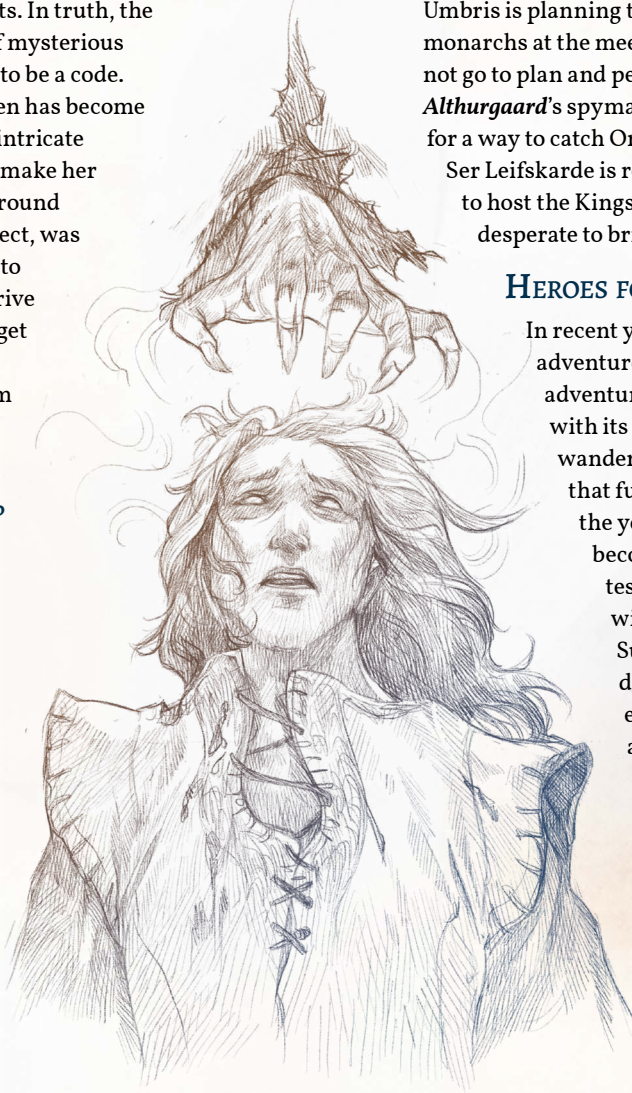
Hunger stalks the streets once more. Common goods like wheat, barley, and oats are becoming scarce, bread is becoming more and more expensive, and the coming winter will only make it worse. If something doesn't change soon, the poorest will begin to riot and steal, sowing chaos. The odd thing is that, if what the farmers and merchants say is true, there was nothing wrong with this year's grain harvest. The foodstuffs they delivered were of the usual quantities and quality, but those resources seem not to have made it into the region's grain stores. It's rumored that Ordo Umbris has replaced the *Master of Provisions* with a doppelganger, and the council of burghers seeks discreet agents to find out what's happening. Unfortunately, many of those agents have been disappearing, or returning with nothing to report.

### THE KINGSMEET

Recently, rumors have spread that the kings of several realms will be meeting for a secret summit to settle territorial disputes. These disputes have been responsible for a decade-long war that has been slowly draining the royal coffers and causing great strife among the populace. It's whispered in seedier circles that Ordo Umbris is planning to kidnap and replace several monarchs at the meeting to ensure that the summit does not go to plan and peace is prevented. Supposedly, *King Althurgaard's* spymaster, *Ser Leifskarde*, is searching for a way to catch Ordo Umbris agents in attendance. Ser Leifskarde is responsible for convincing his liege to host the Kingsmeet at a hidden location, and is desperate to bring peace back to the realms.

### HEROES FOR HIRE

In recent years, Ordo Umbris has been targeting adventurers. It's been replacing the heads of adventurers' guilds and other notable patrons with its operatives and attempting to hire wandering adventurers to undertake quests that further Ordo Umbris' master plan. As the years have passed, these quests have become more and more suspect as the cult tests how far it can push hired heroes with promises of gold and treasure. Such assignments include protecting disguised Ordo Umbris operatives from enemies, sabotaging certain nobles and merchants, stealing important documents from castles and manors, and even assassinating figures who have been falsely accused of crimes. Rumors of these crooked patrons and organizations have been gaining traction among adventurers, and now the rogue *Glara Deadeye* has quietly put out a call for allies to investigate.



## PROPHETS OF THE VOID

Wealth	☼☼☼☼☼
Resources	💧💧💧💧
Defence	🛡️🛡️🛡️🛡️
Influence	⚡⚡⚡⚡⚡
Services	Planar Travel, Eldritch Boons, Summoning
Disfavored	Paladins, Rival Clerics, Gods, Order
Favored	Warlocks, Sorcerers, Clerics, Orcs

*And forth from the Outer Dark came Narkul, the Great Collector, bearing the wisdom of the darkness that lies between stars. When great Narkul saw Aurelius, he decided to make him and all of his descendants a tool of his unfathomable designs. And when their work is done, Narkul the Great Collector shall come to collect the souls of his instruments, and transmute those who remain into wretched, despairing forms.*

— Excerpt from *The Hexagaphica*, scripture of the Prophets of the Void

**N**arkul the Great Collector, denizen of a strange and unfathomable plane of existence known as the Outer Dark, is the vile patron of the Prophets of the Void. It is said that gaining an audience with Narkul can provide answers to dark mysteries, and the Prophets promise hidden knowledge to those who join their ranks.

The Prophets are led by Thaddeus Vorden, the oldest living son of Cassius Vorden, a wealthy aristocrat. It's rumored that the Prophets are searching for the severed hand of their patron, *The Hand of Narkul*, as well as rebuilding an ancient portal to the Outer Dark called the Aurelian Gate. In the meantime, the cultists have been using tears in space and time called *realm rifts* to abduct people and deliver them to Narkul for "collecting," a process that rips their memories and thoughts from their minds.

Narkul's ultimate plan may be unknowable to even his most loyal servants, but one thing is for certain: Narkul only needs to reclaim his lost hand to pierce the veil between the mortal realms and his own. Once it's breached, chaos and madness will be unleashed, along with Narkul himself.



## THE VORDEN LEGACY

Over five hundred years ago, Aurelius Vorden sought a means to satisfy his thirst for knowledge. In his occult studies, he learned of the existence of a gate to the Outer Dark, where an oracle existed that was said to be capable of answering one's deepest questions. After locating the gate, he found the being he sought, surrounded by lifeless bodies floating in the void, but Aurelius realized that it was no oracle: this was Narkul, the Great Collector. Aurelius barely managed to escape, cutting off one of Narkul's hands in the process. Tumbling back into the mortal world, Aurelius woke up days later, deformed, tainted, and forever changed. *The Hand of Narkul* lay on the ground beside him.

Changed by the chaotic energies of the alien realm, all Vorden children suffer from terrible deformations, forcing the wealthy and influential family to lead a life away from the public eye. However, these physical symptoms pale in comparison to the maddening whispers that each hears. Every descendant of the Vorden family has suffered the incessant burden of Narkul's maddening thoughts echoing within their minds, along with a never-ending, cacophonous stream of crushed hopes, fears, and silenced dreams from mortal souls...

## REALM RIFTS

When the *Hand of Narkul* was severed from Narkul himself, it created a massive tear in the fabric of reality, opening a *realm rift* between this plane and the Outer Dark. Rippling and twisting like liquid glass, time and space trembled under the savage force of these two planes pulling against each other. These rifts are gateways into the Outer Dark and, to an unsuspecting eye, the threshold appears to be only a few yards deep, beyond which an inconceivable alien world sprawls as far as the eye can see. Upon setting foot into a rift, all normal laws of physics, dimension, and perception melt away.

Dangerous stray energies leaking from the realm rifts into the Material Plane distort everything around them, including living creatures. Those who are warped by a rift become *far-touched*. The taint of the portal may turn a finger into a small tentacle or turn appendages translucent after only a few minutes. Longer exposure to the transmutative energies can cause even more nightmarish mutations.

The Prophets have opened many realm rifts since the original one appeared, and though some have decayed or been sealed, others still remain in forgotten places.

## GNAWING MADNESS

Those who spend years in service of the Prophets learn much that should never be comprehended by mortals. Even more terrifying, however, are their rituals to open *realm rifts*, which serve as portals to Narkul's realm. It is these unspeakable experiences that grant them their uncanny powers: knowledge of the future, insight into the minds of the living, and the ability to warp reality are only a few of the secret arts that they gain, but they come at a steep price—the sanity of the practitioner.

Madness is a constant companion of most Prophets, and most see it as a gift rather than a curse. Though some devolve into wide-eyed, catatonic states or fits of violent rage, the more resilient Prophets claim that their altered minds see invisible layers of reality and even glimpse hidden, eldritch truths. Still, given time, the path of madness inevitably leads Prophets to a state of mind incomprehensible to even their fellows. The exposure to unholy magics and forbidden rituals tends to change the bodies of the Prophets as well, morphing them into bizarre and horrifying aberrations.

The lowest rank in the Prophets is a Thoughtthrall, a person whose descent into madness has broken their will, but not their body. These aimless, living husks become slaves to the cult, controlled by a higher-ranking Prophet who commands them telepathically.

## THADDEUS VORDEN

AGE: 49

RACE: Far-Touched Human

OCCUPATION: Planar Explorer

SPECIALTY: Eldritch Magic, Summoning, Ancient Lore

**T**haddeus Vorden is the descendant of Aurelius Vorden, the first humanoid from this realm to travel to the Outer Dark and bear witness to Narkul. While Aurelius rejected the Great Collector, Thaddeus has embraced the whispers of Narkul and seeks to serve this eldritch being as its high priest. He left his family to become the leader of the Prophets, though he kept the reason for his disappearance secret.

Instead of blindly serving Narkul, Thaddeus instead hopes to recover the Hand of Narkul and use it to bargain with the Great Collector to gain immeasurable power, as well as to free himself from Narkul's influence forever. Though Thaddeus relishes the dark might and reality-warping secrets granted to him by serving Narkul, he yearns for a day when he serves no one but himself.

Thaddeus' physical form has been warped so much from his ancestry and travels through realm rifts that he is barely recognizable. His head has been transformed into a geometric hedron, his skin discolored into a sickly, translucent turquoise, and his right arm into a thin, articulated tendril capable of immense, unexpected strength.

◆ **PAWN OF NARKUL:** Despite believing that his ambitions to free himself from the service of the Great Collector are still secret, Thaddeus' plans are known to Narkul. The entity has carefully manipulated Thaddeus' dreams of power to ensure that he will stop at nothing to recover the Hand, even if it means killing his own family.

◆ **FAMILY TIES:** Thaddeus' father Cassius is still searching for him with the hope that his son has not succumbed to Narkul's influence. Thaddeus wishes to keep his identity as the leader of the Prophets a secret, as well as ensure that his family does not interfere with his pursuit of the Hand.

Thaddeus' aberrant, far-touched form gives him access to eldritch abilities that make him a terrifying combatant, as well as spells that channel the power of the Outer Dark.

◆ **GIFTS OF THE OUTER DARK:** Thaddeus has blindsight, an aura of whispering madness, the ability to summon aberrations and open realm rifts, and innate spellcasting. He can communicate telepathically with other creatures and warp the minds of those in medium range.

## LEADER & FOLLOWERS

Cultists of the Prophets of the Void typically have some kind of physical mutation that betrays their contact with the Outer Dark. Initiates might have minor alterations such as additional eyes, tendril-like fingers, or warty, toad-like skin, while higher-ranking members are likely to have undergone far more serious transformations—their heads might have become golden hedrons or their arms turned into reticulated tentacles.

### PROPHET OF THE VOID RANKS

Rank	Responsibilities
Thoughtthrall <sup>1</sup>	Carrying out menial tasks, defending cultists, nourishing Narkul with thoughts
Initiate <sup>1</sup>	Collecting sacrifices, scouting sites for new bases, intimidating commoners
Voidherald <sup>2</sup>	Finding and converting new followers, spreading Narkul's influence
Gatewarden <sup>2</sup>	Keeping realm rifts stable, summoning and commanding creatures from realm rifts
Seeker <sup>2</sup>	Collecting and researching magical lore, performing rituals
Aberrant <sup>2</sup>	<i>Far-touched only</i> ; Guarding temples, realm rifts, and other cultists
Voidweaver <sup>3</sup>	Opening and closing realm rifts
Great Seeker <sup>3</sup>	Exploring the Outer Dark and other planes of existence, researching eldritch magic
Voice of the Void <sup>4</sup>	Communing with Narkul, commanding cultists, researching rituals

1 - low rank, 2 - medium rank, 3 - high rank, 4 - leader

### ☉ THADDEUS VORDEN, THE VOICE OF THE VOID (MALE FAR-TOUCHED HUMAN WARLOCK)

Thaddeus is one of the two sons of the still-living Cassius Vorden. After Thaddeus' disappearance, Cassius sent his other son to search for him, but to no avail. Thaddeus resents Cassius, who hides away his far-touched mutations with a mask and wishes to conceal his family's abominable link to Narkul. To better serve the search for the *Hand of Narkul*, Thaddeus has set forth three mandates for the cult: gather power and recruits, open and explore new realm rifts, and sow chaos. To Thaddeus, Prophets who cannot explore or open rifts are only useful as distractions to

ensure that the cult's search is not interrupted. Though many Initiates join the cult searching for knowledge, Thaddeus believes that educating Prophets about Narkul and the Outer Dark is secondary to exploring rifts.

Thaddeus does not concern himself with the wellbeing of low-ranking Prophets or the Thoughtthralls. He leaves this task to Amanis, whose zealotry and ego has blinded her to the fact that she and her adorers are merely tools. Instead, Thaddeus spends most of his time training and overseeing the Great Seekers and Voidweavers, whose minds and bodies must be carefully maintained in order to avoid mutating into useless, gibbering piles of flesh.

### ☉ AMANIS THIREMAR, "THE GOLDEN SISTER" (FEMALE ELF CLERIC)

Amanis is a riveting figure: tall and willowy with honey-colored skin, violet eyes, and waist-length blond hair, she possesses an otherworldly beauty that sharply contrasts with the horrors of her far-touched brothers and sisters. Known as the Golden Sister, she guides the training and assigns orders to the Prophets, answering only to Thaddeus and her dark god, though she would prefer not to deal with the cult leader at all. While Thaddeus is publicly loyal, his demeanor in private moments makes her doubt his faith in Narkul. So far though, she has no proof of disloyalty and Thaddeus is too feared and respected by the other cultists for her to openly oppose him. Amanis knows that she can never replace Thaddeus, as she herself is not a member of the Vorden bloodline, but she secretly hopes to depose him and try to take control of the cult regardless.

Amanis' body has been altered by her contact with Narkul, causing her to grow multiple arms, but this has only stoked the other cultists' reverence for her. Her remarkable willpower has ensured that her mind remains mostly intact, but Amanis longs to gain a closer connection with Narkul's unfathomable will. She believes that the Great Collector's vast plans for the cosmos could be grasped if only she could understand his whispers. If her prayers remain unanswered, her obsession with Narkul could slip into madness.



### ☉ **DAMINI SINGH (FEMALE HALF-ELF SORCERER)**

When the Prophets need an enemy murdered in their bed or a town pacified through fear, they turn to Damini Singh. Damini has dusky skin and short-cropped black hair, and though she once possessed large, beautiful eyes, Damini's eyes are now pitch-black with white, pinpoint pupils. It is said that her eyes can catch glimpses of the Outer Dark where Narkul lurks, and that her sockets glow with a dim, violet light on dark, moonless nights. She is the cult's most accomplished assassin and agent of terror, and her reputation outside of the Prophets is one of whispered dread.

Damini's induction into the cult was in the name of power and revenge—her first targets upon making her pact with Narkul were the learned wizards who barred her from their academies due to her sorcerous gifts. Though their terror was gratifying, Damini found her victory strangely hollow. Now the Prophets are all she has, and so she turns her murderous urges on the enemies of the cult. While Amanis deals in seduction and persuasion, Damini is all about force and coercion. Her eyes grant her the ability to plumb the deepest fears of her victims and drive the weaker ones to madness, but if given the choice, she prefers using lightning to kill her foes.

### ☉ **GASPAR FREY OF THE ABERRANT MIND (NONBINARY FAR-TOUCHED HALF-ORC WIZARD)**

Gaspar Frey is one of the most far-touched members of the Prophets. Originally a half-orc, Gaspar Frey has been transformed into a giant, limbless creature resembling a six-foot-long lamprey. Their mouth has become huge and distended, while several new rows of sharp teeth have filled the fleshy space within. Their limbs have been replaced with a set of six sharp, chitinous appendages similar to a lobster. They are truly hideous to behold, but carry much responsibility and power within the cult: each Thoughtthrall and Aberrant in the cult is one of Gaspar's wards, and Gaspar has the ability to control them from vast distances. Under Gaspar's guidance, these horrific servants have built new temples, defended their cultist brethren, and laid waste to towns.

To Thaddeus' chagrin, Gaspar is also one of the few cultists who can withstand the weight of Narkul's constant whispering. Though their mind is profoundly warped, Gaspar remains relatively lucid and intelligent—in

fact, Gaspar's mental capacity seems to have expanded to allow them to control hundreds of entities at once, while their senses allow them to perceive layers of the cosmos hidden to all but Thaddeus himself. Despite these great boons, Gaspar is mostly helpless on their own and can only communicate via telepathy.

## DARK OFFERINGS

While the Prophets of the Void are usually shunned by society at large, they occasionally offer services to outsiders. The desperate, the mad, and the immoral alike might seek out the cult, but the Prophets do not always demand coin for their work—often, more unsavory methods of payment are required.

### ◆ **PLANAR TRANSPORTATION**

Perhaps the most attractive service offered by the Prophets of the Void is the ability to travel between planes. Many Prophets, especially those of higher rank, are capable of teleporting through the planes of existence, though this power is kept for cultists only. What is permitted for outsiders is the opening of portals and gateways. These portals can go to a huge number of permanent locations on other planes, or on the same plane. Travel is near instantaneous, but requires a short traversal through the Outer Dark. While in that realm of maddening whispers, travelers are at risk of attracting eldritch abominations or becoming far-touched.

### ◆ **OUTER DARK SUMMONING**

The Prophets of the Void work closely with disturbing aberrations from the Outer Dark on a regular basis. These alien beings serve multiple roles—the less intelligent and more chaotic ones might be used as soldiers or guards, while the more intelligent ones serve as advisors or even tutors. For a high price—or, more likely, a favor for the cult—outsiders can request the summoning of one of these aberrations. Through a summoning, a person might learn a new language from an *Emissary of the Dark Stars*, gain mind-reading magic from a *Floating Hedron of Ozaroth*, or gain the temporary allegiance of a *Void Collector*. However, simply standing in the presence of these creatures may drive one mad, while some aberrations may be difficult to control or command. In the worst-case scenarios, a summoned creature may consume those who summon it or escape to wreak havoc.



### ◆ ELDRITCH BOONS

The Prophets of the Void conduct rituals that grant them greater understanding of Narkul and his arcane secrets, but many Prophets use them to ask for boons, especially after completing a task meant to please Narkul. These boons are dangerous and never offered to outsiders, but can provide advantages to those willing to accept the risks. See *Eldritch Boons* table below.

## ABERRANT ITEMS

### ◆ WAND OF MINDTOUCH - 1,500 GP (RARE)

These metallic wands are forged from ores harvested from meteors, also called star metal. They tend to be very thin, around six to eight inches long, and capped with strange celestial symbols. The wands can be used to manipulate the thoughts and memories of creatures. This includes deleting memories, altering thoughts, or simply reading them. Modifying a memory or thought depletes the magic of the wand, which must be recharged by bathing it in

moonlight for several hours. If the wand is overused, then there is a chance that it can explode in a flash of blinding starlight, forcing everyone in the area to save against blindness, and the user to also save against being stunned.

### ◆ CENSER OF STARDUST - 50,000 GP (VERY RARE)

Made of platinum and embossed with gemstones, these censers contain within them a dimensional rift to the Outer Dark. Pouring forth from the perforations in the metal octahedrons comes an effluvium of noxious stardust that forms a small radius around the creature wielding the censer. Far-touched creatures within the censer's radius are empowered by the nebula, gaining advantage on attacks and saving throws. Non-far-touched creatures within the censer's radius are assaulted by maddening whispers from the Outer Dark that deal psychic damage and can stun. The creature wielding the censer can use it like a flail, dealing additional psychic damage on a hit. The censer can be destroyed to open a gate to the Outer Dark, which collapses in on itself after one minute.

### dio Eldritch Boons

- 1 **ADDITIONAL ARM.** The recipient grows an additional arm, which can be used to wield an additional weapon, manipulate objects, or perform other tasks. The limb is monstrous, and probably not even humanoid.
- 2 **STRANGE SIGHT.** The recipient's vision of the world changes, allowing them to see other creatures' life force through total cover, but obscuring most other details. They can't discern color, only outlines in shades of gray. Furthermore, their eyes become milky white, mirrored, or black.
- 3 **SILVER-TONGUED.** The recipient becomes a skilled liar capable of deceiving even the most insightful individuals. However, they start to forget which memories are real and which are stories, and their tongue becomes forked or turns silver.
- 4 **ABERRANT STRENGTH.** The recipient develops immense strength far beyond what would normally be possible for them. This strength can only be maintained by feasting on something disturbing, such as humanoid flesh, dreams, or blood.
- 5 **SUPERIOR SPEED.** The recipient becomes incredibly rapid, capable of outrunning a horse. The speed comes from additional legs, or transmutation of one's legs into insectoid or arthropoid limbs.
- 6 **IMPENETRABLE MIND.** It becomes impossible to read the recipient's thoughts, emotions, and desires through any means. Their head is transformed into a form that would typically be considered non-living, such as a golden hedron or a floating granite orb.
- 7 **UNTRACEABLE.** The recipient becomes impossible to sry upon, and divination spells that aim to locate them automatically fail. For one hour each day, they phase out of existence, becoming a ghostly form incapable of physically interacting with the world around them.
- 8 **AMORPHOUS.** The recipient gains the ability to fit through spaces at least one inch in diameter, turning into a gooey ooze in order to do so. Additionally, their body constantly oozes a thick, greasy mucus that makes them hard to grapple.
- 9 **RESILIENT FORM.** The recipient gains some level of natural armor that makes it hard to pierce their skin and provides some resistance to mundane damage. Their skin becomes stone-like, scaled, covered with chitinous plates, or metallic.
- 10 **LEVITATION.** The recipient gains the ability to float a few feet off of the ground and mentally controls their facing, direction, movement, and elevation. They lose their lower limbs, which are replaced with wafting tendrils, whirling smoke, dragging tentacles, or something similar.

◆ **SHARDS OF NARKUL - 800,000 GP (LEGENDARY)**

When Narkul's hand was torn from his arm by Aurelius Vorden, droplets of their eldritch blood were scattered across the planes. These droplets have been hardened by age and look like smooth, black shards of stone, typically no larger than a few inches in length and an inch deep and wide. Those who possess a Shard of Narkul can read and control the minds of creatures within a large radius, channel the power of the Outer Dark to gain random mutations, and consume the minds of other creatures to temporarily increase their attributes.

## RUMORS & SECRETS

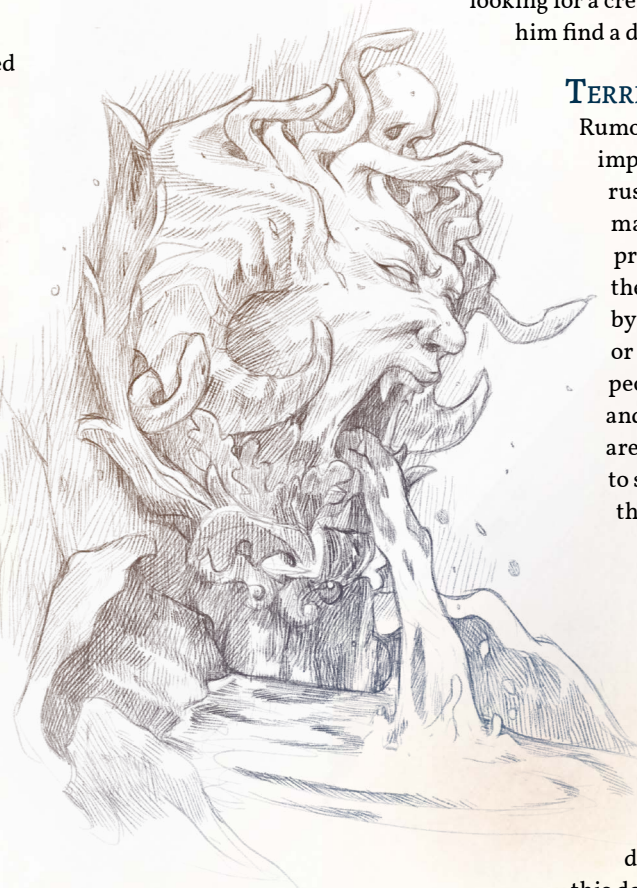
### CURSED ABBEY

The Prophets of the Void have moved into an abbey that was abandoned two hundred and fifty-five years ago after the monastic order in residence there vanished, leaving only a viscous sludge behind. Now the local villagers are being terrorized by swarms of unusual bug-like creatures that have been tearing through the crops in surrounding fields. There is also a seemingly permanent iridescent cloud that hangs low over the monastery's spires, which residents believe forebodes the doom of the town. It's whispered that the insect-like creatures are actually aberrations from the Outer Dark that have been using the dungeons beneath the monastery to lay horrific eggs, which hatch to reveal the vanished monks, now living but hideously changed. A wizard whose tower is not far from the abbey is looking for adventurers to help investigate what is going on there. They know that the two hundred and fifty-sixth anniversary of the monks' deaths is looming, and are worried about what the Prophets might be preparing.

### SECRET COUNSEL

Two years ago, a local noble, *Sir Araval van Burgen*, disappeared. No ransom was ever demanded. No enemy stepped forward to take credit for their demise. Local law enforcement ran out of leads and sources of information were exhausted. The noble's wife, *Lady Lichter van Burgen*, continued her desperate search for her partner long after everyone else gave up. Recently, she turned to

the Prophets of the Void for aid, providing them with a large portion of the estate's remaining funds. Within two weeks, they located her partner's remains and returned them to her. Now the Prophets are a common sight at her estate, as she takes their counsel in all things. Recently, the lady has proclaimed a new tax; a young lamb, goose, goat, or calf from each farmstead that produces livestock. This is but one in a series of strange requests and edicts since the Prophets became her advisors, and possibly not the last. Recently, local cemeteries have been placed under watch by the lady's guards. Except during burials, no one is allowed inside except for the Prophets. A holy order has sent a cleric to speak to Lady van Burgen, but he has been barred from her estate. Now the cleric is looking for a crew of adventurers to help him find a discreet way inside.



### TERRIBLE TIMES AHEAD

Rumors run rampant about impending doom. Folk rush about in desperation, making preparations to protect themselves from the forthcoming disaster by boarding up windows or buying weapons. Some people are hoarding money and supplies, while others are going on spending sprees to squeeze enjoyment from their last days. Entire families are gathering up their belongings, selling what they can't carry, and leaving for distant locales. Others are fortifying their homes against whatever awaits.

When trying to determine exactly *what* this doom is, however, things become murky: everyone seems to have a different answer, ranging from a coming plague, to war, to some terrible natural (or even unnatural) disaster. The only thing anyone is certain of is the origin of this revelation: the Prophets of the Void. The cult members are the only ones who don't seem fearful or panicked—in fact, they seem to relish its coming. A militia made up of hunters and former soldiers has been gathered to maintain order in the midst of the panic, but they're in desperate need of assistance.

# SCIONS OF SAARDON

Wealth	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
Resources	💧 💧 💧 💧
Defence	♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥
Influence	⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡
Services	Hybridization, Animal Companions
Disfavored	Artificers, Wizards, Civilization
Favored	Druids, Barbarians, Rangers, Beastfolk, Elves

*When I saw the fungus covering her back, I knew it was too late. You could see the little roots bulging under her skin. The worst part was when she tried to speak—all she could do was cough out the spores. The Scions spoke of living with nature, becoming one with the beauty of the forests, but what they did to her was...twisted.*

—Hedin Cox, Survivor

**T**o some, nature is a force to be tamed and controlled, muzzled and broken. Others think it is better to embrace nature, grow along with it, and merge with it until they are transformed into a higher state of being. Those who walk this path govern their lives by the natural cycle of death and rebirth: mighty beings collapse into rot, from which tiny spores grow, cell by cell, into the most powerful—and deadly—creatures of creation.

The Scions of Saardon is a loosely organized cult composed of individualists who prefer to walk the wilderness alone, like barbarians, druids, and rangers. They regard civilization as a blight, for it imposes itself on the natural rhythms of the world, corrupts the natural order, and exploits what it should nurture. When the Scions discover a threat to the wild, they hunt it down, leaving behind a trail of mangled corpses, clusters of fungus, and burning buildings. The Scions' greatest weapon, the fungal plague now called Saardon's Tendrils, was rumored to be the genesis of the group: Saardon, the group's founder, originally fought to protect city-dwellers from the disease, but embraced its spores after they transformed him. The most feared Scions are bizarre hybrids of flora and fauna, able to thrive in either world.

Their steady shuffle through the forest, just beyond the homesteaders' feeble lamplight, has become the stuff of nightmares. It's rumored that in some places they have begun to affect so innocent a thing as the mushrooms that grow in cities' gutters.

## PLANT HYBRIDS

The first of the Scions' tenets is that life and death are part of the cycle of nature, which encompasses all beings. Though innocuous at first glance, the Scions have used this to justify their massacres against anyone and everyone who threatens the natural world. Their second tenet is that sapient life has become a blight upon the world, and that all mortals need to evolve to higher, more advanced forms that place them in harmony with nature again. The new form proposed by the Scions is a meticulously cultivated hybrid of plant and animal. This involves infecting someone with Saardon's Tendrils and carefully managing the fungus so that it enhances rather than destroys the body. For most mortals, undergoing the process of hybridization opens new senses, new modes of survival, and new connections to the natural world, such as the ability to speak to plants and trees. However, the transformation has not yet been perfected, and some find their bodies and minds altered beyond recognition.

To most other druids, the Scions' philosophy toward nature is twisted and unnatural, and betrays a disturbing willingness to play God. To the Scions, this is the only way to regain balance in the world.

## ENEMIES OF CIVILIZATION

The Scions see cities and towns as new, aberrant ecosystems full of beings who have forsaken their connection to nature, whether it be the forests, the oceans, the plains, or the deserts. The growth of these settlements is akin to the growth of a tumor upon the land, and even if their residents do not directly participate in deforestation or other natural incursions, they are held responsible for driving those activities through their demand for lumber, fish, and other goods. In the view of the Scions, no one is free from the web of corruption created by civilization.

Operating from hidden places deep within the wilderness, the Scions have few allies to their cause, and are usually hostile to outsiders. Some of their only companions are beasts, and they have begun sending animal spies to cities and towns. These spies are meant to find the weaknesses in these settlements, as well as spread the Scions' signature weapon—Saardon's Tendrils.

## SAARDON'S TENDRILS

The Scions use guerilla tactics to terrorize those who threaten the wilds, but their greatest weapon is the same fungal plague that sparked Saardon's founding of the group. The long, thin, black-capped mushrooms have been dubbed Saardon's Tendrils, and a single mature bolete can release enough spores to infect dozens of people. The mushrooms can grow nearly anywhere that's dark, and their spores create a horrific growth cycle in victims that causes their lungs to fill with poisonous, miniature versions of the normal mushrooms. The mushrooms' thin tendrils eventually spread through the veins until they erupt from the skin. Though the mushrooms can be burned and the victims quarantined, there is no cure for the infection or its poisonous effects. However, the fungus does not kill all of its hosts—some, like Saardon, merge with the fungal growths and begin to display traits of both plants and animals. However, without careful cultivation, these nascent hybrids may lose their minds or simply grow into immobile masses of flesh and fungus. Within the Scions, the Tendrils are one of several "symbiotes" developed to create hybrids of plant, animal, and humanoid species. Saardon has begun spreading his Tendrils in both cities and forests, hoping to turn larger and larger swathes of the world into a toxic hellscape for all but his Scions.

## SAARDON, PROGENITOR OF PLAGUES

**AGE:** 214

**RACE:** Hybrid (former Half-Elf)

**OCCUPATION:** Renegade Druid

**SPECIALTY:** Transmutation, Mycology, Druidic Magic

Long ago, Saardon was called upon by the citizens of the nearby city of Visona to save them from a voracious fungal plague. He beseeched the spirits of nature to grant him a gift, a magical bounty that would provide a cure. To Saardon's horror, the city-dwellers wasted it: the fruits were left to rot while the mayor decided what to charge for the cure. Soon, thousands were dead, and thousands more lay sick and dying.

The city-dwellers dumped the bodies in the forest, spreading the plague to the wildlife. The fungus took hold, and the trees became riddled with parasitic mushrooms. But as Saardon trod the forest paths and wept, he saw the plague's mushrooms, toadstools, and slime growing apace. The forest was renewing itself in a way that he had not foreseen. In his grief he took the spores unto himself, hoping to end his misery. To his surprise, he did not die; instead, the fungus transformed him into something new, something more than what he was. A handful of survivors of the plague crept into the woods, forsaking death in the city, and Saardon taught them the new way, infecting them with his new spores of enlightenment.

◆ **DESTROYING THE PAST:** Since his transformation, Saardon has held his humanoid heritage in particular disdain. He seeks to undermine the homes of his ancestors, and has already managed to entirely corrupt and destroy the human town where his maternal family came from. Recently, he has been sending animal spies into the great elven cities to begin the process of infestation there.

◆ **SAVAGE ALLIES:** Saardon believes that lycanthropes are natural hybrids between humanoids and animals, and that they are natural enemies of civilization. He wishes to recruit a nearby werewolf tribe into the Scions, but the members of the tribe are wary.

Though he was once a humanoid, Saardon is now a quadrupedal plant-humanoid hybrid with writhing, root-like legs that let him scuttle like a crab at immense speed. His whole form is merged with plant life, giving him numerous unique abilities.

✦ **PLANT FORM:** Saardon has a climbing speed, increased armor and damage resistance thanks to barkskin, grasping tendrils that increase his reach, poisonous lashes that whip from his wrists, and blindsight conferred by a cloud of fungal spores to which he is psychically attuned.

# LEADER & FOLLOWERS

The Scions of Saardon are unified by their shared philosophy rather than a strict hierarchy. Though they may operate in their own territories, carrying out their missions as they see fit, all Scions pay fealty to Saardon and obey when he commands them.

## SCIONS OF SAARDON RANKS

Rank	Responsibilities
Sporehost <sup>1</sup>	Protecting the wilderness, growing spores within themselves that can later be harvested
Sporebringer <sup>1</sup>	Infiltrating settlements, cultivating spores in secret, causing outbreaks among enemies
Herald <sup>1</sup>	Seeking out new potential members, spreading the word of the cult to settlements
Spy <sup>2</sup>	Scouting out potential settlements for destruction and discovering their weaknesses
Saboteur <sup>2</sup>	Sabotaging those harvesting lumber, hunting animals, or threatening the wilderness
Symbiotist <sup>2</sup>	Infesting new members with fungi and managing their development
Spymaster <sup>3</sup>	Managing Spies, Sporebringers, and Saboteurs, reporting to the Sporemaster
Blightpriest <sup>3</sup>	Cultivating new spores and symbiotes with which to infect cult members
Sporemaster <sup>4</sup>	Directing the cult's actions, guiding the evolution of new hybrids

1 - low rank, 2 - medium rank, 3 - high rank, 4 - leader

### ☉ SAARDON (MALE HYBRID DRUID)

Years after his transformation, Saardon remains bitter and distrustful of civilized folk. Now called the Sporemaster, he roams the forests, sending his Scions abroad with a message: become one with nature or be destroyed by it. Saardon seeks to spread his Tendrils, turning the world's peoples into hybrids of plants, animals, and humanoids. Those who refuse nature's gift are infected against their will or ripped apart by the Scions' transformed members. Nature is cruel and merciless, and Saardon emulates this in his outlook. Out of all of the cultists, Saardon is the most dramatically

mutated from his original form. He cultivates his new form with druidic magic and elaborate rituals, allowing him to experiment with new abilities and senses. In his quest to perfect his unique form of hybridization, he has begun collecting survivors of Saardon's Tendrils from the affected cities and turning them over to his apprentice Zugruz for experimentation.

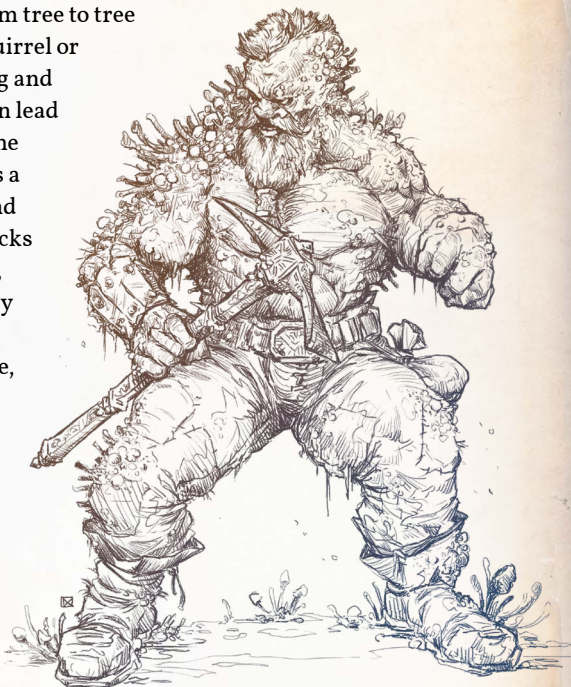
### ☉ WELCARYN GOLDWORTHY (FEMALE HALFLING DRUID)

Small even for a halfling, Welcaryn is notable for her scarred skin and complete lack of hair, including eyebrows. Of her close-knit family of twelve, she was the only survivor of a forest fire set by a nearby city called Tungvar, which was looking to expand its borders to accommodate its rapidly growing slums. After recovering from her vicious burns and regaining her strength, Welcaryn swore revenge, and now she is utterly committed to holding back the advance of civilization and the destruction of the wilderness.

Naturally, this drove her to Saardon. She received his spores gladly, and soon rose in power among the Scions. Her cave lair is a haven for Scions, who go there to receive her counsel and the aid of her druidic magic. Welcaryn seldom confronts trespassers herself; rather, she flits from tree to tree in the form of a squirrel or songbird, following and watching. If she can lead them to disaster, she will; there's always a mother owlbear and her hungry cubchicks to feed. If she can't, she marks who they are, what they did, and where they live, and then reports that information to Saardon.

### ☉ DELG RUBYEYE (MALE DWARF BARBARIAN)

A hulking brute of a dwarf with gigantic muscles rippling under his mottled, spore-infested skin, Delg hails from a clan of dwarves who once mined copper in the foothills just north of Saardon's forest. The clan was one of Saardon's first targets and though they fought hard to defend their holdings, the spores prevailed. After watching his compatriots succumb, Delg found Saardon striding through the dwarves' ruined camp.



He was surprised when his enemy offered him mercy. Over several nights, Saardon and Delg spoke about the beauty of the earth and the excesses of industry, and Delg emerged from the camp reborn.

Delg's knowledge of soil, stone, and tunneling is so valuable to Saardon that Delg has become a trusted Scion. Undermining a sewer, a building's foundation, or even a city wall is child's play for the former miner—especially with his ability to summon earth elementals to aid him. Saardon knows that he need only point Delg at a troublesome patch of civilization and wait for it to come toppling down.

### ☉ ZUGRUZ (MALE LIZARDFOLK SORCERER)

On the shores of a small lake in the middle of Saardon's forest is a village of lizardfolk. They suffered greatly during the fungal blight, and Saardon did his best to save them from its ravages. While he wasn't able to save all of them, he saved enough that the villagers hailed him as a hero. Since then, more than a few of the village's young lizardfolk have become his Scions. Zugruz was an early devotee, and soon became an apprentice to the Sporemaster, eager to learn all that he could teach about natural magic.

Out of all of the Scions, Zugruz is the most powerful spellcaster next to Saardon himself. Zugruz's special area of study is magically grafting plants and fungus to sentient creatures, and Saardon's stronghold near the lizardfolk village is littered with the results of

Zugruz's experiments. Most of these flawed hybrids are mercifully dead, softly decomposing and sprouting fungus. Some, however, remain very much alive, their personalities and sanity absent. The experiments wander amidst the trees, at peace with nature but showing no sign of their former selves.

Zugruz is the key to Saardon's vision of a new generation of hybrids, while Zugruz himself is obsessed with finding the perfect balance between flora and fauna.



## PROTEAN OFFERINGS

Saardon offers many gifts to his Scions, but few to outsiders. In order to access these gifts, one must prove themselves worthy—never an easy task. Saardon would rather use his powers to kill an outsider than grant a boon to them, but if one does a great service to the Scions, he might grant them a reward.

### ◆ FUNGAL SYMBIOTE

Saardon grafts a fungal symbiote that grants special powers onto a person. The symbiote grows in power over time, evolving into new forms that grant additional abilities and eventually transform the host. The following table provides examples of symbiote abilities conferred to cultists of ascending rank.

Stage	Symbiote Ability
Neoplasia	Flowers that emit an intoxicating scent that charms others, flytrap-like hands that improve grappling
Dysplasia	Root tendrils that grant the host a fast climbing speed, bark-like skin as protective as chain mail
Hyperplasia	Branch-like extra limbs that can interact with objects, fungus-filled lungs that allow for exhalation of toxic spores
Metastasis	Thorn-covered arms that can be used as slashing weapons, poisonous seed pods that can be used as missiles
Evolution	Vine-like hair that restores the host's health when exposed to direct sunlight, root tendrils that allow the host to restrain enemies

### ◆ NATURE'S BOUNTY

The Scions' territory contains immeasurable bounties of beneficial plants, healing herbs, and material components that enhance nature-based magic. Becoming a Scion or making a deal with the cult grants access to these flora. Though only given in limited amounts, they are remarkably potent and highly prized by alchemists and rangers alike. Some of the most valuable are *Dryadara*, which can stabilize a creature on the brink of death, and *Hag's Tooth*, whose leaves can produce a deadly poison that is nearly undetectable.

#### ◆ ANIMAL COMPANIONS

The Scions have forged strong alliances with beasts of all kinds, from fierce raptors to stealthy rats. These creatures usually possess greater intelligence and abilities than their wild counterparts, and can be commanded to carry out simple tasks or even serve as mounts. The Scions are disdainful of forcing animals into service, so these companions are not to be treated as servants. Instead, they are treated as peers and allies.

## BLIGHTED ITEMS

The following items are unique to the Scions of Saardon and used by its members.

#### ◆ WAND OF AWAKENING - 600 GP (RARE)

These wands are carved from the wood of living trees and imbued with druidic magic by the Scions themselves. They can be used to elevate creatures, plants, and fungi to a sentient state. Creatures made sentient by the wands obey the wand's owner for a short period of time, after which they will follow their own will. Beings who are awakened by the wand may gain the ability to speak and usually act in a friendly manner toward the wielder. After a period of one week, the being gradually loses its sentience.

#### ◆ WILDROOT - 100 GP (COMMON)

Wildroots are living, semi-intelligent roots that feed on the blood of living creatures. In the wild, they creep around the forest looking for prey to strangle and feed upon. They can grow to lengths of up to twenty feet, and can even overpower wolves when fully grown. The Scions have learned to tame Wildroots and use them as weapons, companions, and even ropes or restraints. A Wildroot functions similarly to a familiar, and must be commanded and fed.

#### ◆ BARKSKIN AMULET - 350 GP (UNCOMMON)

These rough bark amulets are cut from the trunks of ancient oaks or willows and are hung from leather cords around the neck. Once per day, the amulet can be activated by speaking a magic word. This causes bark to spread from the amulet over the wearer's skin, forming a woody shell that is hard to pierce but just as flexible as humanoid skin. The effect lasts for one hour. If the amulet is used for multiple days in a row, there is a small, cumulative chance that the barkskin will remain even after the amulet's magic fades, permanently covering the user.

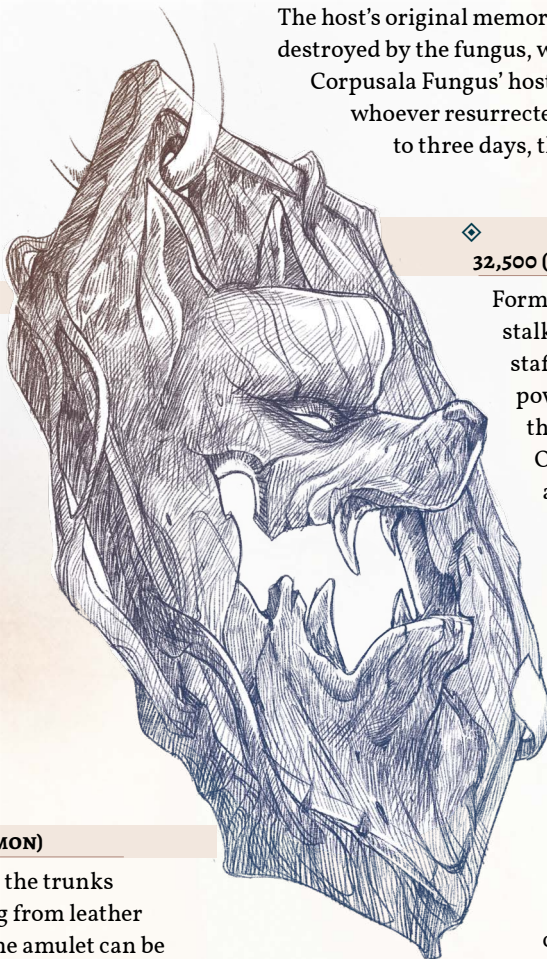
#### ◆ SPIDER BOMBS - 200 GP (UNCOMMON)

These horrific amalgamations of spiders and fungi are one of the Scions' new breeds of living weapons. Each Spider Bomb looks like a melon-sized, bulbous fungal mass with several black, insect-like eyes and eight chitinous legs. The bombs can understand simple commands, such as "attack," "wait for my signal," and "explode when a creature comes close." When a Spider Bomb explodes, it sprays a large area with poisonous gas, killing itself in the process. Spider Bombs are extremely fast and fearless, but are relatively fragile.

#### ◆ CORPUSALA FUNGUS - 2,000 GP (VERY RARE)

Though the Scions claim to treasure the natural cycle of life and death, they are not above dabbling in necromancy. Corpusala Fungus is a unique strain of fungus that infests and animates dead flesh, enhancing the host's strength and resilience as well as granting it a semblance of intelligence. The host's original memory and personality are completely destroyed by the fungus, which is vulnerable to fire.

Corpusala Fungus' hosts will obey the command of whoever resurrected them. After a period of one to three days, the host usually falls apart.



#### ◆ BLIGHTSTAFF - 32,500 GP (VERY RARE)

Formed of the desiccated, twisted stalks of human-sized fungi, these staves are imbued with magical power during a ritual that involves the rapid decay of a living creature. Once the creature has rotted away, its dust is turned into a paste which is worked into the staff's head - reinvigorating the toadstool somewhat and giving it an unearthly glow. These staves can be used to cast blighting spells that sap the life of creatures and plants in a large radius around them. They store this life force as magical energy that they can later release in powerful necrotic surges against mightier foes. The staves can also be used as conduits for spreading diseases that eat away at flesh, or convert it into plant

material. A creature petrified by a blightstaff turns into wood instead of stone, and deadly poisonous fungi sprout from the form within 24 hours of its initial petrification.

# RUMORS & SECRETS

## FRUIT OF EONS

In their fight against the Scions, city-dwellers have spent vast amounts of time, energy, and money seeking a cure for Saardon's transmutative plague. Knowing that Saardon's cure for the original plague was magical fruit granted by nature spirits, many expeditions have been launched into the ancient forests in search of these fruits or beings who can produce them. There are many druids who oppose Saardon's merciless creed, and it is they who are at the forefront of the search.

Now, the search may have paid off. The sage Thimorn of Dineus has discovered a passage in an old journal that mentions the discovery of a fruit that can cure all illnesses. Of course, the fruit is exceedingly rare and is only found in an antediluvian forest called the Forest of Eons. To make matters worse, the plant only bears fruit once every century, and its estimated ripening is rapidly approaching. The city elders and druidic circles seek adventurers to brave the Forest of Eons, while the Scions are seeking allies to ensure that they seize the fruit first.

## BUYING LOYALTY

In their desperation, city-dwellers have sent emissaries far and wide, hoping to convince others to come to their aid against Saardon and his Scions. One emissary has returned with an offer from an unlikely ally: a tribe of rock trolls that dwells in the nearby mountains. The trolls are said to have sprung from the stones of the mountain itself, and are supposedly immune to Saardon's spores. In addition, their great strength will allow them to rend Saardon's fungoid horrors limb from limb.

The trolls demand a tribute of gems and precious metals to secure their alliance against Saardon; according to the trolls, they devour these minerals to strengthen their rocky forms. However, the Scions are also courting the trolls with promises to raid nearby mines to obtain gemstones and minerals. Both factions are searching for negotiators that can help them sway the trolls to their cause.

## PLAGUE BRINGERS

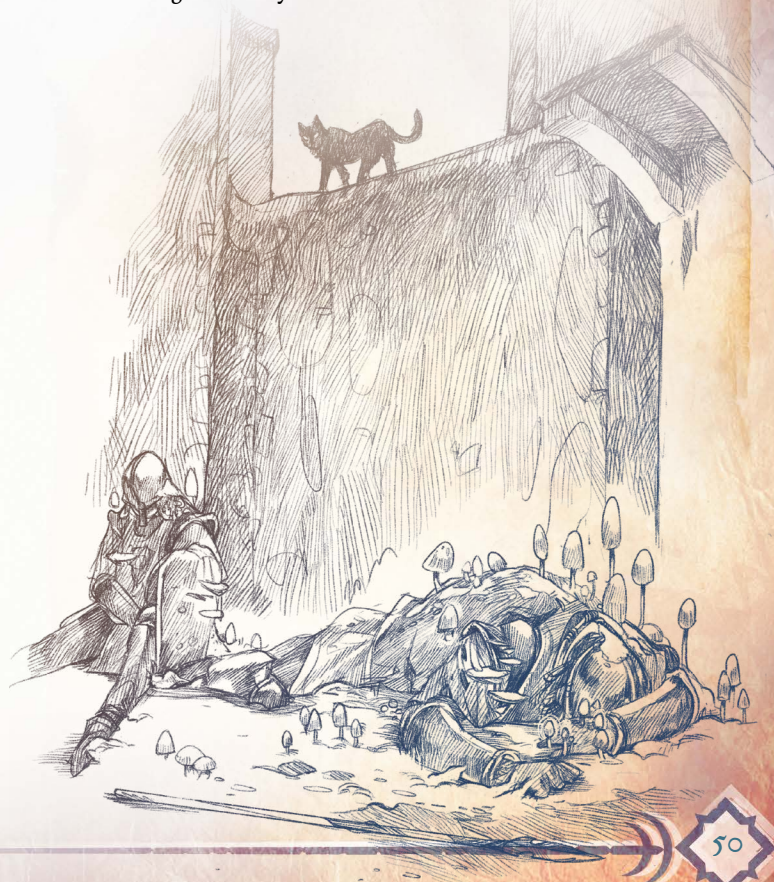
The nearby city of *Nelos* has been growing without restraint on the borders of the vast *Yorula Forest*, and all of the Scions who have attempted to staunch its expansion have been killed or forced to retreat. The Scions are rumored to be searching for people who can pass themselves off as civilized folk and surreptitiously plant fungi in *Nelos* to start a deadly outbreak, and several spies carrying the deadly mushrooms have already been caught. Some suspect that the Scions are already within the city walls, disguised as stray cats and dogs and searching for the right people to advance their pestilential plans.

The most recent rumor is that the city's sewers are the place to search for the Scions, but others claim that the poor quarters of the city are their hiding places. The city's mayor is paying a handsome reward to those who come forward with fruitful information, especially captive spies. However, the Scions are also said to be rewarding those who assist them; they offer immunity from the coming plague, and the chance to loot the ruins of *Nelos* once the city falls.

## STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

Although the growth of the Scions of Saardon seems irrepressible, rumor has it that many fey creatures in the forests have been fighting against them. Some, such as *Ymantha, Mother of Hags*, have said that they'd miss having mortals as their playthings...or prey. Others, such as *The Green Huntsman*, find the fungal hybrids to be repulsive mockeries of the natural order and have marshalled their servants to prepare for war. There is even rumor of a rival cult that aims to turn humanoids not into plant hybrids, but rather into fey creatures. This rival cult is called *Salvea*, and is headed by the ambitious fey *Queen Lelthaine of the Coming Spring*.

According to the rumors, each of these factions has placed a bounty on the head of *Zugruz*, the Scions' lizardfolk sorcerer. The problem is that *Zugruz* makes his home deep in the heart of Saardon's home forest. Anyone who can capture or kill the sorcerer will gain a truly wondrous reward.



# THE SCARLET FLEET

Wealth	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
Resources	💧 💧 💧 💧
Defence	🛡️ 🛡️ 🛡️ 🛡️
Influence	⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡
Services	Smuggling, Shipbuilding, Abduction
Disfavored	Clerics, Lycanthropes, Elves
Favored	Artificers, Rogues, Fighters, Vampires, Sailors



*When the Scarlet Fleet glides into port, you know you'll be making a small fortune if you play your cards right. We all know that, just like we know about all the people who go missing whenever they drop anchor. This time, though, it's my niece. All this wealth, all these friends in high places, and no one will admit they took her...everyone just gives me that same pitying look.*

— Pelle Floros, Merchant of Kingsport

**A**mong merchants and common folk, it's a common saying that "red sails bring wealth." For the most part, it's true—the Scarlet Fleet will trade with any kingdom for any good, from spices to silver, and they'll find a way to undercut nearly any competitor. These traits cause their trading partners to overlook many things—including the scores of people who disappear in their wake. Among sailors and longshoremen, however, it's whispered that the Scarlet Fleet is led by vampires, and wherever they make port, they're met with a mixture of greed and fear.

The true strength of the Scarlet Fleet lies in the utter necessity of its business, a strength that its members have spent years cultivating. No kingdom can refuse the allure of its prices and goods, especially not in times of poverty or war. In fact, the Fleet actively recruits emissaries, negotiators, and orators of high renown to work for it and spread its influence. Whether in royal courts or guild halls, the Fleet's representatives use their charm, wit, and pragmatism to persuade clients that their trading fleet will make them richer than they thought possible. It's only years later, once the Fleet has cemented this relationship, that its true nature is revealed.

By then, its clients have no choice but to write off the Fleet's vampiric nature as a vicious rumor and cover up its widespread practice of feasting and kidnapping.

## BLOOD MONEY

The Scarlet Fleet's prosperity is built on the uncanny speed of its ships, its seeming immunity to blockades and pirate attacks, and the shrewdness of its emissaries. In addition, the Fleet has the remarkable ability to be in the right place at the right time: like vultures, its agents will swoop in when a client is in the direst of straits and offer a generous deal that will shore up debts or avert a crisis. Of course, attached to this deal comes a long-term contract to trade solely with the Fleet.

The Scarlet Fleet is staunchly opposed to tariffs or trade restrictions, a policy that has ruined some of its lesser clients but enriched far more powerful ones. Now, the Fleet is more akin to a floating empire than a trading company: it controls island strongholds across the ocean and even some minor colonies on some continents. Few outsiders have ever visited the Fleet's island settlements, but rumors abound of vaults full of gold, dungeons packed with countless prisoners, and parties drenched in blood.

## A CRISIS OF BLOODLINES

The vampire family behind the fleet, the Saltari, has enjoyed power and wealth for centuries, but after watching their kin being burned and scattered in pursuit of crowns and thrones, they decided to take the route of merchants, not kings. Rather than continue their conquest across the land, the Saltari have taken to the oceans. Their aim is to become dominant not through might, as they once would have, but to control all trade throughout the realms and become de facto rulers through commercial control.

However, a troubling trend has emerged in the past few decades: the elders of the family have been diminishing in vitality, becoming shriveled husks instead of paragons of dark power. The problem has been traced to a flaw in the family's bloodline, an unknown weakness in one of their ancestors, that is now so deeply ingrained that there is no escaping it. Unless this can be remedied, members of the family will devolve into helpless walking corpses too frail to defend themselves against the pirates, royal navies, or vampire hunters bent on dismantling the Saltari empire.

Current members of the family survive by consuming the blood of select mortal lineages, but the future of Saltari relies on finding new members whose blood can counteract the weakness of the taint. This means tracking down, kidnapping, and turning the right mortals into vampires, whether or not they're willing. This search is facilitated by the Fleet's globe-spanning travels and well-placed allies, but their activities have become harder to hide in recent years.

## A VAMPIRE FLEET

The ships of the Scarlet Fleet are crewed exclusively by vampires, each being a member of the extended Saltari family. These vessels keep living mortals on board, but they're not there to man the sails; rather, these doomed individuals are kept chained in the lower decks, where they can be fed upon. Because of their crews' hatred for sunlight, the vessels of the Scarlet Fleet only do business at night. The inhuman strength and agility of the crews allow them to sail even large ships with half the number of sailors usually required. In addition, the Fleet's members are curiously unaffected by crossing running water, unlike most vampires. In fact, if a ship's own stocks of blood are running dry, its crew sometimes swims up to other ships to feed. Mortal sailors sometimes offer up their services in return for the promise of immortality and wealth within the Fleet, but this rarely comes to pass; the members of the Fleet are extremely selective about who they recruit into the Saltari family, especially since only a select few are strong enough to resist their tainted bloodline.

## AURÉLE SALTARI

**AGE:** 96

**RACE:** Vampire (previously Human)

**OCCUPATION:** Admiral of the Scarlet Fleet

**SPECIALTY:** Sailing, Negotiation, Dueling

**Auréle is the newest Admiral of the Scarlet Fleet, equally competent in both combat and commerce, though they relish the former. Auréle is a young vampire, not quite a century old, but they already have decades of experience at sea, making them a formidable captain and merchant. Auréle fiercely believes in their mission to save their clan's bloodline, both to repay their debt of immortality and to see the family's nautical empire expand beyond the horizon.**

Auréle was recruited into the Saltari family when their sire, a vampire by the name of Corentin Saltari, decided she saw vast potential in the young sailor. At the time, Auréle was working as a captain for a shipping company called the Gilded Alliance. When they approached the Scarlet Fleet with a deal, their subtle, calculated ruthlessness impressed Corentin. That night, Auréle became a full-blooded Saltari, stealing their own vessel and joining the Fleet.

◆ **MY OWN BLOOD:** Auréle's younger brother Victor also served the Gilded Alliance, though he was a navigator. After Auréle went rogue, the Gilded Alliance imprisoned Victor and tried to negotiate the return of their ship in exchange for his life. The Fleet's council has repeatedly refused to raid the prison over the years, but Auréle is still desperate to set him free.

◆ **A MATTER OF HONOR:** A pirate captain called Mooneye has placed a bounty on Auréle's head after discovering that they were responsible for a bloody massacre of one of Mooneye's crews. Offended, Auréle has offered an equally large bounty to anyone who can bring Mooneye to them alive.

Despite their vaunted position, Auréle prefers to lead from the front: they captain the Fleet's flagship themselves, and are known to chase down pirates for sport. They are a capable fighter and an excellent tactician.

✦ **VAMPIRIC FRENZY:** For one hour after feeding on another creature, Auréle's attacks do more damage, their movement speed increases, and they become harder to hit.

# LEADER & FOLLOWERS

At first, Auréle's relative youth made the elders of the Saltari family wary, but after systematically dismantling several rival trade companies through shrewd negotiations and subtle sabotage, Auréle became the undisputed leader of the Fleet. Though Auréle is not shy about their love of bloodshed, they know restraint is needed to command an empire. The Scarlet Fleet is advised from the shadows by a council of Saltari elders, but the true power lies in the hands of the Fleet's Admiral, as well as the Admiral's small cabinet of confidantes and loyal Captains.

## THE SCARLET FLEET RANKS

Rank	Responsibilities
Associate <sup>1</sup>	Smuggling, dock work, shipbuilding, spying, abduction
Mate <sup>1</sup>	<i>Vampires only</i> ; sailing, navigating, defending the ship from attacks
Lieutenant <sup>2</sup>	<i>Vampires only</i> ; stocking supplies, planning voyages, commanding the crew
Merchant <sup>2</sup>	Trade negotiations, warehouse management, political representation
Captain <sup>2</sup>	<i>Vampires only</i> ; sailing, commanding the crew, plotting routes
Treasurer <sup>3</sup>	<i>Vampires only</i> ; accountancy, trade negotiations
Vice Admiral <sup>5</sup>	<i>Vampires only</i> ; issuing orders to ships, negotiations with ports and royalty
Admiral <sup>4</sup>	<i>Vampires only</i> ; monitoring fleet health and income, conducting war, coordinating operations
Ancestor <sup>4</sup>	<i>Vampires only</i> ; creating long-term strategies for expansion

1 - low rank, 2 - medium rank, 3 - high rank, 4 - leader

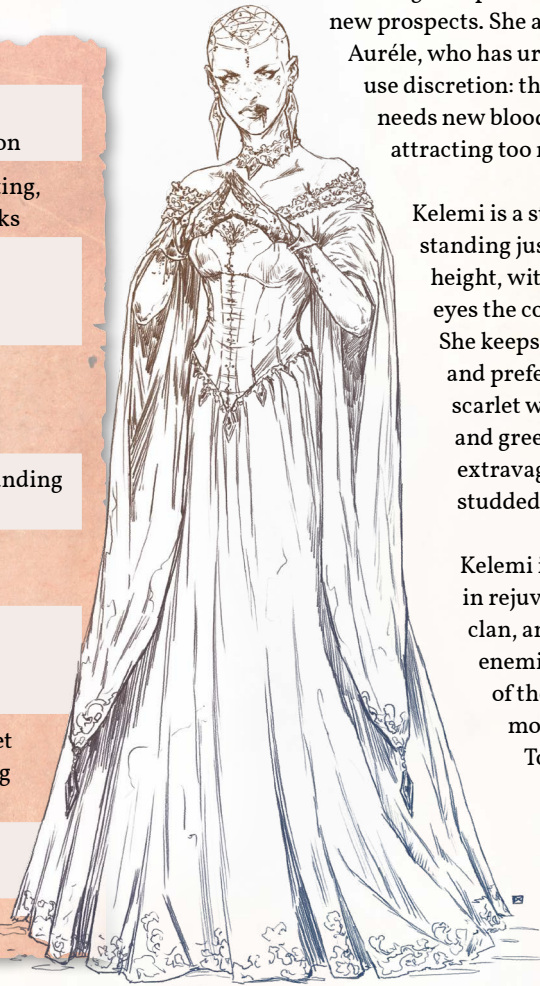
### ☉ AURÉLE SALTARI (NONBINARY VAMPIRE ROGUE)

Auréle is tall and lean, with short, dark hair. Their slim face has sharp, angular features accented by their large blue eyes. They typically dress in rough and ready gear for the high seas, but can don refined, nautical military dress when doing business or socializing in high society. Auréle's demeanor can also change with chameleon-like efficiency; they can go from the rough, profanity-laden speech of a sailor to refined, cultured language in the blink of an eye.

Auréle's adeptness at blending in with the people around them works to their advantage on multiple levels: their natural charisma puts people at ease, so much so that they start to forget that the individual they are dealing with is one of the undead. This makes them an excellent diplomat and negotiator while their ruthlessness and cunning make them a frightening opponent.

### ☉ KELEMI NEWAS (FEMALE VAMPIRE DIVINER)

Kelemi specializes in divination magic and has been charged with the vital responsibility of locating new members to add to the fleet's vampire clan. Many others work under Kelemi, doing the actual work of heading into the night to persuade or kidnap new prospects. She answers only to Auréle, who has urged Kelemi to use discretion: the Saltari family needs new blood, but it can't risk attracting too much attention.



Kelemi is a striking figure, standing just over six feet in height, with dark skin and eyes the color of amber. She keeps her head shaved and prefers dark robes of scarlet with accents of gold and green, particularly extravagant earrings of gold studded with emeralds.

Kelemi is proud of her role in rejuvenating her vampire clan, and she views the enemies and detractors of the family as little more than animals.

To Kelemi, the Fleet is shaping history, including not only the wealth and future of kingdoms, but also the inevitable rise of the

Saltari to dominance over mortal affairs.

### ☉ BELLODRI BAEREN (MALE GNOME ARTIFICER)

At 372 years of age, Bellodri is the oldest mortal in the employ of the Scarlet Fleet. He uses his laboratory and considerable scholarly skills to work on the puzzle at the heart of the Saltari family: the reason why the vitality of so many of the clan's vampires deteriorates over time. Thus far, the gnome has been unable to find a way to reverse the inherited weakness of the family bloodline. It was Bellodri, however, who discovered that certain bloodlines

do not succumb to this weakness. He continues to labor away in his lab, seeking answers and providing alchemical elixirs to help prolong the unlife of the clan's elders.

Bellodri is an elderly, wizened gnome with wrinkled, tan skin and large, watery blue eyes. His wispy, snow-white hair sticks out at odd angles from under his felt cap, but his mustache and three-forked beard are always well-groomed, though often stained from the chemicals in his lab. He dresses exclusively in black garments and a heavy, leather apron when at work.

Bellodri's work for the family has granted him outrageous wealth and a life of luxury outside his library, but his original reason for assisting the Saltari was his interest in crafting an elixir of immortality. Unlike others in the service of the Scarlet Fleet, Bellodri does not wish to be made a vampire—he finds the idea of becoming undead abhorrent, and fears that vampirism will be forced upon him if it appears that he may die of old age before solving the problem of the clan's weakened bloodline.

#### **MUNDI HRALEFSSON (MALE VAMPIRE FIGHTER)**

Mundi is second-in-command of the *Fierce Whisper*, Auréle Saltari's ship and the flagship of the Scarlet Fleet. Mundi is a physically imposing man, barrel-chested and well-muscled, standing nearly six and a half feet tall. He keeps his dark brown hair cropped short, but has a long mustache, which he braids with gold wire. Mundi's coats and tunics are typically sleeveless, revealing some of the intricate tattoos that cover his upper body. Mundi has lived through storms and battles that would have killed lesser men, and his stories are relished by his crewmates.

In his role as a commander, Mundi helms the *Fierce Whisper* during its voyages and serves as Auréle's trusted advisor. The *Fierce Whisper* is known for being one of the largest galleons on the seas, and can carry a king's ransom in cargo, especially gold and exotic spices. Though respected by his crew, Mundi is a merciless taskmaster and demands strict discipline from his sailors. Outside of the Fleet, Mundi evokes awe and fear among those who know of his reputation. He is infamous for his slaughter of the pirate ship *Midnight Lover*, as well as his tendency to cut out the tongues of those who slander the Fleet's name.

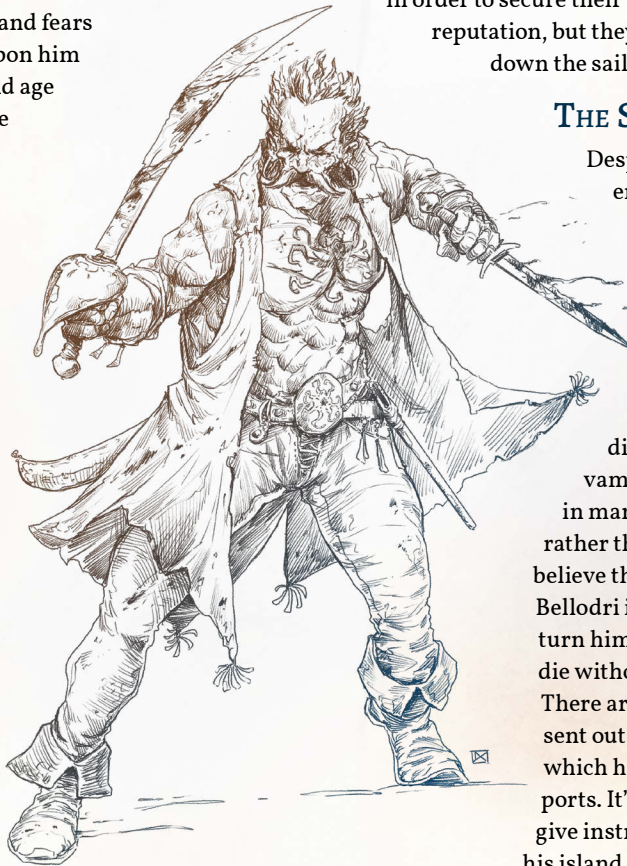
## RUMORS & SECRETS

### BLOOD IN THE WATER

Rumor is spreading about a Scarlet Fleet vessel that was sunk just off the Adamantine Coast. Apparently, the Fleet's vessel was mistaken for a pirate ship and attacked by the Emerald Armada, a mercenary force of ships that defends the Coast from raiders. Although most of the Scarlet Fleet's sailors miraculously survived the wreck, several other vessels in the area reported barrels floating up from the sunken ship. The barrels were assumed to contain wine until crews caught the rank, ferrous stench of blood. Now, the captains and crews of the ships who had reported the barrels of blood have begun going missing. A small group of merchants whose businesses were crushed by the Fleet are searching for the surviving crew members in order to secure their testimony and ruin the Fleet's reputation, but they're having trouble tracking down the sailors before the Fleet does.

### THE SCHOLAR'S ESCAPE

Despite making every effort to ensure that the Saltari family doesn't turn him into a vampire, Bellodri Baeren is convinced that he's run out of time. He is old, even for a gnome, and not in the best of health. After years of work, he has yet to discover a solution to why the vampire clan's bloodline fails in many hosts, declining with age rather than strengthening. The Saltari believe that he is their best hope and Bellodri is convinced that they will turn him rather than allow him to die without producing an answer. There are rumors that Bellodri has sent out several messages in bottles, which have found their way to nearby ports. It's whispered that these letters give instructions on how to infiltrate his island laboratory, rescue him, and stage his death so that he can escape for good. Even more tantalizing is the reward: enough gold to turn anyone into a king, as well as the secret weaknesses of the Saltari.



## BLOOD OF YOUR BLOOD

A scandal has rocked the port city of Watersmeet: someone has kidnapped Soraya Al-Hashiri, the daughter of the prominent merchant Farhad Al-Hashiri, leaving no trace behind but a torn curtain and an open window. Rumor has it that the night before, a small Scarlet Fleet vessel sailed into port but conducted no trade, and left before dawn. Locals are whispering that its sole goal was to kidnap the young woman, who has most likely been taken to Bleachbone, a nearby island outpost owned by the Fleet. One individual claims that they knew the ship to be Kelemi Newas' private vessel, the *Heartstring*.

The Fleet is rumored to use Bleachbone as a charnel house for storing mortals who will be used as bloodstock on their vessels. These unfortunate souls are kept in a vast catacomb system beneath the island. No one outside the Fleet has ever stepped foot there and lived, but tales are told of the cruel torture carried out there, as well as the macabre bone effigies on the shore.

Farhad fears that Soraya will be turned into a vampire, or sent to join the Fleet's food supply if she refuses. Rumors claim that abductees only have until the following sunset to make their decision, so Farhad has offered a massive reward for anyone who will sail to Bleachbone before sundown.

## ORDER OF SUCCESSION

A few clients of the Scarlet Fleet have heard that the cult's vampiric elders have grown weak and complacent. Though the Fleet has brought them wealth, these powerful clients would rather overthrow the Fleet and take its place. The group of conspirators is led by Grezor Antalin, a powerful noble and vocal supporter of the Scarlet Fleet—at least in public.



Grezor has quietly begun searching for vampire hunters who are willing to infiltrate the Fleet's island stronghold on Neressa and wipe out the weakened council of elders. It's not enough to cut off the head of the organization, however—Grezor wants to humiliate the Fleet and show his hesitant allies that its empire can be destroyed. To this end, the hired hunters will be asked to bring one of the elders back alive so that they can be publicly burned at the stake. In return, Grezor has promised to supply the hunters with a custom-built ship and the right to any treasure they might find in Neressa.

## UNDERHANDED OFFERINGS

While the Scarlet Fleet mainly serves the Saltari family and its own trading clients, it also offers certain services to outsiders—if the price is right. Listed below are some of the most common services that can be purchased from the Fleet.

### ◆ SMUGGLING

The Scarlet Fleet can be hired to requisition and transport dangerous items, illegal goods, or cargo that other merchants balk at carrying, such as dark magical items or a live basilisk. Exceptionally valuable, dangerous, or unusual cargo will result in higher fees, ranging from 1,000 gp to 15,000 gp. Adventurers in need of such items usually find themselves picking up deliveries from a Scarlet Fleet ship at midnight.

### ◆ PASSAGE/TRAVEL

Less common than transporting goods, the Scarlet Fleet will also take on passengers. Being aboard a ship with vampires may seem foolhardy, but the Fleet's leaders take a vested interest in the safety of their passengers. Given the rarity of pirate attacks on vessels carrying vampires, there may not be a safer ship to travel on than one raising the red sails. Cost of passage on a Scarlet Fleet ship usually ranges from 100 gp to 600 gp, depending on the destination.

### ◆ SHIPBUILDING

The ships of the Scarlet Fleet are some of the best on the seas, due in part to the organization's exclusive contracts with master shipwrights. On occasion, the Fleet will decommission one of their older ships and sell it for a price between 20,000 and 30,000 gp. On very rare occasions, they may commission a new ship for special clients or as payment for a particularly difficult task done on their behalf. These new ships can cost between 40,000 and 60,000 gp.

### ◆ TRACKING & ABDUCTION

The Scarlet Fleet has invested copious amounts of time and resources into being able to track down people from all walks of life, especially with the use of blood divination. Their efficiency and accuracy are renowned enough that some are willing to pay small fortunes in

order to commission them for personal use. Sometimes customers want their target not just found, but also captured and delivered; the Scarlet Fleet is willing to do this for trusted clients who pay a fee between 500 gp and 5,000 gp, depending on the difficulty of the target.

## BLOODSTAINED ITEMS

The following items are unique to the Scarlet Fleet and used by its members.

### ◆ SANGUINE STANDARD - 2,500 GP (RARE)

These flags are flown by most of the important ships in the Scarlet Fleet. During their enchantment, they are soaked in the blood of humanoids slain by the vampires, who restrain their urges and burn the blood afterwards, rather than give in and drink it. This abstinence, combined with the magical wards cast on the flags, give a *sanguine standard* powerful abjuration qualities. A ship of the Scarlet Fleet that flies a *sanguine standard* cannot be set aflame and will only sink if subjected to catastrophic damage. Furthermore, holy priests and the like cannot set foot on the ship without being beset by a supernatural fear that freezes them in place.

### ◆ WATERWALKER'S AMULET - 500 GP (UNCOMMON)

These amulets are made from the hands of drowned sailors, which are desiccated and attached to leather thongs or iron chains and worn around the neck. They can be worn by undead and living humanoids alike. A creature wearing such an amulet can move across any liquid surface, such as water or acid, as if it were harmless solid ground. Furthermore, if submerged by any means, they float to the surface of the fluid at a rate of 10 feet per second. If a vampire wears the amulet, then they are immune to any impediment caused by running water.

### ◆ WRAITH FIGUREHEAD - 15,000 GP (VERY RARE)

Bound in a cage of cold iron is a smoky, spectral wraith—the restless spirit of a slaughtered sailor. These foul figureheads are affixed to the prows of Scarlet Fleet ships not just for their fearsome appearance, but also for their magical powers. If intruders such as spies or boarders set foot aboard the ship, then the spirit is released from its bonds and compelled to attack the intruders using necrotic

magic that drains their life force. The spirit can also warn of imminent storms by wailing, a sound that terrifies all but the undead. The spirits encased in these figureheads can only be freed by pouring holy water over their cages.

### ◆ CRATE OF CONCEALMENT - 1,000 GP (RARE)

To any casual observer, these boxes appear to be mundane storage crates. They measure around three feet in each dimension and are normally nailed shut, but can be opened with a crowbar. Inside the crate is an extradimensional space that can store around one hundred cubic feet of cargo, with no weight limit. No matter their contents, the crates never weigh more than fifty pounds each. When opened, the crate appears to be filled with straw unless a creature speaks a magic word, in which case they see the extradimensional space. The space has enough air to keep a single creature alive for around six hours.

### ◆ RAPACIOUS RAPIER - 5,000 GP (VERY RARE)

Masterfully forged in the sulphurous fires of the hells, these blades are made as part of a pact between the Saltari family and Fortana, an archdemon of greed. Each strike dealt by the weapon causes 20 gp of the injured party's wealth to disappear in a small puff of smoke and reappear in the possession of the wielder of the rapier. The gold pieces do not have to be in the injured person's physical possession to be stolen; they may lie in the target's home, or in a bank. If no gold pieces are available, then the rapier steals silver instead, but it will not steal copper.

### ◆ GOBLET OF DECADENCE - 6,000 GP (RARE)

These golden goblets are studded with blood-red rubies and decorated with images of krakens, sharks, and galleons. Though they're usually reserved for special toasts at opulent gatherings of the Fleet's Captains, some are brought to negotiations with the Fleet's partners to flaunt the organization's immense wealth. When filled with wine or blood, a single creature may drink from the goblet to gain a temporary bonus to all of their skills. After an hour, those skills return to normal, but the creature's maximum health points are halved for 24 hours. If a creature drinks from the goblet twice or more within the same week, they must roll a 1d10. On a 1, they become a vampire.



# HEIRS OF SALVEA

Wealth	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
Resources	💧 💧 💧 💧
Defence	♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥
Influence	⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡
Services	Restoration, Transformation
Disfavored	Dwarves, Human Civilization
Favored	Druids, Rangers, Clerics, Warlocks, Elves

*I have been called many things—a beggar queen, an insurrectionist, and a ruler of ruins. In truth, I am a monarch moved by mercy. I care for subjects who have been abandoned by their callous sovereigns and condemned to die, and I provide them with a new reason to live: a golden kingdom, rebuilt from the ashes, where their appearance will become a mark of pride.*

— Queen Lelthaine of the Coming Spring



Salvea was founded by Queen Lelthaine of the Coming Spring, an ancient archfey who has dedicated her immortal life to reclaiming ancient lands seized from her by mortals. To bolster her ranks, the Queen's emissaries seek out those who have been afflicted by sickness and plague and offer to cure them through a mysterious fey ritual. Those who are cured are newly transformed into fey creatures, but with each healing, the cult's emissaries become more corrupted, manifesting horrifying magical disfigurements that are passed onto the new converts.

Salvea follows diseases through the realms like vultures follow an injured deer, seeking out the desperate and hopeless. Because of this, its members are familiar figures among the lowest tiers of society, especially the destitute and dying. When a victim of disease accepts the cult's secret cure, their maladies are removed and their vitality is restored. What the Healers of Salvea fail to mention about this process is the hideous transformation that accompanies this recovery: many watch their feet turn to hooves, spiraling horns erupt from their scalp, and their pupils become stretched into goat-like slits. This transformation causes most of



Salvea's convalescents to be shunned by their families and communities, leaving them with only Salvea to turn to. Thus, Queen Lelthaine gains another servant.

## HIDEOUS BARGAINS

The deceptive bargain offered by Salvea is usually presented to those who have no other choice. For many, it seems to be a miraculous boon—at least at first. This magical healing process causes the Salvea Healer to absorb the corruption and decay of the victim's body, which in turn corrupts the Healer's physical form. Where once a fey might have looked truly magnificent with butterfly wings and golden locks cascading around their shoulders, after dozens of healing sessions these wings lose their vibrancy, becoming dusty and grey; their limbs twist and their skin cracks like old porcelain; and their hair falls from their scalp in greasy clumps. Those they heal also take on these aspects, which means that the cult's Healers eventually reach a point where their attempts at transformation and restoration cause their patients to become horrendous abominations that cannot survive for long, while they themselves degrade into deformed monstrosities.

## UNTIL KINGDOM COME

Along with the magical ritual that transforms mortal forms into warped fey bodies, most new converts to the cult are enchanted with a spell that allows Queen Lelthaine to subtly coerce them into obeying her will, as well as communicate with them telepathically. This spell only grows in power over time, until the Queen gains the power to command her subject with but a thought.

To bridge the divide between her ancient fey subjects and the newly converted mortals, Lelthaine fills the minds of the transformed with visions of the past, when the Queen's kingdom of Cirania thrived within the mortal realms. The Queen whispers to her new subjects that their fates are now intertwined with her kind, and that a new life and purpose are calling to them: to reclaim the Queen's old lands, rebuild Cirania, and live forever in peace and joy. What the Queen does not mention is that many new members of the cult will become the frontline soldiers for the coming war. In addition to becoming warriors, many of these new fey will replace the cult's current Healers when they become too warped and corrupted to heal any longer. This ensures that the cult continues to grow, though the cost will be terrible.

## A HIDDEN EMPIRE

Salvea is met with resentment and hatred by the common folk for their deceptions and grotesque transformations, while the nobility (especially rulers) view Salvea as an insidious fey insurrection that threatens not only their lands, but the balance of power. With so much ire directed toward the cult, members of Salvea use disguises, illusions, and secrecy to pursue their goals and move undetected through mortal lands. Even mortal converts are granted fey magic by their new forms, and many gain proficiency with illusions and charms in time.

Despite being known for their signature transformative cures, the cult has mastered many forms of healing magic under the tutelage of Queen Lelthaine. In addition, Salvea counts experienced generals, powerful mages, and talented spies among its ranks, though the cult's foot soldiers are planned to be drawn from the newly transformed mortals. When Lelthaine's forces have regained their former numbers, the cult's reclamation of their ancient lands will commence. In the meantime, the cult seeks to infiltrate the wild places of the realm to set up clandestine strongholds.



## QUEEN LELTHAINE OF THE COMING SPRING

**AGE:** Unknown

**RACE:** Fey

**OCCUPATION:** Archfey Noble

**SPECIALITY:** Nature Magic, Enchantment, Restoration

**Q**ueen Lelthaine of the Coming Spring is a powerful Archfey noble who watched mortal civilization rise from the mud. Her kingdom, Cirania, thrived for centuries until she decided to support the ancient mortal kingdom of Nyra. Lelthaine sent soldiers alongside her legendary healers, but the alliance proved disastrous: Nyra fell, and Cirania was conquered in a cataclysmic war. Lelthaine and her court were driven into exile, and Cirania passed into myth. After despairing at her own subjects' few offspring, Lelthaine founded Salvea to rebuild her strength and raise an army capable of reclaiming and rebuilding Cirania.

Queen Lelthaine was once a magnificent fey monarch and a powerful healer, but since starting her cult, she has diminished into a hag-like being. She disguises her appearance whenever possible with veils and illusions, but despite her grotesque appearance, many of her original servants view her with reverence and trust.

◆ **LIVING CASTLE:** As part of refounding her ancient kingdom, Queen Lelthaine has been constructing a castle that rivals the fortresses of her mortal enemies. The Queen's servants have been constructing this castle from the stone ruins of Cirania and living plants that are cultivated into becoming the architecture for courtyards and keeps. This majestic structure is huge and mobile, and continually changes to fit Lelthaine's will. It serves as the cult's main stronghold, but the Queen is still searching for her throne's lost keystone.

◆ **ASSASSINS ABOUND:** Queen Lelthaine has been tasking her subjects to hunt down and kill the mortal nobles that now rule her ancient lands. She has already killed several members of the landed gentry, and now many dukes and barons have placed bounties on the heads of all Salvea members.

The Queen is hideous and deformed, but her spellcasting power and talent for deception is undimmed. She uses a combination of mind-affecting magic and nature spells to destroy foes.

◆ **FY ARCHNOBLE:** Queen Lelthaine has access to spells that influence the minds of mortals, including powerful illusions and charms. She can also alter the earth and plants around her, and transform enemies with a snap of her fingers.

# LEADER & FOLLOWERS

Each member of Salvea is a fey creature of some sort, though most are deformed and warped. They range from satyrs to wild elves to dryads, and their deformities include withered limbs, gnarled flesh, and crooked features. Most cultists choose to conceal these disfigurements behind flowing robes and masks or illusions.

## SALVEA RANKS

Rank	Responsibilities
Brother/Sister <sup>1</sup>	Performing menial tasks like construction and growing food
Traveler <sup>1</sup>	Concealing members with disguises and illusions, creating safe havens for other members
Healer <sup>2</sup>	<i>Fey only</i> ; Conducting rituals that cure and transform mortals
Spy <sup>2</sup>	Gathering knowledge about the cult's enemies, committing sabotage
Soldier <sup>2</sup>	<i>Fey only</i> ; Raiding and reclaiming mortal lands, defending territory
General <sup>3</sup>	Planning missions to raid and reclaim territory, leading Soldiers on missions
Wayfinder <sup>3</sup>	<i>Fey only</i> ; Discovering and tracking diseases, locating new converts
Courtier <sup>3</sup>	<i>Fey only</i> ; Advising the Queen, building alliances
Queen <sup>4</sup>	<i>Fey only</i> ; Managing the cult, issuing orders, planning the new kingdom

1 - low rank, 2 - medium rank, 3 - high rank, 4 - leader

### 🌀 QUEEN LELTHAINE OF THE COMING SPRING (FEMALE ARCHFEY NOBLE)

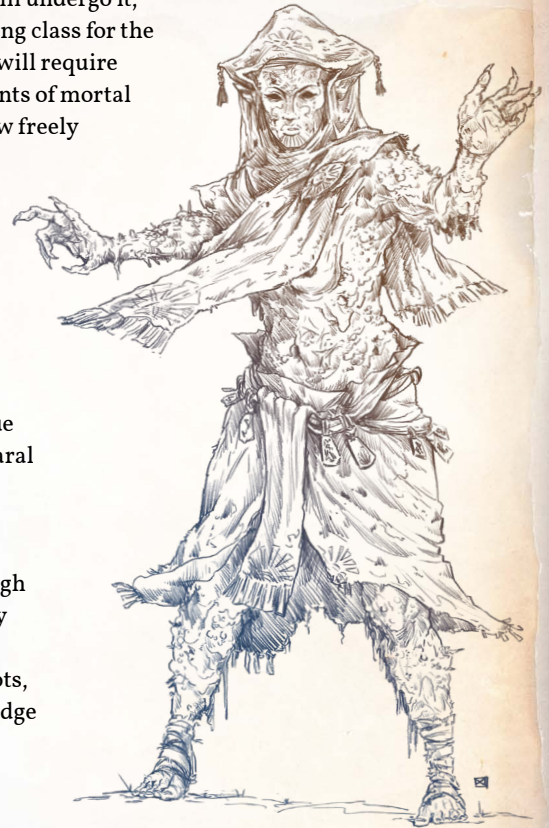
Queen Lelthaine is outwardly empathetic toward her twisted subjects, especially the original fey who gave up their beautiful appearances to become Healers for the cult. However, her plans for re-establishing her kingdom reveal her cold pragmatism and willingness to deceive her servants: many malformed members of the cult will prove useless in battle, and are instead being trained as fodder for the coming wars. These wretched cultists will never see the kingdom they were promised, and their sacrifices will lay many mortal settlements to waste.

In addition, Lelthaine has been exploring a way to magically restore her most loyal subjects to their previous beauty and vitality. Once the ritual is perfected, only

Lelthaine's chosen will undergo it, forming the new ruling class for the kingdom. The ritual will require collecting vast amounts of mortal blood, which will flow freely in the war to come.

### 🌀 EMBARAL BRIARHAND (FEMALE DRYAD WAYFINDER)

Due to her supernatural ability to sense plague and pestilence, Embaral is Salvea's primary Wayfinder. She is capable of seeing the flow of disease through a population as easily as she might see the growth of a tree's roots, and uses this knowledge to determine which communities are the best targets for the cult's transformative recruitment process. As one of Lelthaine's original subjects, Embaral is dedicated to the Queen's vision for the future. Despite this, she has a distaste for the mortals that the cult transforms—in her eyes, they do not deserve the gift of becoming fey.



In addition to tracking the vectors of sickness, Embaral performs transformation rituals on new converts herself. Because of this, she is truly malformed: though she was once a dryad possessing a flowing form and an enchanting gaze, she hides her now withered form beneath heavy robes and an oaken mask so that she is less likely to provoke the hostility of mortals. In private, however, she revels in her tainted form, showing off her twisted limbs and bleached bark like medals of dedication. When unmasked by guards or mobs, Embaral relishes in their horror at her true appearance and takes joy in leaving behind a trail of bodies as she escapes their grasp.

### 🌀 MOONSILVER SELAYN (NONBINARY PIXIE BARD)

Moonsilver is one of Queen Lelthaine's most trusted Spies. They use glamours to disguise their true appearance, which has faded with age. In their true form, they possess dull, dusty, moth-like wings, translucent skin, and sunken, coal-like eyes, but most members of the cult see Moonsilver as a slender, silver-skinned pixie with butterfly wings painted in shifting, kaleidoscopic colors. To the cult's enemies, Moonsilver may take the form of a trusted friend, a handsome stranger, or a familiar face

on the street—anything that allows them to ensnare the target with a charming word or an enthralling look.

Once a target has been charmed or enchanted, Moonsilver discreetly teases out whatever knowledge they can use to the cult's advantage. This might be the local guard captain's planned raid on a Salvea safe house, a nascent alliance between mortal lords to defend their settlements, or word of a sickness festering in the slums of a city. Moonsilver takes joy in deceiving mortals and creating different personas, to the point that Queen Lelthaine has reprimanded her Spy for putting their own entertainment ahead of their mission. Though Moonsilver has proven to be a talented Spy, they see Salvea's grand plans as little more than a backdrop to their own private diversions.

### **☉ SAMHARA OF THE FORGOTTEN FOOTSTEPS (FEMALE FEY GIANT GENERAL)**

Standing well over ten feet tall, Samhara serves as the cult's foremost General. She is one of the founding members of Salvea along with Queen Lelthaine, and her full title is Baron Samhara of the Forgotten Footsteps. Apart from her superhuman strength and immunity to mundane weapons, Samhara possesses a unique ability: after leaving a creature's field of vision, she can remove all memory of herself from their mind. This allows her to infiltrate mortal settlements with ease and makes Samhara a terrifying raider and scout. To Samhara, mortals are mere cattle to be frightened, herded, or slaughtered.

Samhara's main duties to the cult are training and leading raiding parties. These small squads are sent to mortal towns and villages to burn houses, spoil crops, kill livestock, and sow fear among the residents, with the goal of pushing them out. Samhara has proven to be an unpredictable and ruthless leader, as well as a master of guerrilla warfare. Instead of sending her small bands of raiders into battles, Samhara treats war like a game of cat and mouse, misleading her foes with illusions and feints and demoralizing them with

midnight ambushes and befuddling spells. To the cult's enemies, Samhara is probably the most hated and feared member of Queen Lelthaine's court behind Lelthaine herself, an achievement made doubly frustrating by the fact that none of them can describe what she looks like.

## RUMORS & SECRETS

### THE FOREST WALKS

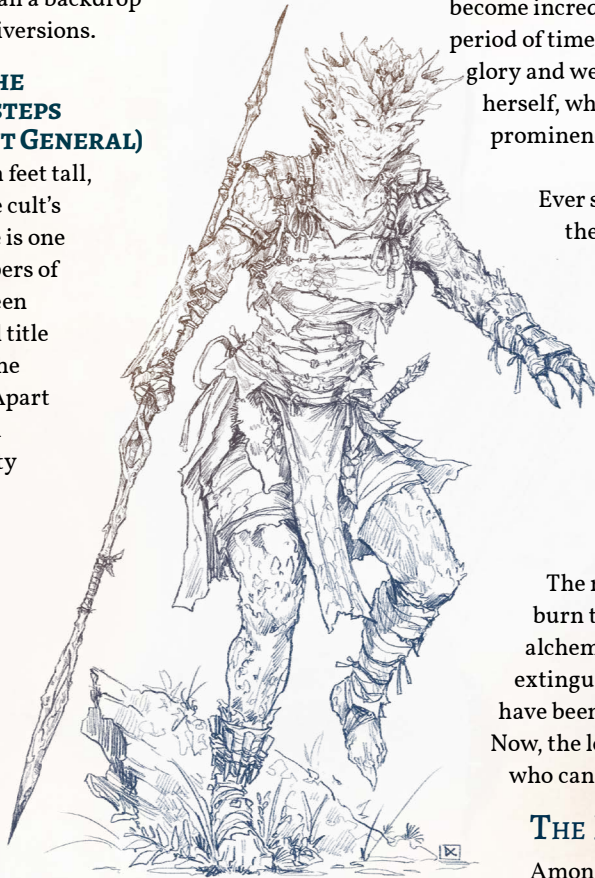
Within the former borders of Queen Lelthaine's ancient kingdom of Cirania, forests are being cleared to make way for the growth of Altan, a thriving city. The city is a burgeoning crossroads for trade, and has become incredibly wealthy in a remarkably short period of time. Unfortunately, it's rumored that Altan's glory and wealth have drawn the ire of the Queen herself, who has become jealous that the city's prominence has eclipsed her kingdom's memory.

Ever since lumberjacks began to clear cut the nearby forest and turn it into lumber for Altan, troubling things have been happening: there have been reports that trees have been groaning and growling, uprooting themselves and crawling on masses of roots, and even ripping apart logging camps. More recently, rumors have spread that the entire forest has come alive and started to advance on Altan like an army.

The rulers of Altan have reportedly tried to burn the marching trees with magical and alchemical fire, but the blazes are quickly extinguished by veiled members of Salvea, who have been seen riding in the boughs of the trees. Now, the lords of Altan are searching for someone who can stop the trees before they reach the city.

### THE FONT OF BLOOD

Among wayfarers of the wilds, there is a legend that tells of a great fountain made of lichen-covered granite and still-living trees somewhere in the forests. This fountain, the legend says, is fed not by a spring, but by humanoid sacrifices. The blood of innocents is poured into the fountain during dark rituals carried out under the light of the full moon, when natural magic is at its most potent. Once the blood has filled the fountain, the ritualists may climb into the fountain and dance in the sanguine spray. The blood washes away impurities brought about by age, disease, and magic, returning the bathers to a pristine, uncorrupted form. Supposedly, the fountain is guarded by a group of hags that have remained eternally young and beautiful by luring travelers to their deaths.



Now, there are rumors that Queen Lelthaine and her Courtiers have been searching for the fountain, and some claim that the cult has already found it and struck a bargain with the hags who guard it. Lelthaine has recently ordered her raiders to begin kidnapping mortals rather than simply driving them off, and it's whispered that these unfortunate souls will feed the fountain with their blood. A ranger named Yelgara has emerged from a neighboring forest to track the missing people, and is said to be looking for companions to help her destroy the fountain.

### BROKEN FAMILY

Some new recruits for Salvea were alone or abandoned, spending their last days wasting away in alleyways or shanties as their disease choked away their life, but many of the cult's converts had families that cared for them during the throes of their illness. However, the afflicted's family often disowns them when they discover their loved one's hideous new fey form in the wake of the healing ritual. The individual is usually ostracized from the community, and thus turns to the cult as their new family.

Rarely, a transformed mortal's repulsive new form will be accepted by their family, and Salvea is left without a new recruit. In these cases, it's rumored that the cult uses a subtle enchantment to influence the convert's mind and lure them back into the fold. However, there are other rumors that claim the cult returns in secret to kidnap the new fey, tearing them from the arms of their families and bewitching their loved ones with false memories. One family in particular, the Lelands, was apparently bewitched to forget their adult son, who disappeared after being miraculously cured of a wasting ailment. The family's true memories have slowly returned, and now they are searching desperately for their lost child.

### HUNTING THE HEALERS

A virulent illness has been seeping through the poorer quarters of the *City of Quaron*, and there are rumors that Salvea has already begun to infiltrate the slums to seek out new converts. Locals report strange stories of veiled healers offering to cure entire families, as well as hideous, sobbing beasts walking the streets, wrapped in bandages.

The magistrate of Quaron is rumored to be assembling a special group of soldiers, bounty hunters, and guards to hunt down and drive out the Salvea Healers, who are whispered to have a hidden safehouse within the slums. Some bounty hunters have refused to join, claiming that the cultists of Salvea have the power to entrance anyone who looks into their eyes. Others say that the cultists can pass on diseases to others, or turn their enemies into animals.

## UNNATURAL OFFERINGS

The magic of the fey allows the cult to offer unnatural boons to its members and followers. These unnatural offerings can only be offered by fey members of the cult and the higher their rank, the more potent the magic.

### ◆ HEALING

Though they are most known for the transformative rituals offered to the gravely ill, Healers of Salvea are able to carry out less extreme forms of healing, including knitting together bones, closing wounds, curing fevers, and even repairing damaged organs or removing hexes and curses. These abilities are rarely offered to mortals, but may be offered to other cult members or those who assist the cult. If a mortal is desperate, a Salvea member may attempt to recruit them to the cult or request a favor, which may involve finding a new convert to pay for saving the mortal's life. Alternatively, the Healer may require payment in gold, between 100 and 1,000 gp, depending on the severity of the wound.

### ◆ GLAMOUR

The cult can clothe outsiders and members in illusions that make them more persuasive, attractive, or enchanting to others. This magic, called a glamour, is considered highly immoral by most of the mortal realms due to its mind-altering effects: in addition to deceiving the senses, glamour entrances and enthralls the viewer, making them more susceptible to suggestion and having positive feelings toward the subject. Nonetheless, it seems to be popular among unsavory sorts, such as criminals and con men. Glamour is sometimes used by nobles and politicians to sway people in their favor or further their own schemes, though they must be discreet when doing so. Salvea offers this magic to outsiders in exchange for favors or keeping their agents secret, but they do so only rarely. When they charge gold, the price is usually 2,000 gp.

### ◆ TRANSFORMATIONS

With the help of elaborate rituals and skillful fey mages, Salvea can transform its members or outsiders into beasts, both mundane and magical. They might transform a cultist into a crow in order to scout out a mortal settlement, or turn an outsider into a mouse to allow them to evade the law. In rarer situations, the cult may transform someone into a powerful creature, such as a roc, a hydra, or even a wyrm. Though the shape is only constrained by the power of the spellcaster performing the transformation, no Salvea member can turn a creature into a dragon or a truly mighty creature such as a frost giant or leviathan. The transformations usually last for up to twenty-four hours, though the transformed creature can sometimes revert to their normal form with a thought. This service is usually offered in exchange for favors, but can sometimes demand a price of 200 to 10,000 gp, depending on the transformation.

## OTHERWORLDLY ITEMS

The following items are unique to Salvea and used by its members.

### ◆ LIFELEECH AMULET - 50 GP (RARE)

These glass jars are filled with writhing red leeches, and are typically worn on chains around their users' necks. A wearer of a lifeleech amulet is imbued with an aura of life-draining magic. Whenever they hit another creature with an unarmed strike, the damage they deal is restored to them as the blood of the injured creature flows out of their skin and into the amulet. In a pinch, the amulet can be destroyed by smashing it and its contents. This causes an eruption of blood that restores hit points to creatures in a small radius, who are showered in the gore.

### ◆ BREAKBONE CLUB - 500 GP (UNCOMMON)

These twisted, vicious clubs are typically made of blackthorn, hawthorn, and other woods with magical properties. The stout weapons can be wielded with one or two hands, and are covered in sharp spurs and spikes that, on first glance, appear to be the dangerous element. However, the true danger of a breakbone club is what gives them their name - a target hit with such a club stands a high chance of having their bones shattered, tendons torn, and ligaments ripped. These clubs cause lingering injuries that result in internal bleeding, hampered mobility, and lasting illness.

### ◆ DISEASE VESSEL - 3,000 GP (RARE)

These abhorrent creations resemble sufferers of different virulent diseases rendered in clay. They are warm to the touch and strangely flesh-like in appearance. A disease vessel can be used to cure and bestow diseases. If empty, the vessel can be touched to a diseased creature. If the disease is nonmagical, it is cured and stored in the vessel, which displays the symptoms of the disease in sickening detail. The vessel can then be touched to another creature, passing on the disease to them instead. Some powerful disease vessels retain the diseases even once they've been passed on, forming a pseudo-living library of plagues and maladies.

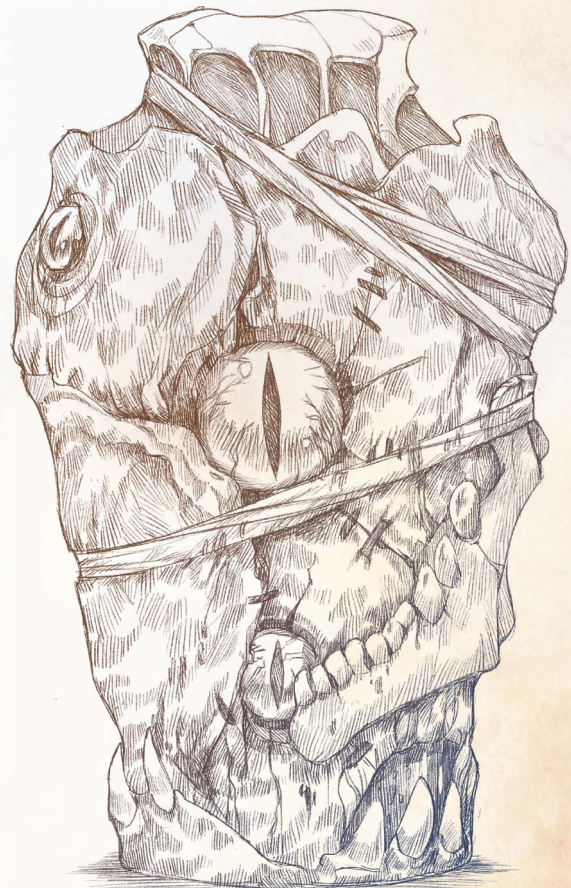
### ◆ BLIGHTED PIXIE DUST - 50 GP (UNCOMMON)

Pixie dust, the powder from the wings of a pixie, has numerous magical uses. Salvea harvests this dust and corrupts it with viruses and diseases so that it retains its magical powers, but becomes far less humorous. A creature exposed to blighted pixie dust is put into a magical sleep, during which time tumours and growths erupt over their body. When the target awakens, the tumours explode, belching forth swarms of maggots with tiny human faces which devour the target, and spread to those nearby.

### ◆ VIRULENT CROWN - 25,000 GP (VERY RARE)

Woven from blighted branches, fungal strands, poison ivy, animal bones, and stretched tendons, these crowns give a mastery over disease to those who wear them. A mortal that wears the crown gains increased resistance to being charmed or enchanted, can't be magically put to sleep, and is immune to all diseases. Furthermore, they only need to rest for half of the usual time, falling into a strange trance rather than falling unconscious. Additionally, the creature gains a selection of minor nature spells focused on spreading disease, such as those that wither plants, deal necrotic damage, cause plagues and blights, blind, and infest.

As the crowns are of fey origin, a fey creature that wears the crown gains additional powers; the ability to enthrall creatures who gaze into their eyes, transform into powerful beasts, disguise their appearance with illusions that cannot be distinguished from reality, and force other creatures to fall into a deep slumber with a song.



# THE SEERS

Wealth	⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗
Resources	💧 💧 💧 💧
Defence	♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥
Influence	⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡
Services	Divination, Decoding, Tattoos, Glimpses
Disfavored	Monks, Wizards, Sorcerers, Architects, Mathematicians
Favored	Clerics, Paladins, Warlocks



*Mortals live in a gray world of illusions and lies, mistaking shadows for the truth. We are the only ones who see what casts those shadows. The light of truth blinds our mortal eyes so we may focus our full attention on the mysteries that surround us.*

— Vardus, Seer Recruiter

**T**he Seers are a sect of zealots dedicated to uncovering The One Truth, an esoteric pattern embedded in the universe that will reveal the true nature of existence and the purpose of mortals within its grand design. They aim to discover this truth by finding signs, messages, and symbols within everyday occurrences; many members of the cult have the Sight, a magical ability that allows them to see new layers of reality, which reveals traces of The One Truth hidden in plain view. However, the pursuit of this mystic Truth has transformed the Seers into dangerous fanatics who despise the unbelievers and will take whatever steps necessary to further their quest.

Though the cult's mission may seem noble and even sympathetic to mystics and philosophers, their obsession and zealotry have made them hated and shunned by the common folk, who view the order as a collection of dangerous lunatics who are deluded into seeing arcane revelations in mundane minutiae. Their dark reputation is reinforced by their recruitment methods, which involve kidnapping children that have the potential for the Sight, and their attacks on those who spread lies, including wizards, clerics, and scholars. For the Seers, all of this is part of their solemn duty to pursue the Truth.

## THE SIGHT

A heightened perception called the Sight is the cornerstone of the Seers' search for the Truth. At its core is the ability to discern hidden patterns and symbols in otherwise mundane phenomena, such as the order of fruits stacked on a grocer's cart, the assortment of shells spread over a stretch of coast, or where the feet of a prisoner step on their way to the gallows.

To fully develop the Sight, a dangerous arcane ritual must be performed on the aspirant. The ritual occurs at the end of one's initiation into the cult, and involves pouring a potion of quicksilver into the aspirant's eyes, which physically blinds them but is meant to open the aspirant's eyes to The One Truth. If successful, the ritual alters the senses of the aspirant, replacing their vision with a new type of sense such as darkvision, blindsight, tremorsense, or some other heightened perception. Those who retain some semblance of normal sight may find their vision augmented or altered by conditions like synesthesia or other strange phenomena.

Though acolytes chosen by the cult may have the potential to gain the Sight, only about three out of five aspirants successfully complete the ritual, leaving many of them permanently blind. These impaired individuals become wholly dependent on and fervently loyal to the cult, and are often assigned as assistants to esteemed members or tasked with spreading word of The One Truth to other communities.

## THE SEVEN KEYS

According to the beliefs of the Seers, one of the major steps to uncovering The One Truth involves locating seven primordial locations within the world that are linked by ley lines—powerful magical currents that run beneath the world's surface. These ley lines are thought to form a vast, complex diagram that will reveal the next stage of the Seers' path to enlightenment. The Seers believe that clues to the locations of these seven places, called the Seven Keys, as well as the links between them, can be found in the patterns of everyday life, such as the cracks in a cobblestone street, the stains on an ancient tome in the city library, or the way the wind courses over a field of ripening grain.

## OPENING NEW EYES

The Seers believe that those who have entered adulthood have had their conventional vision for too long to receive the Sight, and thus are useless, or even harmful, to the cult. Instead, the organization seeks out gifted and talented children, especially those with a knack for divination magic, and convinces them of the existence of The One Truth.

Usually, the cult convinces the children that they are special, have more potential than their parents or teachers are willing to admit, and that their families and friends are being cruel to them by holding back the reality of existence. Many naive youths are swayed by the Seers' words, and agree to undertake the ritual that will potentially gift them with the Sight.

When residents of a town or city discover the Seers recruiting their children, it usually ends with the cult being immediately pushed out. However, the Seers have become adept at integrating themselves into communities and disguising their agenda by presenting themselves as traveling mages and offering useful services, such as dowsing for water.

## DENOUNCING FALSEHOOD

The Seers are also infamous for the harsh way that the cult treats "liars." The Seers believe that some magical practitioners and religious leaders are deliberately perpetuating falsehoods in their magical experiments or sermonizing by portraying the cosmos in a way that clashes with the Seers' One Truth. If the cult decides that such an individual has grown too influential, or is interfering with the cult's recruitment or operations, the Seers may take brutal measures to eliminate them. The punishment may take the form of blinding, where the individual's eyes are plucked from their skull to show their blindness to The One Truth, or silencing, where their tongue is cut out of their mouth to prevent them from speaking any more falsehoods.

## ASPHAEL, THE SIGIL TRACER

AGE: 583

RACE: Human

OCCUPATION: Diviner

SPECIALITY: Futuresight, Mathematics, Planar Knowledge

**A**sphael is an ancient human covered in tattoos and scars that depict intricate symbols. He always carries a sharpened steel quill with which to etch these shapes into his flesh or the flesh of his followers, often at a moment's notice. Asphael wears a blindfold to cover his eyes, which are blind but not silvered like the other members of the cult. It was he who received the vision of The One Truth, an event that changed his entire existence and caused him to found the cult.

Asphael was born blind, but quickly became used to navigating the world using senses beyond sight. He mastered the intricacies of mathematics at a young age and soon began to experience visions of the future, which revealed patterns in time itself. His knowledge of The One Truth seems to have kept Asphael alive despite his age, a fact that serves to bolster the faith of other cult members.

Asphael believes that by discovering the Seven Keys and unlocking The One Truth, he'll have access to unlimited power and extraplanar travel. Though Asphael believes he is tapping into the power of the cosmos, he abhors those who claim the One Truth is divine, or that any god can claim to understand it. To Asphael, even gods are simply ignorant actors following an invisible plan.

◆ **A GLIMPSE OF A KEY:** Asphael has recently glimpsed another reality, which allowed him to divine the location of one of the Seven Keys. Unfortunately, it appears to be underneath a well-protected holy city, within its most sacred temple. The city is hostile to the Seers, so it must be infiltrated before the Key can be discovered and utilized.

◆ **THE LIVING SIGIL:** Recently, in one of his more powerful trances, Asphael inscribed a strange sigil on the back of one of his supplicants. This sigil changes shape fluidly, and is apparently trying to communicate with those around it. Asphael has become obsessed with learning to speak with it, but to no avail.

Asphael has mastered many arcane arts, but his mind and body are failing him, causing him to be physically frail.

☛ **FORESIGHT:** At all times, Asphael is able to see a few moments into the future, which prevents him from being surprised by an ambush and gives him a slight advantage when trying to avoid attacks, spells, traps, and the like.

# LEADER & FOLLOWERS

Each member of the Seers typically shaves their head and shuns hats, eyewear, or headwear of any sort, lest it disrupt their connection to the hidden realities of the world. Seers also tattoo themselves with the symbols they see so that they are never forgotten. For the same reason, the cult harvests, cures, and stores the skin of their members upon their death.

## THE SEERS RANKS

Rank	Responsibilities
Pupil <sup>1</sup>	Learning the arcane geometries, studying the existing sigils and symbols
Lens <sup>1</sup>	Basic divination, public liaison, continued studies
Optic <sup>2</sup>	Advanced divination, ley line invocations
Blinder <sup>2</sup>	Blinding and silencing, blackmailing
Sigil Shaper <sup>2</sup>	Recording sigils and symbols, tattooing
Recruiter <sup>3</sup>	Recruitment, observing communities, public liaison
Vigilant <sup>3</sup>	Guarding the sigil libraries and discovered Keys
Advisor <sup>3</sup>	Managing lower ranks, advising the All-Seer, advanced divination
All-Seer <sup>4</sup>	Supreme divination, cult management

1 - low rank, 2 - medium rank, 3 - high rank, 4 - leader

### ASPHAEL, THE SIGIL TRACER (MALE HUMAN WIZARD)

Asphael, while once a remarkable mage and powerful diviner, is losing his touch. His age, while revered, has come at the cost of his cognizance: Asphael is now mercurial and half-mad, vacillating between wise, contemplative serenity and frenetic, gibbering mania. He is mostly disconnected from the present time and place and is obsessed with webs of omens and signs that he has glimpsed from other realities. Furthermore, he has come to believe that The One Truth possesses a kind of consciousness

or personality, though it lacks a physical form. Asphael has become callous to the lives of his acolytes, if he even recognizes them at all. To Asphael, mortals appear as shifting webs of patterns spread across space and time rather than individual entities. For this reason, Asphael views human experiences like death, pain, and emotions as illusions—all are merely ripples of the vast, intricate design of The One Truth.

### VARDUS (NONBINARY HUMAN WIZARD)

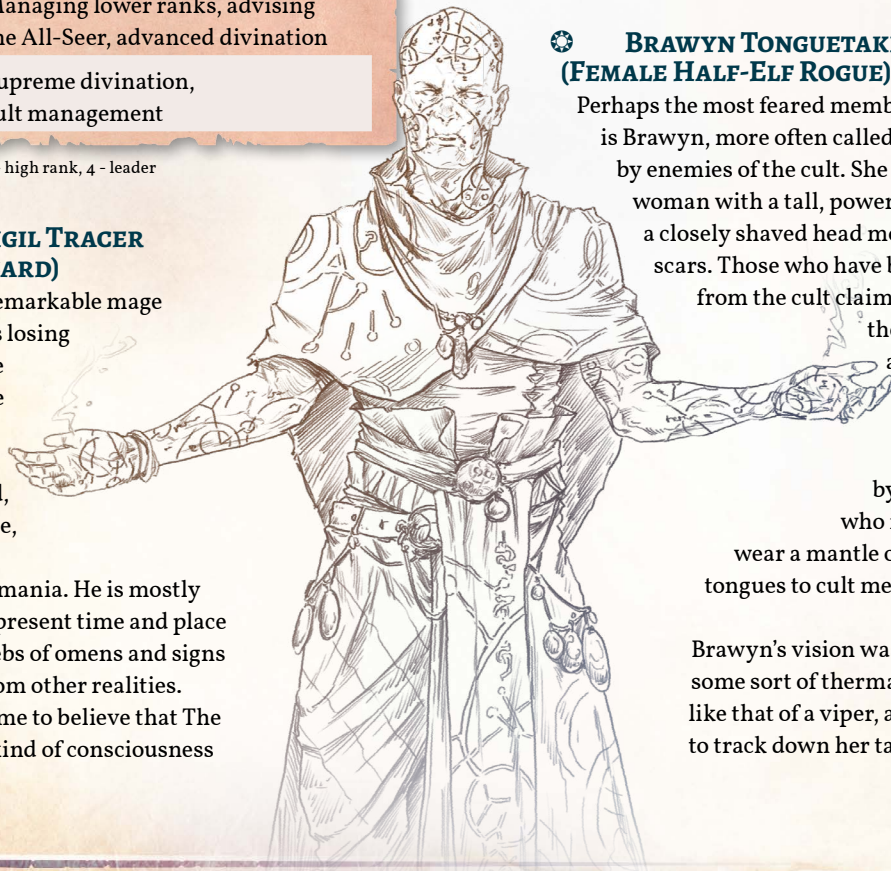
Vardus is one of the Seers' head Recruiters. They have a shrewd talent for recognizing arcane ability in children and a sinister knack for manipulation. Untold families have been ripped asunder by this infamous individual, who travels through the borderlands in search of communities naive to the reputation of the Seers. As well as trying to convert communities to the idea of The One Truth, Vardus serves as a diviner of sorts, and will tell fortunes, predict weather changes, or determine the fate of missing livestock in return for monetary donations to the cult. In this way, they build up a community's faith in them and their fellows before the recruitment process begins. It has been reported that some communities become so enamored with Vardus' clairvoyance that they willingly offer up their children as apprentices.

Vardus' silvery eyes and tattoos contrast with their tanned skin, forming a web-like pattern not dissimilar to the ley lines they claim to perceive. Like many of the Seers' members, they prefer loose robes embroidered with symbols pertinent to the cult: eyes, geometric symbols, and sequences of seven.

### BRAWYN TONGUETAKER (FEMALE HALF-ELF ROGUE)

Perhaps the most feared member of the Seers is Brawyn, more often called Tonguetaker by enemies of the cult. She is a muscular woman with a tall, powerful frame and a closely shaved head mottled with scars. Those who have broken away from the cult claim that most of the blindings and silencings inflicted upon outsiders are committed by Brawyn, who is rumored to wear a mantle of desiccated tongues to cult meetings.

Brawyn's vision was replaced by some sort of thermal perception, like that of a viper, allowing her to track down her targets with



relative ease. Though she usually wears the traditional dress of the Seers, she is known to disguise herself in the rags of a beggar or the robes of a priest. She is said to carry a vicious curved knife with which she removes the tongues of those who speak out against the cult or try to contradict the proselytizing of the Seers. Most who meet Brawyn find her laconic, humorless, and imposing.

### ☉ ENSTAL (FEMALE HUMAN WIZARD)

Enstal is likely the most well-known Seer in the realm due to her service to royal families, prominent mages, and the nobility. Though relatively young, she is regal and intense, causing even those of noble birth to become awestruck by her presence. Of course, her unique ability also inspires reverence: during her initiation into the Seers, Enstal was gifted with an otherworldly perception that allows her to gain a bird's eye view of nearly any location in this plane of existence, as well as others. Her incredible ability is used by the cult to find ley lines and monitor the activities of their enemies, but the Seers also lease her service to powerful clients, such as spymasters, military generals, and scholars. Though some doubt the accuracy of her scrying, the Seers claim that Enstal is infallible and all-seeing.

Because of her importance to the cult, Enstal never travels alone. She travels with a cohort of dedicated blind assistants who take care of her every need, as well as several cultists with the Sight who assist her during rituals and ceremonies. There have been numerous kidnapping attempts on Enstal, but no successful ones as of yet.



## ESOTERIC OFFERINGS

As well as their constant quest for discovering the underlying arcane geometry of the multiverse, the Seers are forced to spend some of their time conducting other business that keeps them afloat. Much of this work is divination designed to increase favor with the masses and draw in donations from wealthier patrons.

### ◆ DIVINATION

The service most often offered by the Seers is divination. This comes in a wide variety of forms depending on the talent of the cultist, ranging from mere fortune-telling to genuine scrying rituals that produce powerful arcane visions. The most common uses for the Seers' divination are finding misplaced items, predicting the weather, or determining the outcome of harvests. For lay people, this service is often offered for free, or for a small monetary donation (usually around 25 to 50 gp). These services are usually meant to ingratiate a community to the Seers.

### ◆ A GLIMPSE

Powerful casters within the Seers are capable of altering the perception of others for a short period of time, typically no longer than until the following dawn. These changes of perception can be common things such as darkvision or blindsight, or more exotic changes such as x-ray vision or thermal vision. These augmentations of an individual's eyes, also referred to as Glimpses, can be bought for a relatively small donation to the cult—no more than 50 to 100 gp. However, this service has another, more sinister purpose: those who receive a Glimpse allow the Seer who bestowed it to see through the recipient's eyes during the augment's duration, allowing the Seer to spy on them.

### ◆ TATTOOS

Many of the Seers are skilled tattoo artists, using both magical and mundane means to apply the ink. These tattoos play a fundamental role within the cult, but can also be bought by outsiders. Some wish to show their belief in The One Truth, while others seek tattoos imbued with arcane energy that give them magical powers that stem from whatever strange forces the cult taps into. These magical tattoos will come at a cost, typically in information about ley lines, primordial sites, or similar information pertaining to the ultimate goal of the Seers.

## MYSTIC ITEMS

The following items are unique to the Seers and used by its members.

### ◆ CRYSTAL LIBRARY - 5,000 GP (VERY RARE)

These crystal globes are translucent and come in various pale shades. All are smooth to the touch and come with a silver stand. These crystal balls can be used as foci for divination spells and allow for scrying and foresight, but they have been specially treated by the cult to record the divination attempts of those who use them. Specifically, they're capable of storing sigils and symbols seen by cult members during their divinations. Once full of recordings, typically a decade's worth, the globe is rendered inert.

### ◆ QUARTZ STYLUS - 150 GP (UNCOMMON)

These long, wand-like crystals contain glowing silver fluid that the cult claims is arcane energy given liquid form. In fact, the substance is a mixture of quicksilver and eyeballs that have been liquified and infused with magic. Once activated, these crystals remain working for one hour. During this time, the crystal can be placed against any wall, allowing the wielder to see what's on the other side as if they were standing there. After being activated, the liquid mixture inside slowly evaporates, allowing the user to gauge how much time is left. When the liquid is gone, the crystal shatters harmlessly.

### ◆ EYES OF THE DISBELIEVERS - 50 GP PER EYE (RARE)

These preserved, varnished eyes once belonged to foes of the Seers. During the preservation process, the eyes are imbued with magical, mind-destroying force. The eyes can be thrown or hurled with a sling toward a target. If they hit a humanoid target, that target takes normal bludgeoning damage, but is also confused for one minute unless they resist the magical effect. These eyes are typically found in pouches of seven.



### ◆ OPTIC AMULET - 3,500 GP (RARE)

This amulet is made from the preserved eyeball of a member of the cult after their peaceful demise. These amulets can only be crafted from eyeballs of those who had the Sight in life, and thus the amulet looks more like a silver orb on a delicate chain than a preserved humanoid eyeball. While attuned to this item, a creature is more able to dodge effects that the amulet can see, such as visible traps or incoming attacks. Furthermore, as long as the amulet isn't covered, the creature cannot be surprised by ambushes or the like.

### ◆ DOWSING ROD - 35,000 GP (VERY RARE)

This Y-shaped rod has two handles that are meant to be gripped, with the stem of the Y pointing outward. A spellcaster that touches the instrument feels an extrasensory perception awakened within them. While attuned to the rod, a spellcaster has the ability to see ley lines, natural currents of magic traveling through the world, which appear as neon-colored lines superimposed on the surface of the earth. The world has eight ley lines, with one corresponding to each school of magic. If a spellcaster attunes to a ley line, spells from the respective school of magic are empowered as long as the spellcaster is within one mile of the ley line. Furthermore, the spellcaster's mana is not depleted when casting low-level spells of that school.

## RUMORS & SECRETS

### BLINDING PLAGUE

A hideous plague is spreading from community to community out in the borderlands of the realms. Called *Sight Rot*, this cruel disease causes bleeding from the eyes, which eventually results in total blindness if left untreated. The only nonmagical cure for the plague is the rare herb *Eyebright*, which grows in swamps but is notoriously difficult to procure. If the whispers are to be believed, this disease—which is spread through contaminated water—is being perpetuated by the Seers. Some claim that barrels of tainted water are being emptied into wells during the night by robed figures who may be members of the cult. Worse still, areas where *Eyebright* would usually grow appear to have been tainted in some way, such as the ground being salted or burned. A bounty on fresh *Eyebright* has been declared, and the reward is generous.

### ONE OF SEVEN

Although it is not common knowledge, it is said that one of the *Seven Keys* has been discovered by the Seers. Most Keys are teeming with elemental power, and this one is no exception. The Key is located in

the heart of the *Frozen Wastes of Relvide*, beyond the western icepeaks. The place is a whirlpool that has been frozen solid, giving it the appearance of an arena of tiered benches sunken into the surrounding ice.

Frozen within the walls of this elemental arena are ancient beings, older than the stars, that still live despite their frigid state. Anyone who looks upon them hears their bone-shuddering voices in their mind, and is compelled by their commands. The cult refuses to send any members to the location, believing that the entities are an embodiment of the temptation of false reality, but they have commanded their most talented spellcasters to cover the entire region with an illusory landscape while they look for willing volunteers who can drive out the star-beings.

### MISSING HEIR

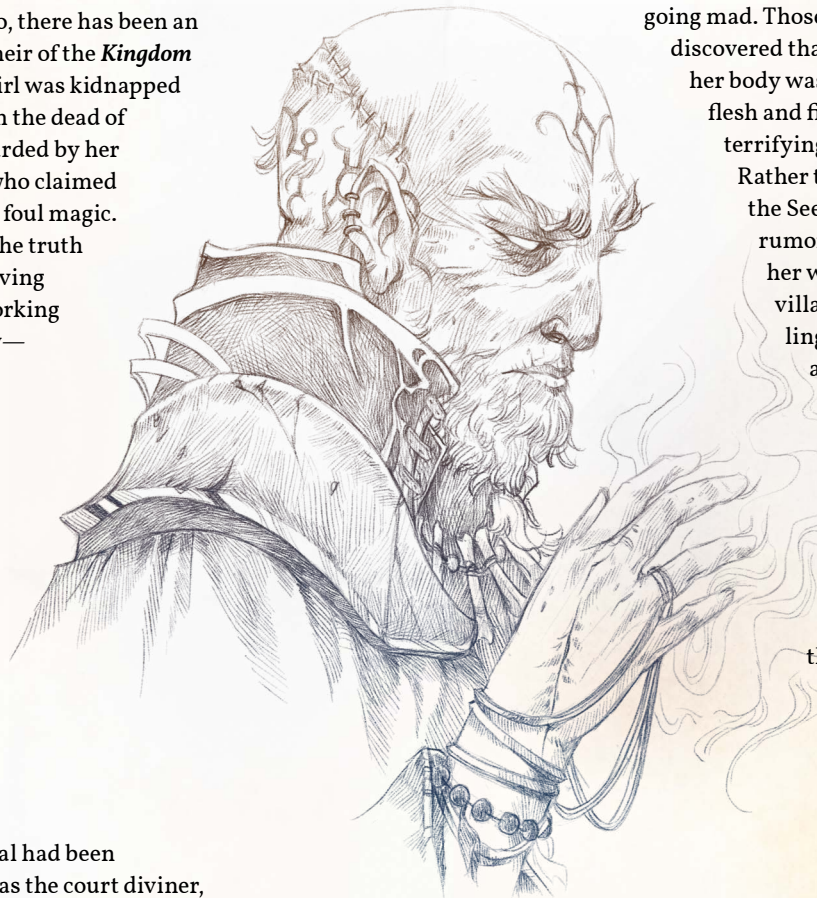
For the past decade or so, there has been an ongoing search for the heir of the *Kingdom of Valkryn*. The young girl was kidnapped from her bedchamber in the dead of night, despite being guarded by her usual outfit of guards, who claimed to have been blinded by foul magic. Rumor abounds about the truth of this, with many believing that the guards were working against the royal family—they are certainly no longer in the employ of the castle, and many have gone missing. Given that she was already training as a mage and showed a mastery of illusion unsurpassed by anyone else her age, many took to blaming the Seers for the missing girl.

In addition to this, Enstal had been serving for many years as the court diviner, and would have had in-depth knowledge of the young heir's life. It's whispered that the Queen herself was planning to offer her daughter to Enstal, but the girl's father managed to spirit her away before she could be taken by the Seers. Now, the King and Queen of Valkryn have grown old, and the kingdom risks falling into chaos if the heir is not returned. However, the Seers are also searching for the girl, and will pay dearly for her.

### HER MOTHER'S EYES

Recently, the Seers tried to implant the eyes of one of their departed members into the head of an initiated member who didn't have the Sight. They hoped that transplanting the eyes would allow the Sight to be passed on to the new cult member, who would otherwise remain blind. The procedure was successful, and the eyes began working in their new host. Unfortunately, the success was short-lived. Before long, the new host began to behave bizarrely, finding warped sigils and symbols unlike anything the Seers had previously documented. The woman would scream that The One Truth is only the mask of Chaos, and that death and life are one.

When the cult tried to dispose of this blaspheming woman, they found that many members with the Sight could not gaze upon her without going mad. Those without the Sight discovered that merely touching her body was enough to rot their flesh and fill their heads with terrifying, chaotic visions. Rather than deal with her, the Seers released her. It's rumored that she made her way back to her home village, where she still lingers. Though she appears to have lost her mind, those who have spoken with her claim that she can see into the realm of the dead. Either way, this outcast remains the only being that the Seers truly fear.





CHAPTER 2

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BRINGING YOUR  
CULTS TO LIFE



# BRINGING YOUR CULTS TO LIFE

*For years, people have poured gold into the coffers of the Temple of the New Flesh like so much water. They don't know what they've gotten themselves into—the Temple's platinum shells are animated with the souls of the rich, but they become puppets controlled by the Temple. Meanwhile, the shambling undead corpses of the paupers shovel the souls of their peers into the blazing inferno of the faithforges. It's twisted. No one wins, except for the Temple's treasury.*

—Statement from Trent Harwood, Cleric of Boreas



**G**f all enemies, cults can be the most insidious. They are quick to punish those who defy their will or pry into the mysteries of their organization, and their secretive ways make it difficult to distinguish friend from foe—in fact, one may not realize that they face danger until it is too late.

This chapter provides resources to make the dark organizations in your game more engaging, complex, and immersive. You can use these resources as presented here, or as inspiration to create your own twists on the sinister factions in your game.

## WEALTH & RESOURCES

The money and resources that a cult can bring to bear for recruitment, defense, and other necessities are limited by its wealth level. Wealth is not the only measure of a cult's strength, but it factors heavily into the way that a cult interacts with the world.

For example, a poor cult such as the Order of Open Hands may have a huge number of followers from the lower classes and be capable of rousing an angry mob with little more than an impassioned speech, but when facing off against enemies, the cult and their followers may have little to draw upon other than whatever weapons their impoverished members can improvise or steal. While a mob of fanatical cultists can be frightening, well-trained and armed soldiers can cut them down like wheat.

A wealthy cult, on the other hand, may employ highly trained and well-equipped followers to deal with threats, or may simply hire assassins to deal with their enemies rather than dirtying their own hands with the task.

In other cases, wealth may grant a cult the luxury of being able to avoid trouble in the first place—a cult such as the Silver Serpents may conduct foul rites to turn humanoid blood into liquid silver, which can be used to bribe members of the city watch and ensure that the cult can continue operating without the interference of the law.

## WEALTH LEVEL

A cult's wealth level determines the amount of treasure available to it, but more importantly, the wealth level provides a reasonable idea of the resources available, such as land, buildings, equipment, and more. A poor cult is likely meeting in an abandoned building, remote wilderness locale, or the back rooms and basements of properties belonging to its members.



Meanwhile, an organization with greater wealth at its disposal may have its own temple, secret underground lair, or other well-constructed stronghold—maybe even several of them. The most affluent cults may blend with the highest echelons of power, such as the nobility or merchants, and inhabit opulent headquarters in the very hearts of kingdoms. Wealth is not a good indicator of a cult's size. A poor cult could have myriad followers, while a small cult could be formed of wealthy individuals with deep pockets.

**Wealth Level Resources**

⊗	Squalid
⊗⊗	Common
⊗⊗⊗	Respectable
⊗⊗⊗⊗	Prosperous
⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗	Mythical

**INCOME SOURCES**

The following table gives examples of methods that may provide a cult with its income. These examples can be tailored to suit a particular type of cult or environment—banditry, for example, could become piracy when dealing with a cult situated on the coast. In addition, certain sources could always bring in more

income than the level at which they are listed below. Raising hawks would be a modest income source, but if a cult bred the finest hunting hawks and sold them across the continent, then that could raise the cult's income level to Considerable or even Affluent. The monthly income can be considered an average, with various windfalls or mishaps causing the total to fluctuate.



Income Source	Description	Income / month
Minimal/subsistence	Begging; muggings; pickpocketing; marketplace snatch-and-grabs; manual labor and odd jobs; scavenging.	100 gp
Poor	Minor burglaries; selling cheap drugs and poisons; muggings in mercantile areas; petty smuggling; hunting and trapping.	250 gp
Modest	Organized smuggling; highway banditry; small-scale mining of common metals and/or minerals; small-scale crafting of armor, weapons, or other items.	500 gp
Considerable	Extortion; hired killings; performing hexes, curses, and minor summonings; large-scale crafting of armor, weapons, or quality goods.	1,000 gp
Affluent	Robbery of nobility; fencing stolen goods; theft of horses or exotic mounts; performing enchantments; necromancy; crafting of minor magical items.	1,500 gp
Rich	Animal husbandry (expensive or rare beasts); smuggling magic items; exporting rare or exotic materials; manufacture of high-quality goods.	2,000 gp
Very Rich	Large-scale mining of precious metals and/or minerals; large-scale manufacture of high-quality goods, donations from wealthy patrons.	3,000 gp
Exorbitant	Casting of low-level spells in exchange for money; mining of very rare metals and/or minerals; manufacture of magical goods.	5,000 gp
Enormous	Casting of mid-level spells in exchange for money; large-scale mining of rare metals and or minerals; manufacture of rare magical goods.	7,500 gp
Superfluous	Casting of high-level spells in exchange for money; husbandry of magical creatures; sale of rare, extraplanar items or resources.	10,000+ gp

## WEALTHY CULTS



Some cults are flush with money and resources. These wealthy cults may derive their riches from the control of a particular resource, donations from wealthy members or patrons, or income from various mercantile endeavors. A cult could also be a crime syndicate, whose coffers are filled with ill-gotten gains. While wealth is a powerful commodity, it doesn't always translate into power. A cult might have wealth but be small in number, whether due to tight restrictions on membership or limited appeal to the public at large.

Rich cults are often more powerful enemies than cults lacking wealth, simply because those resources provide them with more avenues to defend themselves or to strike out at enemies. Whether through hired assassins or mercenaries, political influence, magical items, or traps, a cult with wealth is a dangerous adversary. Listed below are several random characteristics that can be ascribed to a rich cult.

### d20 Wealthy Cult Characteristics

- 1 The cult offers its services to select criminals and wealthy members of society, but charges a significant markup.
- 2 The cult's members are characterized by their consumption of luxury products, such as rare vintage alcohol, exotic furs, expensive jewelry, and fashionable clothing.
- 3 The cult has a trade deal with other cults, establishments, institutions, or businesses where they offer each other exclusive deals and favors in order to remain better off than their competitors.
- 4 The members of the cult invest in many legitimate business ventures outside of the cult itself, such as mining, shipping, and trade, and their investments always seem to provide suspiciously high returns.
- 5 The cult runs charitable foundations such as orphanages and soup kitchens that help the poor and needy. Many of those helped by the foundations go on to join the cult, or at least spread word of it to others.
- 6 A particular resource (gemstone, precious metal, rare herb, valuable fur, or similar item) is considered sacred by a wealthy cult. It has a monopoly on this resource in the local area.
- 7 A cult has taken over a particular community. Its wealth is a product of owning all of the local businesses. Those unwilling to devote themselves to the cult scrape by, living off meager labor.
- 8 This cult targets the mercantile class. The cult's members claim that joining the cult is the key to prosperity and success. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the cult's influence grows with the more members it has.
- 9 The cult uses bribery and corruption to influence the outcomes of political votes. It controls the governance of their local area through criminal activity.
- 10 The members of the cult always wear distinctive, high-class pieces of clothing in public, such as griffon leather shoes, silver signet rings in the shapes of skulls, or silk robes.
- 11 The cult cultivates extraordinarily beautiful and exotic plants, such as flowers, trees, or topiary bushes. These plants are kept in palatial private gardens, away from the public.
- 12 The cult designates a certain week each year to hold a festival, whether in public or in secret. Members of the cult dance, sing, and indulge in lavish celebrations and rituals.
- 13 The cult has a large network of horses, carriages, and wagons that allows its members to smuggle people and goods under the guise of running a legitimate transport business.
- 14 The members of the cult are collectors of rare or expensive items, such as books, pieces of art, or weaponry. Other collectors are aware of these collections, and may be jealous of them.
- 15 The cult makes gifts of statuary or paintings to the nobility. These works are highly sought after and the nobles have them prominently placed in their homes. They don't realize that these items are scrying devices.
- 16 Much of the cult's gold is ancient and bears the markings and faces of rulers of long-lost civilizations or distant ages.
- 17 The cult is heavily involved in the import and export of goods from a certain port—no one can conduct any business at the docks without the consent of the cult.
- 18 All of the members of the cult are beautiful and youthful-looking thanks to expensive magical surgery.
- 19 The cult is composed of the social elite. The leaders know their members' most terrible secrets, and are ready to reveal them and ruin those who defy them.
- 20 The cult's buildings feature remarkable craftsmanship and hidden symbolism. They are constructed by a handful of architects who work only for the cult.

## POOR CULTS

**N**ot all cults have the luxury of deep coffers and a never-ending stream of resources. Some appeal to the poor, desperate, and fringe elements of society, while others may eschew material wealth, relying solely on nature to meet their basic needs. More sinister cults may gain resources stripped from their victims and sacrifices. Others may simply be too small and new to garner any significant patronage, and thus must scratch by on what they can bring in until they can build themselves up into something greater.

In some cases, being poor in resources does not necessarily mean that a cult is weak in its scope or power. A poor cult may be popular among the folk of a region, giving them power or influence beyond what can be attained by wealth. Listed below are several random characteristics that can be ascribed to a poor cult.

### d20 Poor Cult Characteristics

- 1 The cult is rumored to kidnap lone travelers, transients, and orphans, either for induction into the cult or as sacrifices.
- 2 The cult obtains most of its supplies through banditry and theft, especially its weapons and food.
- 3 The cult's headquarters is dirty, run-down, or leaky, and rats or other pests infest the rooms and chambers.
- 4 Instead of gold, the cult offers favors to mercenaries, assassins, or other contractors who work for the organization.
- 5 The cult's main territory or area of influence is barren, lawless, or poor in resources. Examples might include a bog, a slum, or a poor mountain village.
- 6 Members of the cult wear shabby or second-hand clothing. They may not have uniforms, or might be expected to only wear a badge or ring to signify their allegiance.
- 7 The cult has established an inn in a poor quarter of the city. It offers hot meals, something to drink, and a spot on the floor to sleep for free. Donations are encouraged, but not required. The cult uses the locale as a place to recruit new members.
- 8 The cult archive or library is moldy, incomplete, or damaged, and many of the books or records are falling apart.
- 9 The cult's weapons and implements are shoddy and easily broken, and their magic items are often unpredictable and dangerous.
- 10 The cult runs scams and confidence tricks, such as fixed races or rigged gambling games, to raise money for its operations.
- 11 Many of the cult members live off the land, especially through foraging and hunting. Their clothing and tools may be handmade.
- 12 The members of the cult are involved in organized criminal activities that are used to fund the cult, such as extortion or mugging.
- 13 Cult members dig up bodies to loot their valuables, then sell the corpses to local scholars and wizards for experiments.
- 14 The cult forces new members to sell most of their worldly goods and donate the proceeds to the cult.
- 15 The cult operates primarily out of the sewers, and has made deals with the rats that live there.
- 16 The cult uses a network of beggars to collect information from cities, roads, and settlements.
- 17 The cult's food and drink are of poor quality—the bread is stale, the cheese is rotten, and the wine is weak and watered-down.
- 18 Most of the cult's members don't know how to read or write.
- 19 Cult members lack manners or social graces—they are rough, crude, and impolite.
- 20 The cult uses the eyes and ears of the city's poor to its advantage. These people see the cult as an ally and pass on information to the cult in exchange for food, shelter, and the blessings of the cult's god.



## CULT RESOURCES

**A** cult needs more than just gold. Members of the Brotherhood of Tegar are bloodthirsty warriors infused with infernal vigor, but its legions of berserkers require black steel for their weapons, which is mined beneath the cult's headquarters on the volcanic Mount Uzgaloth. The Seers need quicksilver for the final step of their initiation rites, which grants gifted members the Sight, but this rare metal can only be acquired by mining cinnabar from the Aldrave Slopes.

The availability and quality of such resources depend on the cult's wealth level; the higher the wealth level, the higher the amount and quality of the resources available to them. A cult's resources can depend on the territory in which its members dwell—a cult based in a large, metropolitan city on the coast will have a larger array of resources available to it than one based in a remote wilderness area, but a wilderness cult may have better access to rare herbs, hardwood, furs, and the like.

A cult's membership can also be a major factor in the resources available to it, as can the people and creatures with which its members associate. A cabal of wizards, for example, is likely to have a considerable number of arcane books and spell scrolls, while summoned demons may grant powerful knowledge or access to forbidden relics. Use the following table to help determine a cult's available resources.

### THE CULT STASH

In a darkened vault beneath the *Obsidian Cathedral* lies the immense cache of the *Sisterhood of Spite*. Sealed away in a vault made entirely of lead mined from the elemental planes, the sisterhood's fabled hoard is said to contain gemstones the size of human skulls, the notorious

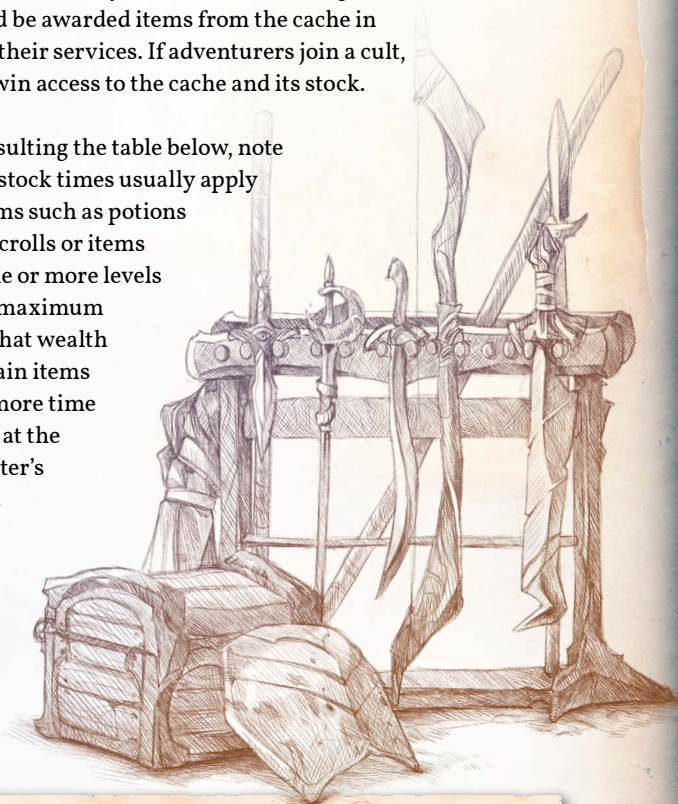
*Medusa blades*, and the most terrifying collection of spell components in existence. This immense stash of wealth is protected by animated serpentine statues whose foot-long crystal fangs drip with petrifying poison, their emerald eyes able to see through stone and darkness alike.

### PRIZED ITEM COLLECTION

Most cults will have a cache, a collection of items and resources to be brought out and used in times of need. A cult's wealth level determines the size of its cache, as well as the quality and rarity of the items within it.

If adventurers clash with a cult and defeat it, then the items in the cult's cache will naturally be part of the loot. Alternately, adventurers working for a cult could be awarded items from the cache in return for their services. If adventurers join a cult, they may win access to the cache and its stock.

When consulting the table below, note that the restock times usually apply only to items such as potions and spell scrolls or items that are one or more levels below the maximum rarity for that wealth level. Certain items may take more time to procure at the Game Master's discretion.



Cult Wealth Level	Maximum Rarity	Cache Items	Restocks
⊗	Common	Skin armor; ceremonial dagger; ring of beast speak; potion of healing; spell scroll (1st)	Quarterly
⊗⊗	Uncommon	Steel armor of acid blood; alchemist's fire; spell scroll (2nd); potion of greater healing; ring of arachnid form; fearsome bone axe	Monthly
⊗⊗⊗	Rare	Mithral armor; serpentine orb; potion of superior healing; spell scroll (4th); silver dagger of wounding	Bi-Weekly
⊗⊗⊗⊗	Very rare	Cold iron armor; potion of supreme healing; spell scroll (6th); silver wand of vermin swarm; sword of blood tide	Weekly
⊗⊗⊗⊗⊗	Legendary	Blackthorn armor; winged silk robes; obsidian hammer of infernal summoning; spell scroll (9th); talisman of ultimate evil	Daily

# INFLUENCE & DISPOSITION

## CULT INFLUENCE

**C**ults may approach the world in different ways. Some are overt, competing with royal families or established priesthoods for power, followers, or wealth. Others are secretive, with few suspecting they even exist, working toward their goals in the shadows. Cults also differ in size, ranging from a gang of bandits enriching themselves by mugging travelers to a continent-spanning order hoping to bring about the end of existence by executing a ritual involving the sacrifice of thousands.

Most disturbing of all is that a cult's devotees can be one's friends or neighbors. The scribe on the corner who pens missives on behalf of the illiterate might secretly be a Nox Libris scholar interested in purchasing fragments of forgotten lore. The duke's chamberlain could be an agent of Ordo Umbris, able to use his role to influence affairs and events throughout the nation. The halfling gutter urchin might be a Scion of Saardon, cultivating plague-bearing mushrooms in the sewers. In any case, a cult's influence can run in narrow channels on a purely local level or can stretch as wide and as deep as an ocean, affecting entire planes.

## AUTHORITY LEVELS

As an optional rule, each cult can have an *Authority Level* on a scale from 1 to 5, indicating the reach of its influence.

Cult Authority Level	Reach
██████	Local influence
██████	Regional influence
██████	Province-level influence
██████	Worldwide
██████	Omnipresent / Planar

The higher a cult's Authority Level, the more influence it has on affairs, such as which goods are traded at a port or who is allowed in certain shops. A cult can even become the de facto ruler of a town or region, supplanting a governor's regime. A cult's Authority Level reveals its scope: a small cult with local ties rarely has an opportunity to influence large-scale events; a global cult may wage war or execute a coup d'état. In addition, a cult might have significant influence in one place and less in another. A criminal gang might exert outright control over one city but only influence in other cities in the same province.

A cult's Authority Level can change over time and should shift as characters interact with it. It's up to Game Masters to determine exactly how and when this occurs.

Cult Tactic	Description
Unbridled Chaos	Cult members engage in bizarre and erratic behavior to mislead people into believing their actions are nothing more than harmless madness.
Unholy Boons	The cult offers boons to powerful individuals, organizations, or even the common folk to secure their support. The boon might be a bountiful harvest, uncanny luck, or the ability to turn flesh into silver.
Subtle Counsel	Cult members penetrate the upper echelons of the criminal underground or seats of government, where they can provide counsel to powerful figures and secretly further the cult's goals.
Utopian Promises	The cult approaches potential recruits with the promise of a paradise-like world.
Dreams & Visions	The cult magically influences the dreams of select figures or of the common people, increasing susceptibility to suggestion, fear, or even madness.
Religious Fervor	The cult takes advantage of superstitions and religious beliefs to advance its agenda; its members may claim to be prophets chosen by the gods.
Informants	The cult uses a network of well-placed spies to gather information on both its enemies and the common people; the findings are used to sow paranoia and distrust.
The Lure of Power	The cult offers to grant people or organizations power, whether through control of the masses, magical might, or influence over a nation or a kingdom.
Gold or Steel	The cult presents itself as reasonable and generous to its enemies, offering to buy their loyalty (or their complicity). If refused, the cult threatens ruthless violence.
Mayhem	The cult carries out acts of chaos and terror—such as murder sprees or magical fires—designed to intimidate enemies and keep others in line.

Sometimes it's obvious: if the party helps a cult gain more territory or a new powerful ally, the cult's Authority Level should increase, perhaps from *Local* to *Regional*. If the party foils its plans, the cult's Authority Level should decrease. Keep in mind that changes in Authority Level can be temporary—given enough time, most cults can usually recover from setbacks.

### CULT TACTICS

Dark organizations use various tactics to exercise their influence over society. These tactics change based on a cult's nature and goals. Use the entries in the *Cult Tactic* table as inspiration for how a cult you create might go about achieving its aims or exerting its influence.

### EFFECTS OF A CULT'S INFLUENCE

A cult's influence is most often hidden, but it always leaves marks. Nox Libris' quiet campaign to persuade the local clergy to embrace dark gods may manifest in common folk wearing strange totems or creating private shrines to demonic beings. Rumors of the Justicars' vigilante activity in a certain part of the city may cause a notable reduction in crime there, even if there's no truth to the claims. Sometimes the clues are more subtle. Use this table to provide hints and indications that characters can use to piece together a cult's activities. Feel free to tailor custom effects for cults you create.



### d20 Cult Influence Effect

- 1 The only lodgings around don't offer much beyond stiff beds and threadbare blankets. Tucked underneath a pillow is the weathered journal of this room's most recent occupant. The final entries describe unnerving behavior from the townspeople.
- 2 For a town of this size, there is a surprising lack of children. The few you see carry strange amulets around their necks.
- 3 Beautiful men and women walk the streets together and speak highly of a temple, the name of which none of the party members recognize. In fact, all conversations seem to revolve around the temple.
- 4 The commerce district bustles with jovial crowds of people, all of whom go about their business as though they can't see the ashen remains of the stalls and shops that once stood among the current vendors; some of the charred heaps still have glowing embers.
- 5 Missives posted throughout town contain warnings and disturbing messages. When asked about them, locals give vague and dismissive answers and watch the party with heightened suspicion.
- 6 Runes are carved into a few buildings in the village. Their inhabitants walk about as if dazed.
- 7 During daylight, the large town square stays vacant, completely devoid of life. As night falls, someone leaves an offering at the statue sitting at the square's center.
- 8 Feverish prayers whispered in the dark can be heard from the open windows of private homes. The words are barely coherent.
- 9 Advertisements for a local merchant feature eye-catching artwork that, upon close inspection, hides a cryptic symbol. This symbol is also found in signage and posters for other businesses.
- 10 A lone carved box, partially obscured by a bush, contains a strange collection of scrap paper. Further investigation uncovers that the papers bear a name hastily scrawled in ink.
- 11 Talking to townspeople and travelers alike reveals that many have had family members disappear. The town itself seems to be in mourning; candlelit vigils and search parties occur each night.
- 12 The local currency has been replaced with coinage bearing alien markings; characters are told to exchange their gold and silver for the new coins.

- 13 Certain buildings seem to inspire dread in the townsfolk. No one is seen entering or leaving these places, but voices—or screams—can be heard from outside.
- 14 Many people appear to be preparing for a certain date.
- 15 Remnants of a ritual can be found at the base of a tall, aging tree growing beside the town's main street.
- 16 Locals avoid contact with outsiders; even taverns and shops struggling for patronage are hostile to travelers, making it difficult for new faces to convince innkeepers and bartenders to accept their business.
- 17 Fresh graves lie open on the outskirts of town, and residents seem terrified of a mysterious disease that only seems to strike certain people.
- 18 Rotting corpses hang in alleyways and even the town square. No one dares touch them or cut them down.
- 19 Houses and buildings have white markings chalked onto their foundation stones or entrances.
- 20 Sleeping in the area causes characters to have incredibly realistic nightmares that seem to go on for hours.

## CULT DISPOSITION

As an optional rule for your game, each cult can have a disposition toward different races, classes, or any other characteristic it finds important.

**FAVORED** - If a race, class, etc. is favored, members of this cult go out of their way to recruit them. This type of person is often granted special privileges within the cult, such as better equipment, greater rewards, or more frequent increases in rank.

**POSITIVE** - If a cult has a positive disposition toward a person, that individual might have an easier time gaining membership. They might also be chosen for more lucrative or risky missions and treated more amiably by other cult members.

**NEUTRAL** - If no disposition is specified, the cult is likely neutral toward individuals of that race, class, etc.

**UNWELCOMING** - Cults who are unwelcoming toward a certain type of person may display distaste or discrimination against those individuals. Such individuals might gain admission to the cult, but will likely be denied access to higher echelons and may be treated unfairly.

**INTOLERANT** - Cults who are intolerant toward a race, class, background, etc. may forbid those types of individuals from joining the cult or even working with the organization. In extreme cases, the cult may go out of their way to target those individuals for murder, kidnapping, or other heinous acts.



## GAINING FAVOR & BECOMING HATED

Cults usually operate in secret. This means that characters going about their normal adventures might accidentally garner a cult's favor—or hatred—without realizing it.

For example, if the characters destroy a treant that was attacking a local village, they might think no more of it once they've collected their reward. But what if that treant was a servant of the *Scions of Saardon*, sent to tear down a bastion of civilization? Such a blow would surely lower the party's standing with that group. In fact, the cult might even send spies to watch the characters and keep tabs on them. If the party's meddling continues, the cult might send a member to infect the characters with its signature fungal plague.

### DARK ALLEGIANCES

Alternatively, characters might learn of a cult and wish to build a relationship with it—or target it. For instance, some adventurers might desire the power afforded to initiates of the *Disciples of the Dawn*, such as radiant magical auras

or powerful sunswords. To this end, a character could volunteer to retrieve esoteric astronomical devices from a ruined temple or to find a sacrifice for a ritual. The character probably won't realize that their actions are ushering a star spawn into the world, but as long as they remain dedicated to the cult, they'll reap its benefits.

The tables below provide examples of actions characters can take to gain favor or enmity from a dark organization—feel free to adapt the entries or imagine new ones for cults of your creation.

## EFFECTS OF BEING FAVORED & HATED

Cults can express their satisfaction or displeasure with a character in a variety of intriguing and terrifying ways. Favor can take the form of a gift or a boon, while hatred often leads to threats, curses, or even bloody vendettas. Sometimes these tokens of favor or hatred reveal the reach of the cult—a character might arrive at a remote port to find an assassin already waiting for them on the docks.

### Favor Gained Example Character Action

Very Low	A character publically vocalizes support for or interest in the cult and its goals.
Low	A character gives a common item, such as a set of armor, or a monetary donation to the cult.
Moderate	A character accepts—and satisfactorily executes—a mission to further the cult's goals.
High	A character successfully performs a vital task for the cult, earning them respect.
Very High	A character partakes in a ritual that demonstrates their loyalty and dedication to the cult.

### Hatred Gained Example Character Action

Very Low	A character openly mocks or criticizes the actions of the cult.
Low	A character harasses or threatens a member of the cult.
Moderate	A character disrupts a cult mission or operation, such as a kidnapping or a heist.
High	A character kills an initiated member of the cult or causes a member to be arrested.
Very High	A character derails a ritual or is found infiltrating the cult's headquarters.

### Favor Level Effect

Very Low	The cult sends a sealed letter to the character thanking them with a silver skull trinket.
Low	The cult grants the character a magical dagger that returns to its wielder when thrown.
Moderate	The cult grants the character a dark mentor that teaches them how to raise the dead.
High	The cult grants an audience with its spymaster, who has extensive files on everyone in the city.
Very High	The cult offers to augment the character's body with a pair of demonic wings.

### Hatred Level Effect

Very Low	The cult leaves a warning scrawled in blood on the character's door.
Low	The cult sends a swarm of rats bearing its mark to attack the character on the street.
Moderate	People who previously interacted with the character stop offering services or avoid them altogether.
High	The cult abducts a befriended NPC, cuts out their tongue, and hangs them upside down in town.
Very High	An invisible fey assassin armed with poisoned daggers is sent to kill the character while they bathe.



*“As I watched, the figure placed a severed head at the foot of the statue.  
Before my eyes, the statue began to come apart, releasing the radiant golem within.  
This was no holy construct, it burned with a sulphurous fire  
and wore an expression of unadulterated hatred.”*

# SERVICES & TRAINING

**M**ost people are used to seeking out the services of a blacksmith, the training of a city's master-at-arms, or even the spellcraft of an enchanter. Cults, however, are another story entirely. Whether it's stealing an artifact from a well-secured vault or teaching a curious individual the art of poisoning, cults can serve as a gateway to a world of illicit new opportunities. However, the price can be steep, and not every cult will want their payment in gold...

## SINISTER SERVICES

Cults don't usually offer their services as easily as a blacksmith or an archery tutor. Finding a cult and persuading it to help may be a challenge, but the rewards are tempting: from criminal syndicates to sorcerous cabals, a cult's illicit services can be used to gain incredible power unavailable to most people. Some cults may offer their services to outsiders, while others' secrets are reserved strictly for members. Outsiders should take care when soliciting a cult's services—dark debts may come back to bite them.

Below, you'll find a table that lists services that may be offered by cults, along with their relative rarity and price ranges.

## ASSASSINATION

Many cults have a predilection for the morbid art of assassination, and it's not uncommon for those outside of a cult to turn to these insidious organizations to hire killers. A few cults may be willing to undertake a public assassination, but most will prefer to execute the deed in private, away from prying eyes. These murders are carried out either directly at the hands of trained cultists, such as the vigilantes of the Blood Creed, or through more subtle means such as spellcraft or poisoning. The fee for such a dire crime varies based on the target's importance and security arrangements—for example, snuffing out a beggar in the street would cost much less than slicing the throat of a seasoned war veteran surrounded by vigilant bodyguards.

## BLESSINGS & DARK BOONS

If a cult serves a dark patron or deity, they may be able to offer their members unholy favors, which can range from physical augmentations to immunity to poison or disease, temporary wealth, or even entirely unique effects like the manifestation of a sword of crystallized blood from the cultist's wounds. Alternatively, cults like the Seers may share a modicum of their power; in the case of the Seers, they may grant a Glimpse, a boost to an individual's senses that might allow them to see into the minds of others, through walls, or even all the way around their heads.

These types of blessings and boons are typically reserved as rewards for loyal service, but they may also be acquired through dark pacts and deals made with the cult. Payment for blessings and boons is never made in coin alone, and typically involves some hideous gift such as an offering of souls, a demonstration of devotion, or a special ritual to be carried out by a supplicant.



Service	Rarity	Price
Assassination	Rare	2,500–25,000 gp
Blessings & Dark Boons	Rare	500–2,500 gp
Cover Identities	Uncommon	100–500 gp
Fencing	Common	50–250 gp
Hexes & Curses	Rare	1,000–5,000 gp
Information	Common	50–250 gp
Intimidation	Common	10–100 gp
Kidnapping	Uncommon	1,000–2,500 gp
Necromancy & Summoning	Rare	1,000–5,000 gp
Theft	Uncommon	100–500 gp
Travel & Transportation	Common	10–100 gp

## COVER IDENTITIES

When an individual needs to lie low or escape the prying eyes of the city watch, they might require a cover identity. Most often, this comes in the form of disguises and fraudulent documents, but cults that are gifted with the arcane arts can use illusions to make a client appear to be someone else, or take it one step further and fully transmute the individual so their face, body, and even race can change. One hideous example is the depraved Cult of Blades, whose priest-surgeons have been known to carefully slice off the faces of two individuals in need of new identities and swap them, allowing them to remain unrecognized.

Payment for false papers and disguises is normally accepted in coin, but more dramatic transformations might require indoctrination into the cult.

## FENCING

Fencing is the practice of surreptitiously buying and selling stolen goods. Fences are vital partners to thieves, rogues, and burglars, since most merchants may report suspicious goods or outright refuse to buy items that are suspected to be stolen.

Cults involved in criminal enterprises may offer this service to those willing to pay a set fee upfront or a cut of the final selling price of the item. Many cults won't care if the item is a precious heirloom stolen from a noble family or the skull of an ancient sage stolen from their tomb, and can typically find buyers for even the darkest and most disturbing of relics.

The Scarlet Fleet is known for their particularly discreet fences. They have the added bonus of being able to deal with buyers throughout the realms, as they can transport their stolen goods via their ships.



## HEXES & CURSES

For those looking to bring suffering to their rivals, there is perhaps no better method than a well-crafted curse or heinous hex. Some cults have mages within their ranks capable of imposing these bedevilmings, which range from disturbing to debilitating: terrifying nightmares, delusions, blindness, madness, and even death are only a small selection of potential effects. The dark rituals involved in these sorceries are often related to a cult's vile patron, but curses and hexes may also be cast without the influence of a deity.

Hags are perhaps the most well-known and feared hexcrafters, and the members of Salvea live up to this reputation. The cult itself already struggles with a hideous affliction that continually deforms its members, but their mastery of disease and disfigurement can be used to turn enemies into grotesque piles of flesh.

The payment required for a hex or curse is based on the severity of the affliction, but typically involves some sort of sacrifice or a quid pro quo arrangement.

## INFORMATION

Cults and criminal organizations often have dark secrets and forbidden lore that isn't found in archives or spoken about by the common people. Discovering the key players and customs of the criminal underworld might require information from a cult, as would information about corrupt judges or which guards are susceptible to bribery. The information may also be more obscure or esoteric: the true name of a demon or the location of a hidden eldritch city may only be known in dark circles. The cost of information varies—the more mundane, the more likely it is that gold is enough. However, for more arcane information, something equally precious must be offered.

## INTIMIDATION

There are few things more frightening than a centipede made from the viscera of sacrificed humanoids scuttling through your bedroom window, or the ceaseless chanting of otherworldly hymns echoing around your house for hours on end. Most criminal enterprises and gangs can provide threats in dark alleys or bloody beatings at dusk, but some cults can offer more imaginative and terrifying forms of intimidation, which can range from severed heads floating down a street to a midnight visit by an invisible demon. Sometimes a single frightening episode is enough to accomplish the goal, but other times the torment may

stretch on for weeks or months, slowly breaking down the target's will until they yield and succumb to the client's demands.

## KIDNAPPING

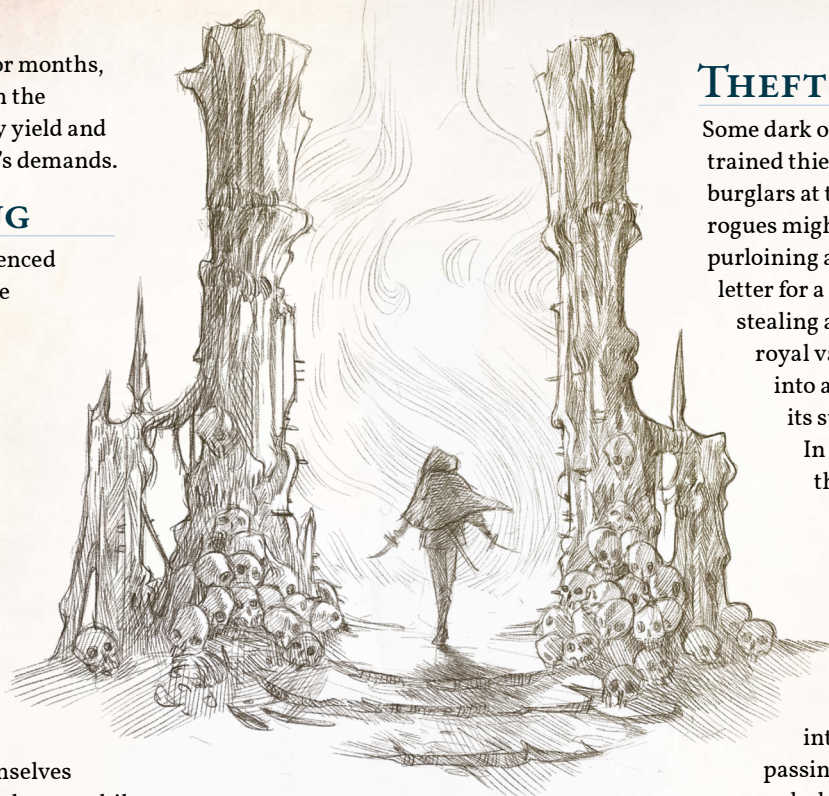
Most cults are experienced with kidnapping since abduction may serve as a way to silence enemies, procure humanoid sacrifices, or gain leverage over rivals. Some cults may have members who specialize in abductions, and may even have a preferred method: members of *Ordo Umbris* are known to approach targets while disguising themselves as guards or even loved ones, while the vampires of the *Scarlet Fleet* prefer to seduce or kidnap targets directly from their beds.

As well as providing members who can carry out the abduction, the cult might also offer a selection of safe, secure locations to hide the victim, such as an abandoned house or a true dungeon. Like assassination, the price of a kidnapping is dependent on the victim and the security around them.

## NECROMANCY & SUMMONING

Among the dark arts, necromancy and conjuration are among the most forbidden and dangerous. A cult might be willing to raise the spirit of a recently deceased murder victim or a centuries-old scholar for consultation, but few might have the capability to create undead thralls or more complicated rituals. The secret to creating liches is an especially rare and precious art, available only to the highest-ranking members of some cults.

Summoning might involve demons, fey, eldritch abominations, or other creatures. *Nox Libris* is adept at this type of conjuration, but approaches it with extreme caution. When summoning extraplanar beings, a cult might require extravagant favors or prices, since the risk and difficulty of contacting such forces often threaten the souls of the summoners, not to mention the possible destruction of the surrounding area. Still, the boons granted by some extraplanar beings can be wondrous and terrible.



## THEFT

Some dark organizations have trained thieves or professional burglars at their disposal. These rogues might be tasked with purloining an incriminating letter for a blackmail campaign, stealing a ritual dagger from a royal vault, or even breaking into a warehouse to cart off its stock of gunpowder. In some cases, these thieves might have magical abilities bestowed upon them; for example, the *Shadowwalkers of The Crepuscular Church* are capable of turning into shadows and passing through keyholes or cracks beneath doors.

Such supernatural skills warrant a much higher price, but their efficacy cannot be denied. The size of the fee should be contingent on how badly the client needs the goods, as well as how risky it will be to obtain them.

## TRAVEL & TRANSPORTATION

For those in need, cults can offer clandestine alternatives to traveling the roads, as well as safe houses, bolt holes, and hidden sanctums. Most cults have access to some form of private transportation, even if it's just a well-stocked stable, but some have more exotic mounts and vehicles available—the *Scarlet Fleet*, for example, has a range of galleons and caravels that can carry select passengers, while the *Scions of Saardon* may ride giant, fungal elk or fly on the wings of tainted rocs. A cult will typically have several hideaways too—these may range from neglected warehouses to heavily trapped and warded lairs.

## PORTALS

Magical portals offer a quick method for getting from place to place, but using them is expensive, for they require at least one powerful spellcaster to create and maintain them. In addition, portals are risky: the magical path from portal to portal often traverses perilous routes, passing through mind-twisting dimensions or attracting the attention of nameless, dreadful entities who may hunger for wayward souls.

Most commonly, a cult offers portal travel to another city or major settlement, but some cults have portals set up in remote locations that are difficult to travel to on foot, such as the depths of a forest or hidden

caverns in the mountains. Rarely, a cult may have a portal that does not need an established exit—instead, passing through the portal simply teleports the user to their destination with no way back.

### SAFE HOUSES & SMUGGLING

Cults often maintain a network of safe houses operated by trusted agents, primarily used to secretly move goods and people. These places might look like mundane townhouses or nondescript shacks, but within, they may display a far more sinister tableau: drapery embroidered with infernal symbols hanging from rails of human bone, wooden idols of unnamable beasts stained with the blood of sacrifices, and layers of wards and enchantments to keep the location from being scried.

For a fee, an organization might agree to house people in these hideouts, but only if they're willing to ally with the cult in some way. Safe houses are also set up to smuggle people into and out of locations discreetly, which comes part and parcel with hiding them away. Some organizations, like rebel cells, might offer this service at no cost if those looking for the service are already members or are aligned with the group's goals.

## FORBIDDEN TRAINING

**C**ults often possess valuable or forbidden skills that can't be learned in magical schools or from reputable tutors. Like services, some cults provide training to outsiders for a fee, while others require a trainee to be a fully-fledged member before they reveal their secrets. The following section gives some examples of new skills that players might seek to learn, but keep in mind that they should mesh with your game's system for skill acquisition, level advancement, or other training.

## LANGUAGES

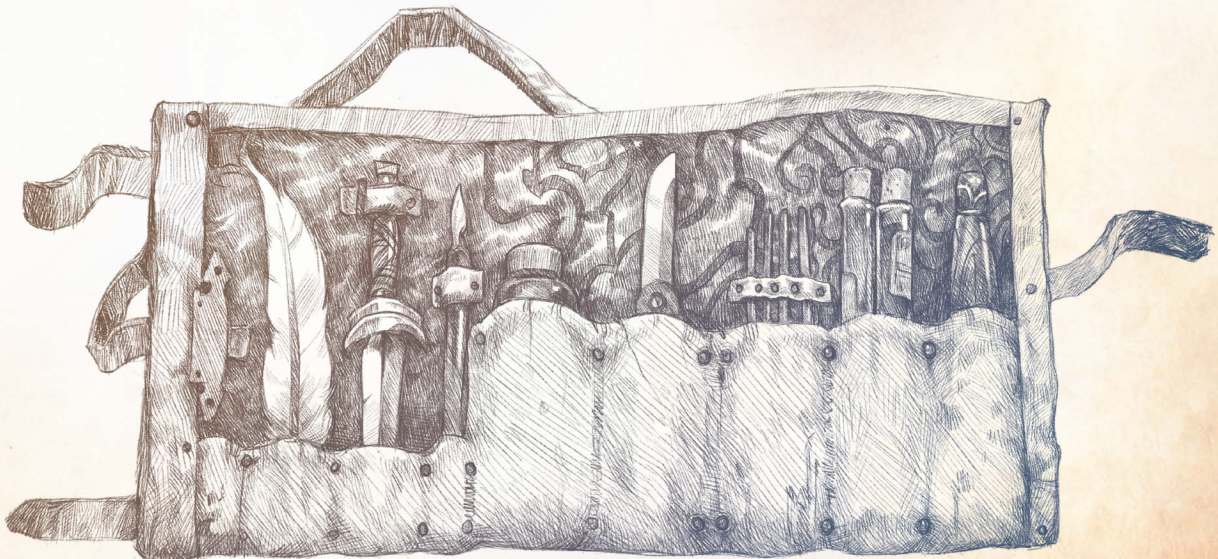
Cults may have members who are masters of ancient, obscure, or dead languages. Clients may seek to learn one of these languages to decipher the writings of a dark tome, converse with eldritch entities and fiends, or read the funerary inscriptions on a tomb. Some languages may be especially dangerous, either because their syllables contain inherent magical power, or because simply speaking it draws the attention of dark beings.

## TOOLS

Esoteric skills like brewing alchemical admixtures and concocting poisons require special tools and the knowledge of how to use them. Cults often count skilled craftspeople among their members, including locksmiths, ritualists, or surgeons, though those practitioners are almost always interested in the darker side of their craft. For example, a surgeon might be most concerned with vivisection and operating on live patients, while a locksmith may be an accomplished thief. When coming to a cult to learn about new tools and the skills to use them, gold is often sufficient—though some teachers will require oaths to keep their trade secrets.

## SPELLS

Dark, dangerous, and forbidden magic is most often found among cults, and can range from obscure arts like divining the future from entrails to powerful summoning rituals used for binding and commanding eldritch beings. While most reputable sages or magical scholars may refuse to teach these types of magic, an outsider may be able to learn them from a dark tutor, usually for steep prices. Payment may take the form of a collection of souls, retrieving a lost artifact, or a king's ransom in ancient treasure. Depending on the Game Master's discretion, player characters might also be able to learn dark spells that are outside the spells normally allowed for their class.



## RANKS & ADVANCEMENT

*Heed me well, lad, if ye want to take over from me. They ain't all alike, these secret societies. There're cherubs an' criminals, soldiers an' saints, good an' bad. They all got their own creeds and degrees, but remember: none of them are your friends. Not unless you're one of them.*

—Tobye Gilebin, alderman and merchant

**D**ark organizations come in all shapes and sizes. Some are true cults dedicated to a mystical creed or hideous entity, such as a demon lord; others are purely criminal organizations out to enrich themselves through cutthroat means. No matter what form a cult takes, nearly all have a structure, a ranking system, and initiation rites. Two cults with the same goal might create very different organizations and offer members different means by which to rise through the ranks.

The structure of a dark organization can reflect its dogma and beliefs. For example, the *Sacred Stair* cult believes in a set path to enlightenment, one ordained by unseen aberrations that live in a prismatic dimension invisible to the uninitiated. Upon initiation, cultists join the lowest tier of membership, called the First Stair. Members can progress up the ranks, rising to the Second Stair, then the Third, Fourth, and so on, by accumulating knowledge and unlocking new levels of understanding. Upon reaching the Seventh Stair, members can join the highest council, which controls the cult.

This strict hierarchy stands in contrast to the chaotic mess of the *Heirs of Gortha*, a cult dedicated to the demon lord of effluvia and obscurity. The Heirs sacrifice beings to their demonic patron, who might subsequently reach out to and turn a supplicant into a reekpriest. These reekpriests possess abyssal powers and attempt to command those below them, typically with disastrous results. Often an acolyte of Gortha will try to sacrifice the reekpriest in charge in order to take their place. This chaotic, murderous churn of members doesn't stop the cult from spreading filth and panic wherever it bubbles to the surface.

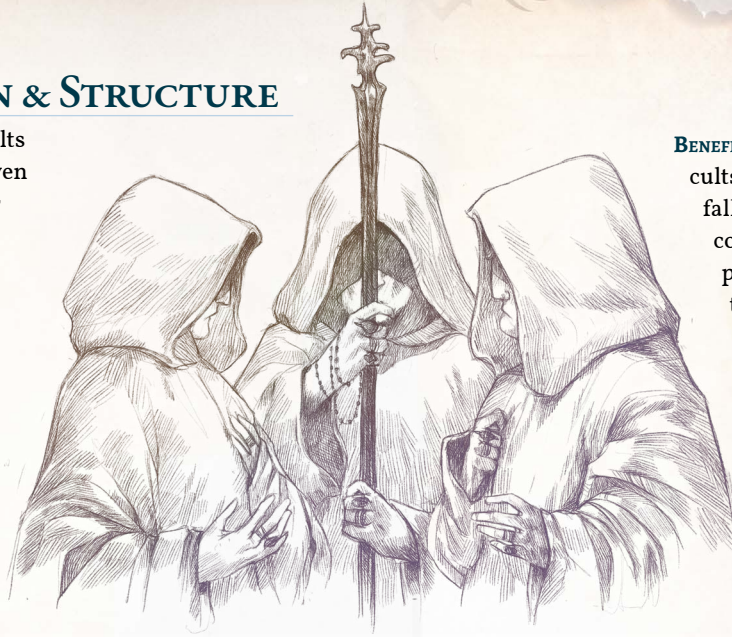
No cult accepts newcomers without some test of loyalty or dedication. Initiation rites are often kept secret from outsiders, but rumors may be whispered about them. For example, those who join the *Silver Serpents* are supposedly forced to swallow a living snake whole, while aspirants of *Malice Opus* must audition for the cult by performing a solo on an instrument made from the skeleton of a person they killed. New recruits must continue proving themselves by undertaking responsibilities and—if they wish to advance—missions that demonstrate their commitment and capabilities.

The higher one rises in a cult's ranks, the darker the responsibilities and the greater the rewards. A cultist of the *Knights Nocturnal* who destroys a rival faction and turns its followers into vampiric cattle might be gifted bat-like wings from the cult's legendary werebat patron or be granted the honor of wielding the cult's infamous weapon, the *Blade of Undeath*. These dark gifts are tempting to those who seek power, but even more alluring is the opportunity to take advantage of a cult's wealth, knowledge, or forbidden tutelage to pursue one's own ends...



## ORGANIZATION & STRUCTURE

Even the most chaotic of cults requires some structure, even if only an iron-fisted leader commanding a sea of servants. Most cults have rules, core beliefs or tenets, and a preferred method through which to carry out their goals. In addition, many cults have unique ranking systems that reward followers for loyalty and skill. These systems usually grant prestige and rewards, as well as more responsibility.



Many cults follow a similar ranking structure: join at the bottom and rise to the top. However, some cults might have a branching hierarchy in which members rise to various levels but are trained in different skills.

A superb example of a branching hierarchy can be found in the *Temple of the New Flesh*. Lower-ranking acolytes may choose to become priests, then proselytizers, and eventually temple heads, which entails commanding the hordes of undead kept beneath the cult's factory-temples. Other acolytes might decide to study the crafts of metallurgy and enchantment, becoming temple artificers and then architects, who are responsible for maintaining the faithforges and creating the cult's infamous construct shells. Architects and temple heads hold similar rank and power, but their positions require different routes.

## LEVELS OF ORGANIZATION

Cults can be rigidly structured, loose and relatively free-form, or somewhere in between. The complexity of a cult's hierarchical structure affects how it operates and may reflect its mission and its members. The following section describes three degrees of complexity regarding cult ranking and organization, along with flaws, benefits, typical types of leader, and examples for each.

### LOOSELY STRUCTURED

A loosely structured cult has few or no formal ranks. Members usually pursue cult goals in any way they see fit, and there is little or no contact with the cult's leaders. A patron leading such a cult might issue orders directly to followers rather than through a spokesperson or a prophet. With so much freedom, members are usually guided by their own understanding of the cult's goals, ideals, and tenets.

**BENEFITS.** Loosely structured cults are less likely to fall apart from internal competition for ranks or prestige. They are harder to destroy due to having few or no central leaders.

Member autonomy allows creativity from members, who might use their individual expertise to carry out tasks. Initiation into such a group can be hard to regulate, so growth might be quicker than in other cults.

**FLAWS.** It's hard for loosely structured cults to coordinate their actions, form organized resistance or defense, or garner political power. Cult doctrine is hard to maintain and is often twisted or abandoned. It's much simpler for enemies to infiltrate this kind of cult, making spying and sabotage easier.

**TYPES OF ORGANIZATION.** Eldritch cults, bandit gangs, rebel groups, druidic circles.

**TYPES OF LEADER.** Fanatics, demagogues, rebels, zealots.

**Example: Winds of Agar.** *Founded by the druid Agar, who unleashed the elemental chaos of the Plane of Air against a newly built settlement on the outskirts of her sacred foothills, this cult seeks to undermine the spread of civilization into the wilds by using destructive elemental magic to create terrible hurricanes, tornadoes, and gales. Agar's words and wishes are treated with respect by other druids and barbarians of the cult, but most members carry out the cult's goal of destroying civilization without orders or counsel from Agar herself. If Agar is pleased with a member's achievements, she may proclaim them a Speaker and grant them greater power over the winds. Speakers are considered representatives of Agar's will and therefore have the authority to lead members and coordinate their actions as they see fit.*

## STRUCTURED

Structured cults usually have a simple hierarchy that consists of three levels: a leader who gives orders, mid-level members who control groups of followers, and low-ranking members who carry out the will of the cult. The leader of a structured cult might declare a goal and leave the devising of plans to mid-level members, while low-ranking members simply follow orders.

**BENEFITS.** A strong chain of command means this cult can coordinate members and carry out schemes more easily. In addition, the cult's hierarchy encourages members to perform well in order to rise through the cult's ranks.

**FLAWS.** Cult members might feel pitted against one another for limited positions of power and may work against one another rather than together for the greater goal. Vying for leadership roles can cause splinter factions to form.

**TYPES OF ORGANIZATION.** Crime families, martial orders, mage cabals.

**TYPES OF LEADER.** Crime lords, schemers, scholars.

**Example: Bridge Street Crew.** The Bridge Street Crew began when the Bronzebolster dwarves started an illegal betting ring that rapidly grew into a full-blown criminal enterprise with money launderers, guarded books, and corrupt political allies. As the original members of the Bronzebolster family grew in power, they instituted a hierarchy that mirrored old dwarven clans: the organization is led by an Elder, who passes down orders to Lodge-Fathers and Lodge-Mothers. They, in turn, command Brothers and Sisters, who take on relatively important tasks, and Cousins, or initiates who do low-level dirty work.

**BENEFITS.** Strict structure can keep a cult with many different arms (such as political, religious, and military) from falling into disarray. In addition, a complex system of ranks and roles can ensure the cult has members suited to special tasks, such as research or assassination. It can also provide members with more promotion opportunities and prestige.

**FLAWS.** The more complex the hierarchy, the greater the chance that members compete for advancement. Strictly structured cults are especially at risk of splitting into splinter factions or cliques. Leaders might become completely disconnected from the group's actual operations due to the layers of bureaucracy.

**TYPES OF ORGANIZATION.** Religious orders, trading companies, spy rings, mage cabals.

**TYPES OF LEADER.** Despots, prophets, high priests, criminal overlords.

**Example: Children of the Worm.** Dedicated to Uргуuz the Metamorphic, a disgusting entity whose mere presence in the world corrupts the earth around it, the Children of the Worm are led by the Wormspeaker, a hybrid creature in direct communication with Uргуuz. Advising the Wormspeaker is a circle of prophetic members called Wormhearts. Uргуuz dictates a command to the Wormspeaker, who confers with the Wormhearts before conveying Uргуuz's will to mid-level cultists called Flies. The Flies then consult the cult's two arms: the Order of Drones and the Order of Larvae (spies and clerics, respectively). Flies respectively collect information and call for unholy blessings from these orders, then recruit Maggots, or cult specialists. Flies can also lead expeditions and will enlist Grubs, or foot soldiers, to join the mission.

## STRICTLY STRUCTURED


Cults whose hierarchies need writing down to understand or whose rank organization is best expressed using a diagram are usually considered strictly structured. These cults have complex systems and roles because of either sheer size or core tenets. Members are expected to act only within the boundaries of their rank, and multiple levels of promotion are usually offered to those who serve the cult well. Strictly structured cults are sometimes commanded by a council rather than a single leader.



## CULT INITIATION

**T**o many, joining a dark organization means giving in to evil. However, the distinction between good and evil may not be black-and-white: Is it truly good to surrender one's will to a callous king?

Is it evil to disrupt nature, even when nature is cruel? Can destruction, deceit, and death be used to create something stable, just, and good?



Some turn to cults to fulfill a desire for wealth or power, but others turn to cults out of desperation. A cult might offer a promise of untold riches to people who are poor, desperate, and forced to beg on the streets each day; people who have lost family and friends may seek cults that claim to speak with the dead.

For those who decide to join a dark organization, the real question is this: How far are you willing to go? Would you have your eyes put out with quicksilver for the chance to glimpse another realm? Would you carve the infernal seal of *Yharox, King of Flames*, into your stomach with a red-hot razor blade for a seat at the table of the *Cabal of Fire*?

When an aspirant is ready, the initiation begins. Some initiation rites are simple oaths of loyalty and secrecy, sealed with blood. Others are elaborate, painful, and terrifying ordeals during which an initiate's mind and spirit are broken and reformed to create an incorruptible servant. Oftentimes a cult will seduce potential members, luring them deep into the organization's influence before truly initiating them. In these instances, a cult will zero in on a new member's deepest desires and dreams, then offer fulfillment in exchange for servitude.

### JOINING A CULT

Characters who want to join and serve a dark cult must first earn its trust. Unlike many quest-granting individuals or institutions, cults are especially wary of being exposed, betrayed, or spied upon by outsiders, so they generally prize loyalty, discretion, and strict obedience. Gaining an organization's confidence can be accomplished in a number of ways.

**VOUCH.** Adventurers wishing to join a cult could seek a friend—one who is a member or associate of the organization—to vouch for their trustworthiness and skill. Perhaps the adventurers did this person a favor totally unrelated to the cult, such as helping to collect a debt or to expel a ghost, or perhaps the person knows them by reputation.

**OFFERING.** The organization could require a token of goodwill, such as a rare book or a kidnapped victim whom the cult intends to sacrifice. Alternatively, adventurers may find an appropriate gift ahead of time and try to impress the cult with their forethought and dedication.

**TRIAL.** The cult could decide to test the party's trustworthiness or skill with a trial. This challenge could be a dangerous ordeal meant to push an adventurer to their limit—for example, forcing a character to face their greatest fear—or it might be more devious and cerebral, such as a disguised cult member tempting a character to betray the organization.

### d20 Initiation Rites & Requirements

- 1 Carry out a tricky burglary without being seen.
- 2 Drink the blood of a sacrificed humanoid while reciting a hideous abyssal chant.
- 3 Undergo submersion in a vat of earth and worms in the cult's vaults for an entire night.
- 4 Burn yourself with the *Flame of Eternity*, which still smolders in its brass brazier centuries after first being lit.
- 5 Take a new name and be baptized with a vial of serpent venom that leaves a bright white burn across your forehead.
- 6 Undergo a physical transformation that turns your skin blue or your pupils goatlike.
- 7 Swear a mysterious oath to an unnameable entity from the space between stars.
- 8 Down an entire bottle of wine, then roll through the cult's cellars in an ancient wooden barrel.
- 9 Pay an immense donation in gold and recite a blasphemous prayer for each coin that enters the cult's coffers.
- 10 Destroy a holy idol by dipping it in tar and cover it with feathers from a bird killed with your own hands.
- II Undergo combat training with a high-ranking member, then defeat a fellow initiate in a fight to the death.
- 12 Slaughter a black cat, then divine a prophecy from the spread of its entrails.

- 13 Smith a dagger from a vein of iron ore that the cult has mined for centuries.
- 14 Allow a vampire to drain the blood from your body, then drink their blood in turn when you rise as an undead the following night.
- 15 Saw off your own hand and replace it with a platinum gauntlet, then toast to the cult's prosperity and wealth.
- 16 Wrap the stem from a living rose around your wrist until the thorns draw blood, then sign your name with blood in a leather-bound tome.
- 17 Inhale dried venom from a *Garagox Toad* and bear witness to the terrifying visions that follow.
- 18 Consume heinous amounts of food from an enormous banquet, then cleanse yourself in the communal vomitorium.
- 19 Allow a *Blood Phage* through your ear and into your brain, where it can telepathically issue dark commands.
- 20 Receive a crescent-shaped wound on your back from a silver sickle.



## CONSEQUENCES OF MEMBERSHIP

Joining a cult comes with certain responsibilities, opportunities, and dangers; it can also come with unintended consequences. Such a consequence could be a guard at the city's front gates who stops and interrogates you about your allegiances. Or it could be a surreptitious gift from a cult spy, left under your pillow at an inn.

### NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

The negative consequences of joining a cult can vary wildly, but one of the most common is that new members are put at odds with folks who previously considered them an ally. For example, a player seen wearing an *Amulet of the Sanguine Dawn* or who's heard talking about cult business might be asked by an innkeeper or merchant to leave. At worst, a new initiate might be targeted by a rival faction for death or abduction, or they might be imprisoned by authorities without trial.

The following table provides some negative consequences of cult membership that characters might encounter soon after undergoing initiation rites.

#### d20 Negative Consequences

- 1 While staying the night at a local tavern, an assassin attempts to kill one of your party members.
- 2 The shopkeeper who was providing good service suddenly refuses to sell you goods.
- 3 You struggle to rest; your dreams are being haunted by terrifying images of the acts you've done.
- 4 Your voice sometimes changes, resembling a sonorous, demonic drawl.
- 5 You are arrested and/or interrogated due to your association with the cult.
- 6 A rival organization marks you as a foe and sends agents to trail your movements.
- 7 Each time you cast a spell, strange eldritch magic surges forth and afflicts unusual effects upon those within a close radius.
- 8 Other cult members continually pressure your party members into joining.
- 9 A strange mark appears on a part of your body that is easily disguised, such as the upper arm.
- 10 Swarms of rats follow you wherever you go and sometimes interrupt your sleep.

- 11 When certain constellations are in the sky, you hear thoughts that aren't your own.
- 12 Your eyes begin turning glossy black due to the magic of your initiation.
- 13 You are trailed by storms or foul weather.
- 14 You become obsessed with identifying patterns or certain numbers with symbolic significance to the cult.
- 15 You attract the attention of a certain type of creature, such as aberrations, devils, or demons.
- 16 A new phobia arises within you—a common fear such as fire, snakes, sunlight, spiders, etc.
- 17 Vermin are attracted to you in hordes; they are sometimes curious, sometimes helpful, and other times malicious.
- 18 You develop a minor sensitivity to the sun, making it hard to be out in daylight without a large hat, a hooded robe, or a similar covering.
- 19 Wherever you walk, plants seem to wither and die.
- 20 A certain race or class refuses to interact with you; this includes denials of service and/or conversation.

## POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES

Initiation can grant a new cultist benefits in addition to the resources, tutelage, and boons offered by a cult. The most obvious benefit comes in the form of intimidation or influence; by revealing one's allegiance to the Black Fox Trading Company, for example, a character might get better prices from a frightened guild member, or they could successfully persuade a judge to take a bribe rather than deal a sentence. Positive consequences can be unexpected, such as receiving a gift from an unknown ally.



The following table provides some positive consequences of cult membership that characters might encounter soon after undergoing initiation rites.

### d20 Positive Consequences

- 1 A bank associated with the cult offers you a generous loan to buy new adventuring gear.
- 2 Certain creatures, such as bats, owlbears, or imps, treat you favorably.
- 3 Criminals avoid trying to con or pickpocket you.
- 4 When you display the mark of your cult allegiance, commoners treat you with respect or fear.
- 5 Maddening or terrifying sights do not disturb you as much.
- 6 Tradespeople in positions of power, such as tavern owners or ship captains, treat you preferentially.
- 7 The cult gives you access to a certain organization, such as an armorer's guild, and its superior goods.
- 8 Whenever a creature dies near you, you can see the soul leaving its corpse.
- 9 Bats or other small animals are attracted to your presence and follow you around.
- 10 Researchers are happy to provide aid in exchange for snippets of information about the cult.
- 11 Whenever you see blood, you feel a rush of bloodlust that briefly heightens your senses.
- 12 A noble cult member gifts you with an expensive magic item as thanks for your service to the cult.
- 13 A certain type of monster seems frightened of you.
- 14 Other cult members are happy to take blows for you and will defend or assist you in any way they can.
- 15 You can faintly hear supplicants praying to your cult's deity.
- 16 You no longer feel a need to eat or drink; even if you want to, it's hard to enjoy partaking in either.
- 17 You can smell the fear of humanoids within close range.
- 18 Worshipers of the cult's deity offer you lodging and food.
- 19 You cease to be bothered by foul smells or biting insects.
- 20 You can tell how much coin a person carries just by observing them.

## CULT RANKS

**D**ark organizations range from mystical brotherhoods to clandestine spy orders, and most have special roles within their ranks. These key members have skills or abilities that make them suited to certain tasks. They usually have a title and benefits that other rank-and-file members cannot access.

The *Remarkable Cults* chapter provides ten unique cults in detail for use in your games. Each cult description includes a rank table that lists each of the key roles in a cult, as well as their general rank level. In this section you'll find a more generic assortment of roles for key members alongside their associated ranks.



### Low Rank Key Member Role

Low Rank Key Member Role	Tasks/Duties	Benefits	Requirements
Animal Keeper/Tamer	Trains and cares for creatures such as hounds, owlbeats, or horses	Access to a variety of exotic, magical, or mundane animals	Proficiency in animal handling
Thug/Warrior	Guards cult members and/or attacks enemies	Training in melee combat, access to quality weapons and armor	Proficiency with weapons and armor or demonstrated combat ability
Tail/Watcher	Stalks targets and gathers information on the cult's behalf	Access to disguises, training in stealth	Proficiency in stealth
Burglar/Thief	Steals items from people and/or places	Looting additional treasure and overhearing people	Proficiency in stealth
Missionary/Emissary	Enlists new followers, spreads a cult's message, represents the cult	Supplies and paid travel to various locations	Proficiency in persuasion or deception
Artisan/Wright	Creates works of art, tools, or gear	Funding for creations, access to quality tools and workshops	Proficiency with a set of tools

### Medium Rank Key Member Role

Medium Rank Key Member Role	Tasks/Duties	Benefits	Requirements
Assassin	Carries out secret or public murders	Access to special weapons, items, and tools	Proficiency in stealth, a poisoner's kit, and specialized weapons
Spy	Gathers information on targets, commits sabotage, sows disinformation	Access to special weapons, items, and tools	Proficiency in stealth, disguise, and thieves' tools
Fence/Smuggler	Sells/transportes stolen or illicit goods	A small portion of all profits, as well as some illicit goods	Proficiency in stealth, bartering, or persuasion
Alchemist/Enchanter	Creates magical potions, bestows enchantments	Access to magical workshops for personal use	Proficiency in spellcasting or alchemical supplies
Ritualist/Summoner	Conducts dark rituals, summons extraplanar entities	Additional spellcasting, plus access to magic items and ritual components	Ability to cast spells, or proficiency with conjuration
Scholar	Researches history, arcana, or other academic topics	Access to esoteric knowledge and libraries, plus a mentor	Research or investigation skills, high intelligence

### High Rank Key Member Role

### Tasks/Duties

### Benefits

### Requirements

Champion	Fights powerful foes, especially nonhuman entities	Access to the cult's best weapons and armor	Martial class or proficiency in martial weapons, demonstrated skill in battle
Loremaster	Researches history, arcana, rituals, or other obscure knowledge	Unparalleled access to clandestine and esoteric knowledge, including scrolls and books	Expertise in at least one area of research related to the cult
General	Commands cult members during battles and raids	Access to loot seized from enemies	Leadership experience, knowledge of tactics and strategy
Spymaster	Manages spies, conducts the most covert missions	Unparalleled access to hidden or sensitive information	Expertise in stealth, disguise, and deception
Archmage	Conducts rituals, casts spells to aid the cult	Access to new spells and powerful arcane items	Powerful spellcasting abilities, a second initiation ritual
High Priest	Conducts ceremonies, communes with deities, leads worship	Access to new spells and powerful (un)holy items	Powerful spellcasting abilities, a second initiation ritual

## LOW RANK: INITIATE

Initiates often take on the bulk of the cult's work but usually have the least access to the cult's inner workings and special privileges. They might only attend specific festivals or participate in certain rituals. However, sometimes low-ranking cultists become key members after taking on more permanent roles in the cult.

## MEDIUM RANK: ADEPT

Cult adepts generally advance into the higher echelon of an organization after undertaking missions, rituals, or rites. They are expected to endure more responsibilities, and they gain new exclusive benefits. Some adept key member roles have requirements that preclude individuals from ascending the ranks.

## HIGH RANK: MASTER

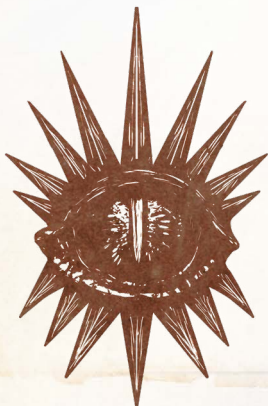
Those who attain a master-level rank are tasked with the most important and demanding roles in a cult, but the rewards usually eclipse anything attainable by lower ranks. The requirements for master-level key members are high, and the consequences of failure are severe.

## CULT LEADERS

At the top of any cult is a leader or a council of leaders. The leader(s) might be humanoid, monstrous, or something beyond flesh, but it's their will that guides the cult and inspires its members to risk everything. If the organization is dedicated to a patron, then the leader answers to only that patron. A member might ascend to the highest ranks of a cult over the span of their career, but few ever attain the position of leader.

The benefits of leading a cult can be immense. Cult leaders can gain numerous boons from patrons. Leaders can inherit powerful artifacts that grant them unholy power. And, of course, leaders have access to dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of followers who are willing to carry out their will, whether wanton bloodshed or a dark quest. However, a leader must also prove worthy of their vaunted position; they must communicate orders that advance the cult's goals, deal with threats from enemies or rivals, and inspire confidence among the cult's members. For cults with patrons, pleasing that patron is paramount; failing to do so might result in a leader's immediate replacement...or annihilation.

If a character is promoted to the position of cult leader via rank ascension, takes the place of a previous leader, or starts their own cult, refer to the chapter *Player-Operated Cults*.





## CULT MISSIONS

Once a character joins a cult, they'll be expected to carry out missions. Perhaps the Scarlet Fleet needs to commandeer a new ship to add to their flotilla and to dispose of any crew members who resist.

Maybe The Seers request that secret knowledge be stolen from the Bibliotheca of Eons in order to decode a newly discovered symbol.

A dark organization might also seek help from outside agents. This can occur for a variety of reasons: perhaps the cult internally lacks the skills, abilities, or connections to complete a task. Or maybe the cult members do not want to risk being implicated in dirty work. For example, the *Thrice-Hexed Cabal* might be filled with powerful spellcasters, but an experienced burglar is best for stealing an artifact that will please the cult's patron.

Whatever the reason, cult missions provide exciting roleplay and gameplay opportunities that can reveal hidden conflicts between factions or important nonplayer characters.

## MISSION STRUCTURE

A well-crafted mission has four main components: a goal, a briefing, restraints, and preparations. These provide structure to the mission, establish the cult's expectations, and offer discrete steps that the players can use to plan the party's course of action.

**GOAL.** This is the mission's main objective; examples are stealing documents, delivering a threatening note, performing an assassination, or poisoning a water supply. The mission may include lesser objectives as well (perform an assassination but leave evidence incriminating someone else).

**BRIEFING.** The characters' contact or mentor within the cult should give as detailed a briefing as possible, listing potential risks, facts about the target, and advice on achieving the objective. The mentor figure shouldn't plan the operation for the characters, but they should provide some key information, such as the location of a target's home.

**RESTRAINTS.** Restraints are restrictions to the mission that are vital for its success. They might involve completing the mission in a certain amount of time, maintaining secrecy, or avoiding collateral damage. They may come in the form of directives, like "Don't let anyone see you," "Don't kill anyone," "Leave no traces of your passage," or "Complete the mission by sunrise."

**PREPARATIONS.** Preparation consists of tasks carried out before the mission to help ensure its success, like gathering intelligence on the objective through NPC contacts, conducting reconnaissance on the objective, and so on. Wise characters will use this information to prepare equipment, spells, and tactics specifically tailored to the mission.

When crafting cult-directed missions, Game Masters should consider the goal, the briefing, and any restraints and preparations. Each component can provide built-in challenges, risks, and roleplay opportunities, both before and during the mission.

## MISSION ARCHETYPES

Missions can be as simple as burning down the house of a village alderman or as complex as undermining a royal family's claim to the throne. However, most missions fall into general archetypes based on the goal. In this section missions are listed by archetype; categories include Assassination, Theft/Heist, Reconnaissance, Missionary/Propaganda, Retrieval, and others.

For example, say *the Gilded Worshippers of the Thousand-Eyed God* wants to construct an enormous life-size statue of its god in solid gold. To do this, the cult obviously needs to amass gold in vast quantities. A low-rank quest might send initiates to gather gold by picking pockets in noble districts (Theft/Heist) or to spy on merchants and learn where they store their coin (Reconnaissance). Medium-rank quests

could have adepts persuade influential folks to give large donations (Diplomacy), subtly threaten banks to give up some of their bullion (Intimidation), or plunder shipments newly arrived from far-off gold mines (Theft/Heist).

The archetype of a mission determines its general outline and its requirements. Use these example archetypes as inspiration to assemble a custom-tailored cult mission.

*Note: Missions available to outsiders are marked with the letter O; missions available to cult members are marked with the letter M.*

**ASSASSINATION. [O/M]** The organization wants someone dead—a high-profile target, like royalty or a religious head, or someone humble and obscure, like a barkeep or a seamstress. Restraints can involve what the assassination looks like, how it's conducted, and how security measures should be circumnavigated. Of course, the characters will also have to escape the scene after the assassination is complete.

**CORRUPTION. [O/M]** The cult wishes to spread corruption through a political or civil institution. Methods include bribery, trading favors, blackmail, jury tampering, planting judges, etc. Example goals could be the release of cultists from prison, preventing convictions or investigations, operation without interference from authorities, cultists in positions of power, or even establishing laws that benefit the cult.

**CRAFT. [O/M]** The cult needs to create an item—perhaps for use in a ritual, to outfit its headquarters, to equip its members, or to earn prestige. The item can be anything, from a simple wooden idol to a complex piece of siege equipment or even a magical artifact capable of separating a soul from its body. To complete the item's creation, special materials or power sources may be required. Depending on the item's purpose, the crafting process might have to be completed by a high-ranking cult member.

**DESTRUCTION. [O/M]** The organization wants an item or a place destroyed. A simple act of arson, in which the characters burn down the headquarters of a rival organization, could be sufficient. Or the goal may be the destruction of a symbol, such as a prominent statue of a ruler. On a grander scale, a destruction-focused mission could have a loftier goal, like eliminating a city or a settlement, a powerful artifact, or a fleet of ships. No matter the mission, the destruction of the target usually takes precedence over killing bystanders or protectors.

**DIPLOMACY. [M]** Diplomacy involves the cult making ties with powerful individuals, such as monarchs or military generals, or with factions, including guilds, other cults, mercenary companies, and the like. The aim might be to secure funding, to form an alliance,

or to enlist new recruits. Cults may also pursue diplomacy to broker peace agreements with rivals, to gain new territory, or to earn entry into a new region.

**FEAR. [M]** The organization wishes to sow terror among the general populace or within a specific group, such as a banking clan or the criminals of a city. The cult influences the targeted group, sowing fear of the cult, its patron, the consequences of interfering with cult business, or something else. Fear can be established in relatively subtle ways, such as by spreading rumors or propaganda, or through more overt, disturbing methods, like smearing blood on houses, murdering a chain of victims, or burning infernal symbols into wheat fields.

**INTERROGATION. [M]** The cult needs to extract information from an unwilling source. Interrogation might involve violence, such as torturing the target, threatening the target's family or friends, or deceiving the target into providing the information. Interrogation may also involve frightening the target, probing their mind with magic, or infiltrating their dreams.

**INTIMIDATION. [O/M]** The cult wants to motivate certain individuals through threatening means. Intimidation often intends to influence certain actions rather than to establish long-lasting fear. The characters might intimidate someone to make a sacrifice for the cult, to hide illegal products in their wine cellar, or to lie to local authorities about what they witnessed at a crime scene. A restraint could be that the target is left entirely unharmed; then it's not obvious that they've been influenced by the cult.

**KIDNAPPING. [O/M]** Kidnapping is stealing an individual. Typically this involves observing the target's movements, then ambushing and transferring the target to another location. This should happen discreetly, with as few clues left behind as possible. Targets might be protected by bodyguards who'll need dealing with, have magical protections, or require impersonating by a disguised cult member.

**MISSIONARY/PROPAGANDA. [M]** Both these activities improve the organization's image among the public, with goals of earning legitimacy, gaining trust, recruiting members, or raising funds. Propaganda work typically involves denouncing the cult's enemies and praising the cult; missionary work focuses on gaining new recruits or spreading the word of the cult's deity, patron, or faith.

**RAID/BATTLE. [O/M]** The cult needs to attack its enemies or to defend itself. This might take the form of an overnight village massacre, a pitched battle between the cult's warriors and a rival faction, or a coordinated attack on the headquarters of the city guard. Raid/Battle missions are rarely accomplished alone and usually require arms, armor, and a detailed plan.

**RESEARCH. [O/M]** The cult needs to uncover lost knowledge or discover something new. This can be accomplished by delving into esoteric tomes, speaking to obscure entities, or conducting arcane experiments. The goal might be recovering a forgotten ritual or creating a new potion that allows a thief to phase through solid walls. Once the goal is met, the cultist tasked with the mission will usually present the knowledge to their superiors.

**RETRIEVAL. [O/M]** Retrieval missions differ from Theft/Heist missions in that the item is not stolen—instead it is procured. The item could be anything, such as a book, an idol, a weapon, or an artifact. It might be lost in a hidden library, a forgotten ruin, a subterranean dungeon, or a lost tomb. In most cases, fetching the item is only half the mission; sometimes the location must be discovered through diligent research, with entry allowed only upon passing a test. But sometimes the journey is the true challenge: the mission might force adventurers to enter a dangerous forest or travel to an abyssal plane.

**RITUAL. [M]** The cult needs to conduct a magical ritual. The ritual might be an isolated magical effect, or it could be the solitary summoning of a fiend or a monstrous beast. Alternatively the ritual could be part of a chain of rituals designed to invoke the fulfillment of a plan much broader in scope. Rituals might be undertaken for various reasons, such as to place a curse on a rival, to gain a powerful magic item or a boon, or to turn the sun black so vampires can freely roam.

**SPYING. [M]** Information can be more valuable than gold and more dangerous than an army of knights. It can be used for blackmail, sold to rivals for a fortune, or incorporated into schemes that enable a cult to overthrow an entire kingdom. Spying usually requires stealth, disguises, well-placed contacts, and infiltration, but targets can range from nobles to common merchants. The purpose of such a mission can also vary; the adventurers might be asked to keep an eye on cult enemies, or perhaps they must track the movements of a particular smuggler's ship.

**THEFT/HEIST. [O/M]** Heists are all about characters getting into what they shouldn't and making off with something securely stored. A cult may order a heist for any variety of reasons. Maybe the objective is simple profit, or maybe it's one specific artifact—a relic crucial in the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. Thefts are similar to heists but usually require less intricate planning. Thefts may also target the belongings of a specific person. Objectives can include gold, valuables, or other treasures, including magic items or documents. Items marked for a theft typically aren't guarded as closely as those marked for a heist.

## RANK ADVANCEMENT

Once a mission is successfully completed, the characters may be given an opportunity to advance in rank (if they are initiated into the cult). However, rank advancement sometimes has requirements. Examples include a special offering, a secret ceremony, or specific skills as detailed in the *Cult Ranks* section.

Potential requirements for advancement are displayed in the following table.

### d10 Rank-Advancement Requirement

- 1 SERVICE.** The cultist must have served the cult for a certain amount of time.
- 2 OFFERING.** The cultist must make an offering to the cult, such as a rare flower, a gem, or the sword of an enemy.
- 3 SACRIFICE.** The cultist must make a living sacrifice on behalf of the cult.
- 4 DEPRIVAL.** The cultist must deprive themselves of something, such as food, speech, or human contact, for a certain length of time.
- 5 CEREMONY.** The cultist must undergo a ritual or a rite.
- 6 TRAINING.** The cultist must develop a certain skill, such as a new language.
- 7 MISSION.** The cultist must take on a follow-up mission.
- 8 STUDY.** The cultist must learn some area of knowledge.
- 9 OATH.** The cultist must make an oath that, if broken, has serious consequences.
- 10 COMMUNE.** The cultist must appear before the cult's leader, deity, or patron for approval.



## ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

In addition to the *Rank-Advancement Requirement* table, Game Masters and players can read the following section for more requirement ideas.

### FAITH/CHOSEN

Cults that worship a god or a patron often require faith in and obedience to a deity, and they especially require adherence to core tenets. Those willing to sacrifice their bodies, their wealth, or their safety in service of the deity are usually considered the most faithful, but those who worship gods of deceit or bloodshed may demonstrate their faith in other ways. Sometimes a cult member is chosen by the deity/patron to be raised to a higher rank—without the judgment of mortal leaders. These members may become avatars of the deity, champions, prophets, or new leaders.

### LEADERSHIP

A member aspiring to promotion must show remarkable leadership skills or a potential to develop them. This can manifest in numerous ways, like organizing the defense of the cult's stronghold, successfully leading a group of cultists on a mission, or taking initiative to plan an assault on territory held by a rival faction. Leadership can be demonstrated in more extreme scenarios, too, such as on the field of battle or within the ranks in a time of crisis. Cowardice and a failure to lead mark a member as an unlikely candidate for advancement; these qualities can result in a swift reduction in rank as well.

### LOYALTY

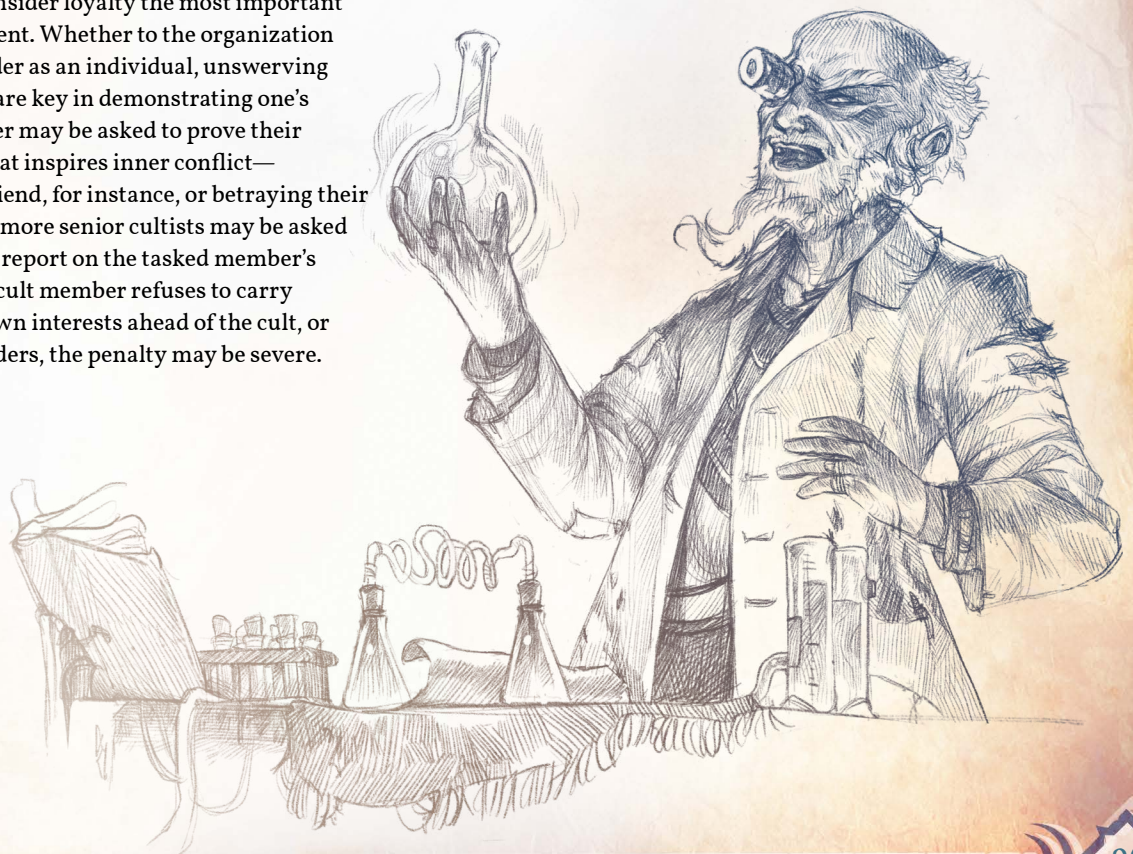
Some organizations consider loyalty the most important criterion for advancement. Whether to the organization as a whole or to the leader as an individual, unswerving obedience and respect are key in demonstrating one's devotion. A cult member may be asked to prove their loyalty via a mission that inspires inner conflict—kidnapping a former friend, for instance, or betraying their homeland. In addition, more senior cultists may be asked to secretly observe and report on the tasked member's words and actions. If a cult member refuses to carry out orders, puts their own interests ahead of the cult, or disrespects the cult leaders, the penalty may be severe.

### MERITOCRACY

Some cults prize skill and competence over slavish obedience and humble deference. In this case, a cult member must prove capable of performing the duties of the office to which they aspire, such as identifying and treating a poison in order to advance to the rank of alchemist or completing a string of stealthy murders to become an assassin. Some cults require the candidate to successfully complete a dangerous mission on its behalf while accompanied and monitored by an observer from the organization. Other cults use a codified trial or test system in which the candidate undergoes an examination within the safety of the cult headquarters.

### SERVICE

Service is a significant act or achievement that a member performed outside of a mission, such as saving the life of a high-ranking cult member, discovering a previously unknown ancient tome that contains sought-after lore, enlisting new recruits with desirable skills, or making a breakthrough that advances the cult's plans. In essence, if a cultist goes above and beyond their duties in a way that results in serious, lasting benefits for the cult, then they are likely to be recognized and/or rewarded.



## UNDERTAKING MISSIONS TO INCREASE IN RANK

### LOW TO MEDIUM

Undertaking a mission to advance from low to medium rank is the most common way to rise through a cult's hierarchy. Typically these missions are relatively low in risk, but success can bring rewards beyond promotion, while failure may entail punishment from the cult.

Below are some examples of low-ranking missions, their requirements, and potential consequences for success and failure:

### MEDIUM TO HIGH

Moving from middle to higher ranks is a steeper climb than a low position to one that's middling. Such a progression might involve several missions or at least one large mission split into multiple parts. Furthermore, the requirements to be considered for such a mission are more demanding. The perks of success and the consequences of failure are similarly increased.

Some of the more severe penalties, including reduction in rank, are detailed in the final section of this chapter, *Losing Rank & Penalties*.

Low to Medium Mission	Requirement	Success	Failure
Poison a well	Proficiency with a poisoner's kit	You receive further alchemical training.	You must imbibe a weak poison as repentance.
Burn down a neighborhood	Experience with fire or arson	You are given loot from the burned houses.	You are scarred with fire.
Press a witness into giving false testimony	Proficiency in intimidation	You receive a magical boon.	You are turned in to the authorities as a scapegoat.
Scare villagers	Proficiency in intimidation	You are gifted with an item that enhances your intimidation.	You are tortured with fear-inducing illusions.
Conduct a burglary	Proficiency in stealth	You are rewarded with extra gold.	You must pay a large sum of gold.
Retrieve an item from a dungeon	Experience with climbing tools, dungeoneering	You are given a magic item.	You are tattooed with a mark of shame.

Medium to High Mission	Requirement	Success	Failure
Assassinate a cult rival	Previous assassination experience	You are gifted a magical weapon.	Your soul is claimed via sacrifice.
Ally with another faction	Charm, good social connections	You are granted an audience with a powerful figure.	Your left hand is severed.
Kidnap the heir to the throne	Experience with infiltration, proficiency in stealth	You are more deeply trained in espionage.	You are expelled from the cult.
Convert a swathe of peasants to the cult	High charisma or persuasion skills	You are awarded gold for each new initiate.	You are demoted.
Summon a being from beyond the stars	Spellcasting ability, previous study	You gain access to new arcana and spellcasting.	You are tortured with arcane rituals.
Serve as a spy in a royal court	Proficiency in deception and disguise	You are presented with a lavish gift, such as an exotic pet.	You are assassinated.

## LOSING RANK & PENALTIES

**O**rganizations, especially dark and sinister ones, usually take a harsh view of failure. Failure to complete a mission, mistakes that endanger the cult, or displeasing one's cult leaders can result in demotion, expulsion, or ending up on a cult's sacrificial altar.

Following you'll find a list of punishments that cults may inflict on their members.

### LOSS OF RANK

In many dark organizations, repeated failures or offenses typically result in demotion. The member is stripped of their responsibilities, the prestige of their office, and even their belongings—including treasure like magic items—and no longer has access to any perks they may have previously enjoyed thanks to the cult's prestige. Some groups allow demoted members to attempt to work their way back up the ranks, but other cults don't. In the latter case, failing cultists are permanently stuck at the lowest rank of the organization. Loss of rank is normally the most common form of punishment for cultists.

### EXPULSION

Expulsion is usually the punishment for when a cultist rejects the cult's creed, betrays the organization, reveals its secrets, or displeases the cult's leaders. Expulsion is considered a mercy; an execution, which is often the preferred punishment for such transgressions, ensures that the cult's secrets are never revealed. An expelled member loses access to all group benefits and is usually prevented from ever rejoining that organization—exiled from the dark community in which their identity is based. Sometimes expelled members are marked in a way that denotes them an exile or an outcast (see "Mark of Shame"). Such members might struggle to find work in places where the cult is known.

### MARK OF SHAME

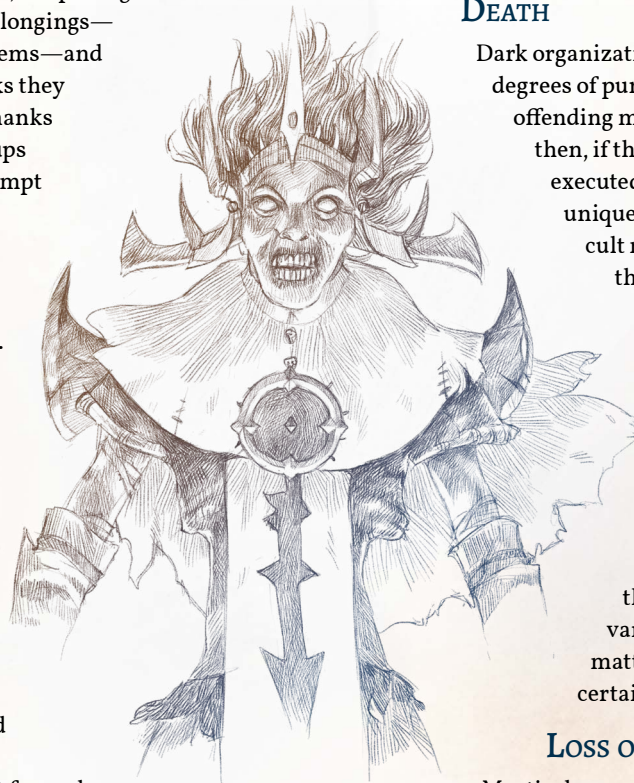
Even if an outcast member is permitted to retain their membership, dark organizations may still mark them with a dark stain. A mark of shame might be visible to the general public, or visible only to members of the cult. These dark marks take a variety of forms, including brands, scarification, tattoos, piercings, amputation, curses, magical wounds, stained skin, acid burns, and other supernatural changes to appearance. Whether the mark is removed after the member atones for their transgressions is up to the organization. If atonement is possible, the mark won't mar a cultist's possible performance; a mercenary company isn't likely to mark an offender in a way that impairs their combat efficacy, for example.

### DEATH

Dark organizations generally don't have many degrees of punishment; most commonly, an offending member is issued a warning, then, if they continue to fail the cult, executed. Exactly *how* they die is often unique to the organization. An eldritch cult might sacrifice a member to their dark god on an altar of writhing tentacles, while a crime syndicate might slit the member's throat and leave their body hanging in a public place to be gawked at and ridiculed. A rebel group, on the other hand, might tie a disgraced former member's hands, gag them, and force them to run headlong into the vanguard of an enemy army. No matter the method, the result is a certainty—or so the cult hopes.

### LOSS OF SOUL

Mystical organizations like infernal cults and wizard cabals sometimes prefer a more unique form of punishment: a fate worse than death. Instead of passing on to the afterlife, a member's soul is handed over to the cult's malevolent patron, fiend, or archmage, who ensures that it will be devoured, ripped apart, or tortured. A classic example would be a lich-worshipping cult, whose failing members have their souls fed into the undead archmage's phylactery. Some cults use souls as a power source for their rituals; in such groups, unfortunate members may still be of use to the cult, as fuel for the fire.



# CULT SIGNS & SYMBOLS



Most cults are bound by symbols and markings that only they understand. An organization's marking might take the form of an innocuous-looking shoulder tattoo or a mysterious crest on a signet ring, but other cults go so far as to design their headquarters in accordance with mystic patterns or emblazon clothing with arcane sigils. Iconography usually serves as a shibboleth—a way to distinguish outsiders and newcomers from the initiated.

## A HIDDEN LANGUAGE

Most symbols represent themes or ideas central to a cult. For example, a phoenix can symbolize life after death to a cult obsessed with talking to the deceased, but immolation to one dedicated to elemental chaos. Symbols also might be linked to idolatry—a cult that worships the slumbering nightmare serpent is almost certain to revere snake iconography. Cults focused on arcane and esoteric pursuits often use complex systems of symbols to represent abstract ideas like truth, power, and godhood. Though cults usually try to keep their operations secret, symbols are one of few ways that a cult may announce its allegiance or presence. A cult's sign might appear on banners, carved into walls, or as pendants. The intention of such displays can vary and may include threatening outsiders, claiming territory, or simply letting rivals know who they're dealing with.

## DARK MARKS

In addition to representing key ideas or identifying cult members, symbols and signs can be used to communicate. Such communications can range from intimidating commoners to marking secret trails that lead to a cult's safe haven. A skull etched into a home's doorframe may mean foes live within. A fishhook carved around a wharf may mean the area is rife with pickpocketing opportunities.



Cult symbology serves many purposes. These may include:

### Symbol Purpose

- Branding the homes of allies and/or foes
- Defining territory boundaries
- Warning of threats such as guards or spirits
- Intimidating the general public into avoiding certain areas
- Inspiring fear in the general public
- Marking heavily patrolled neighborhoods, streets, and alleyways
- Identifying institutions sympathetic to the cult
- Indicating a safe hiding spot
- Marking hidden entrances to hideouts and/or shrines
- Signaling dropoff locations for secret packages
- Marking a secret meeting place and/or a safe haven
- Labeling a hidden route or trail
- Branding a person for kidnapping, assassination, or theft
- Marking a building for destruction or infiltration

**COMBINATIONS & VARIATIONS.** Paired symbols can have changed meanings: a snake might symbolize death, but a snake wrapped around a staff may symbolize healing. Furthermore, a symbol's positioning and orientation may affect its message: a skull may mark a good hiding place, whereas an upside-down skull warns of danger. Color, too, plays an important role: red can symbolize blood, while green can indicate poison.

## LAYERED SECRETS

While some symbols are simple—tattoos noting rank or graffiti designating enemy territory—decoding others can require greater understanding of a cult. For example, an elaborate painting depicting figures and scenes allegorical to a cult's objectives; a complex geometrical diagram featuring shapes and connections that mirror the human body and the universe; or the placement of intricate tattoos designating one's progress toward fulfilling a cult's ideals.

In addition, a cult might codify key dates via iconography. Let's say the third day of the fourth month is a cult's founding anniversary; the date might be symbolized by a three-pronged spear wrapped four times with a ribbon. Likewise, a series of triangles nested within triangles might reflect a cult's hierarchy; the image could also be a map overlay revealing the location of the organization's headquarters.

Complex, multilayered symbols can offer characters great insight into a cult's ideals, its structures, or even its plans. Because symbology functions similarly to puzzles, signs and symbols can become a quest's central feature and provide players with opportunities to use investigative skills, both in game and at the table.



**-TOWER OF AKESH-**  
*Looming high above the earth,  
this symbol is a sign of power and oppression*



**-SERPENT MOON-**  
*A sinister sign of deception  
and betrayal.*



**-EYE OF WRATH-**  
*Bloodshot and blazing, the eye of  
wrath inspires hatred and madness.*



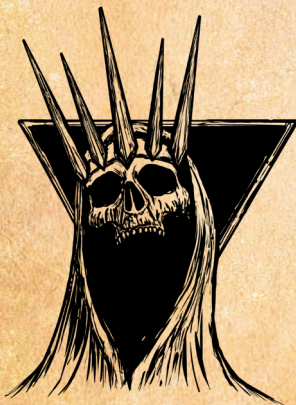
**-CHAOS DEMON-**  
*A symbol of total anarchy.  
Man worshiping the abyss.*



**-FLAMING SCALES -**  
*A mark of fiery justice,  
but who is the judge?*



**-CLAWS OF MADNESS-**  
*A constellation of sanity-  
sapping stars align to bring  
forth aberrations.*



**-NAMELESS KING-**  
*He rules a realm of undeath that  
spreads like plague across the land.*



**-PREYING COBRA -**  
*A symbol of intellect defeating  
might, and of toxic  
vindication.*



**-BLACK LIGHT -**  
*A mark of witchcraft and sorcery,  
of arcane supremacy.*



**-DRIPPING DAGGER -**  
*Symbol of assassins.  
A symbol of blood, magic and honor.*



CHAPTER 3

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CREATING YOUR OWN  
REMARKABLE CULTS



# CREATING YOUR OWN CULTS

*We're familiar with the rumors about the Prophets—many speak of the Vorden ancestor's travel into the Outer Dark, where he met with Narkul and claimed the hand of the Great Collector. Everyone knows we're the ones opening the realm rifts, but you don't see any of our number being thrown in prison or hanged by the neck, do you? That's because we have true power, the kind most people would die for.*

*—The Golden Sister, taskmaster of the Prophets of the Void*



**M**any enemies like predatory monsters or cunning demons can be set against adventurers, but no antagonist is quite so insidious as an organization of like-minded zealots. They're not confined to the wilderness, dark dungeons, or city sewers; they openly walk the streets, engage in commerce, and use the same systems and services available to adventurers. Yet, beneath the surface, they are ruthless opponents who will stop at nothing to achieve their goals.

This chapter provides Game Masters with everything needed to create their own dark organizations, including goals, origins, headquarters, leaders, and followers.

## GOOD IS A POINT OF VIEW

Few people think they're a villain. Most cults are convinced that they act either on behalf of the greater good or for the good of their members. Like guilds or knightly orders, cults have their own guiding codes and ideologies. These principles allow cult members to rationalize their actions and harden their resolve when faced with threats.

For example, the exiled dwarves of the Hammerfeet street gang may be infamous for their brutality, but they believe their brotherhood is simply reclaiming a future of wealth and respect that was taken from them. Like the dwarven lodges of old, the Hammerfeet value honor, family, and bravery, which attracts other dwarves struggling to find their place in foreign cities.

Sometimes a cult's ideology and beliefs are simple facades used by leaders to deceive or exploit followers. For example, the cult known as the Golden Tower was founded on a deal with a demon who promised its twin leaders—the Count and Countess von Durie—vast riches in return for mortal souls. The count and countess appealed to rival nobles and merchants with a stated goal of charity and almsgiving. They then deceived newfound members into signing a pledge that would harvest their souls after a period of five years. After revealing the clause, the Duries offered each follower a choice: buy your freedom with gold or find a new soul to take your place.

The *Point of View* table on the following page is designed to spark ideas of how a cult's beliefs might differ from accepted norms.

### Accepted Point of View

All living beings are essential, and their contributions, however small, are valuable.

Violence should be a last resort.

An individual should seek to be selfless.

One should seek to weave a harmony from the world's many differing voices.

Beings should live in accordance with nature.

Upholding peace is the greatest virtue.

Tradition guides the future.

Achieve balance in all matters.

Truth and honesty are virtues.

Mercy must be encouraged to prove we are better than our enemies.

### Alternate Point of View

Hierarchy is built into nature; some will always be worth more or less than others.

Violence is the tool of the strong and the brave; only the weak and the craven fear it.

A person has no obligation to anyone else.

Greatness is the product of one goal, one vision, and one unified voice.

Beings should reform nature to fit their desires and needs.

War weeds out the weak and leaves only the strong behind.

The bindings of the past cannot be allowed to hold us back from what is to come.

Only those who take their ideals and goals to the extreme can achieve lasting impact.

Honesty can be discarded to achieve greater aims.

Mercy sows the seeds for its own destruction by allowing the merciless to survive.

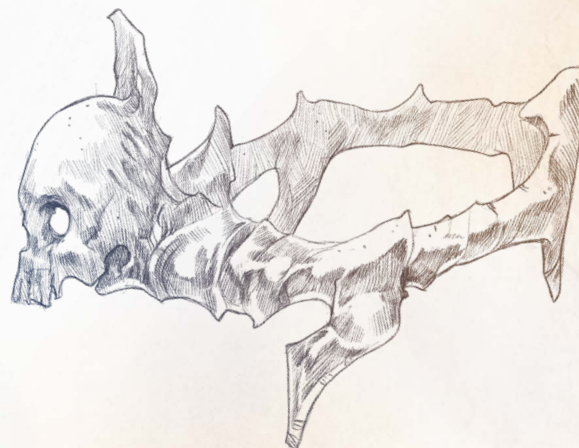
## ORGANIZATION TYPES

The sheer breadth of dark organizations means a home can be found almost anywhere: a band of werewolf barbarians might stalk the woods, while a crime family may carve out a bloody niche in the neighborhoods of a bustling city. Each organization operates in different ways and sets widely varied goals and ideals. When creating a cult, Game Masters should think about both a cult's purpose and any goals it wishes to see fulfilled in the campaign narrative and setting. As Game Master, you could intend for one cult to antagonize the party and for another to entice characters into joining its faction.

The following table displays common types of dark organizations, as well as similar groups suited for nefarious plans.

#### d10 Organization Type

- |    |                 |
|----|-----------------|
| 1  | Mage Cabal      |
| 2  | Druidic Circle  |
| 3  | Religious Order |
| 4  | Crime Family    |
| 5  | Eldritch Cult   |
| 6  | Bandit Gang     |
| 7  | Spy Ring        |
| 8  | Rebel Group     |
| 9  | Trading Company |
| 10 | Martial Order   |



### MAGE CABAL

A mage cabal is an arcane order of spellcasters that practices forbidden or abhorrent forms of magic. This could be arcana such as necromancy or blood magic, which violate the sanctity of the dead or require human sacrifices. Alternatively, the cabal might be used to organize a group of mages around a goal, such as obtaining the secrets of divinity or gaining lost knowledge that threatens the world.

### DRUIDIC CIRCLE

Druidic circles are usually composed of those who revere and draw power from nature, such as druids, barbarians, and rangers. These circles exist outside the laws of civilization and usually obey a wilder, more brutal code: they may harvest the blood of trespassers to fertilize their groves, hunt other mortals for sport, or even wage outright war on civilization itself. Among druidic circles, bloodshed and cruelty is usually considered a part of nature.

## RELIGIOUS ORDER

Religious orders can be some of the most insidious cults of all, since they usually operate in public and gain followers in a similar manner to other faiths. Some, however, are secretive and exclusive, preferring to carry out their worship and rites away from the public eye. A dark religious order almost always worships a deity, but it may be an infernal being, a god of death and destruction, or a twisted demigod.

## CRIME FAMILY

Most crime families comprise criminals who have taken oaths of loyalty to the “family.” As opposed to street gangs, crime families operate on a strict hierarchy and usually create their own customs and traditions. Some crime families specialize in certain types of criminal activity, such as magical burglary or operating pleasure-houses in hidden pocket dimensions. Crime families are also generally adept at bribery, intimidation, and kidnapping.

## ELDRITCH CULT

This more “classic” cult is dedicated to strange entities from other planes of existence. Eldritch cults typically aim to bring these beings to the mortal realm or to earn boons by furthering their plans. Eldritch cults might worship bizarre demons or ancient spirits that predate civilization, or they might seek out alien beings who dwell in the void. Eldritch cults are usually secretive and apocalyptic and may wield strange powers.

## BANDIT GANG

Bandit gangs are usually groups of murderers, muggers, thieves, and/or rogues. They might target travelers on a wilderness road or city dwellers in a darkened alley. At their most brazen, bandit gangs might even raid towns or extort villages. Though usually associated with muscled thugs, a bandit gang can comprise cunning halflings, silent and ruthless elves, or even mages who mix magic with bladework.

## SPY RING

Skilled in a variety of espionage techniques, spy rings are sometimes hired out to the highest bidder, though other groups self-finance through blackmail or private fortunes. A spy ring's usual activities consist of amassing information, infiltrating organizations, committing acts of sabotage, and even carrying out assassinations. Though members are skilled at intrigue and clandestine operations, they may augment their talents with illusions and enchantments.

## REBEL GROUP

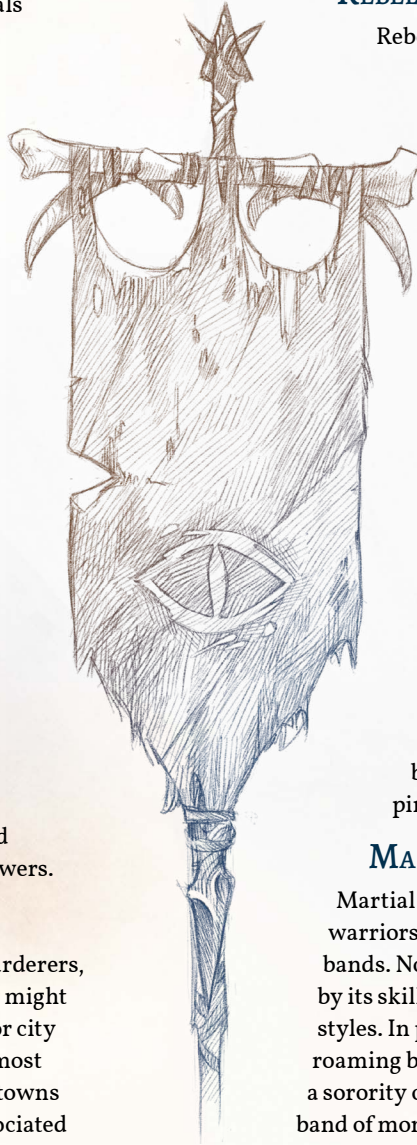
Rebel groups can consist of exiled warriors looking for vengeance against former homelands, pretender princes wishing to wrongfully claim thrones, or anarchic artificers plotting overthrows using construct warriors. Rebel groups generally wish to see the downfall of current authorities, whether via a campaign of terror, a revolution of the common people, or other strategies. Some rebel groups may raise armies and fight on battlefields, while others prefer guerilla warfare.

## TRADING COMPANY

Many trading companies have shady dealings, but a truly villainous one uses its influence and resources to commit vile acts on a grand scale, such as hiring mercenaries to seize control of kingdoms or employing assassins to eliminate rivals. Trading companies might bribe judges or authority figures to ignore their activities. Particularly brutal companies sometimes expand into piracy or brigandry to ensure profits.

## MARTIAL ORDER

Martial orders range from fellowships of monk warriors to mercenary companies and even gladiator bands. No matter the case, a martial order is defined by its skill in combat and mastery of various fighting styles. In practice, orders may comprise bloodthirsty roaming berserkers who exalt their cruel god in battle, a sorority of assassins who use exotic weapons, or a band of monks who duel those they deem impure.



## SIZE & WEALTH

**C**ults can be characterized by size (the number of followers) and wealth (access to gold and resources). A cult may have membership in the hundreds, or even thousands, but little actual wealth—perhaps because its converts are mostly peasants. Another cult could have an extremely exclusive membership—maybe only a dozen individuals—but immense wealth because each acolyte leads a business.

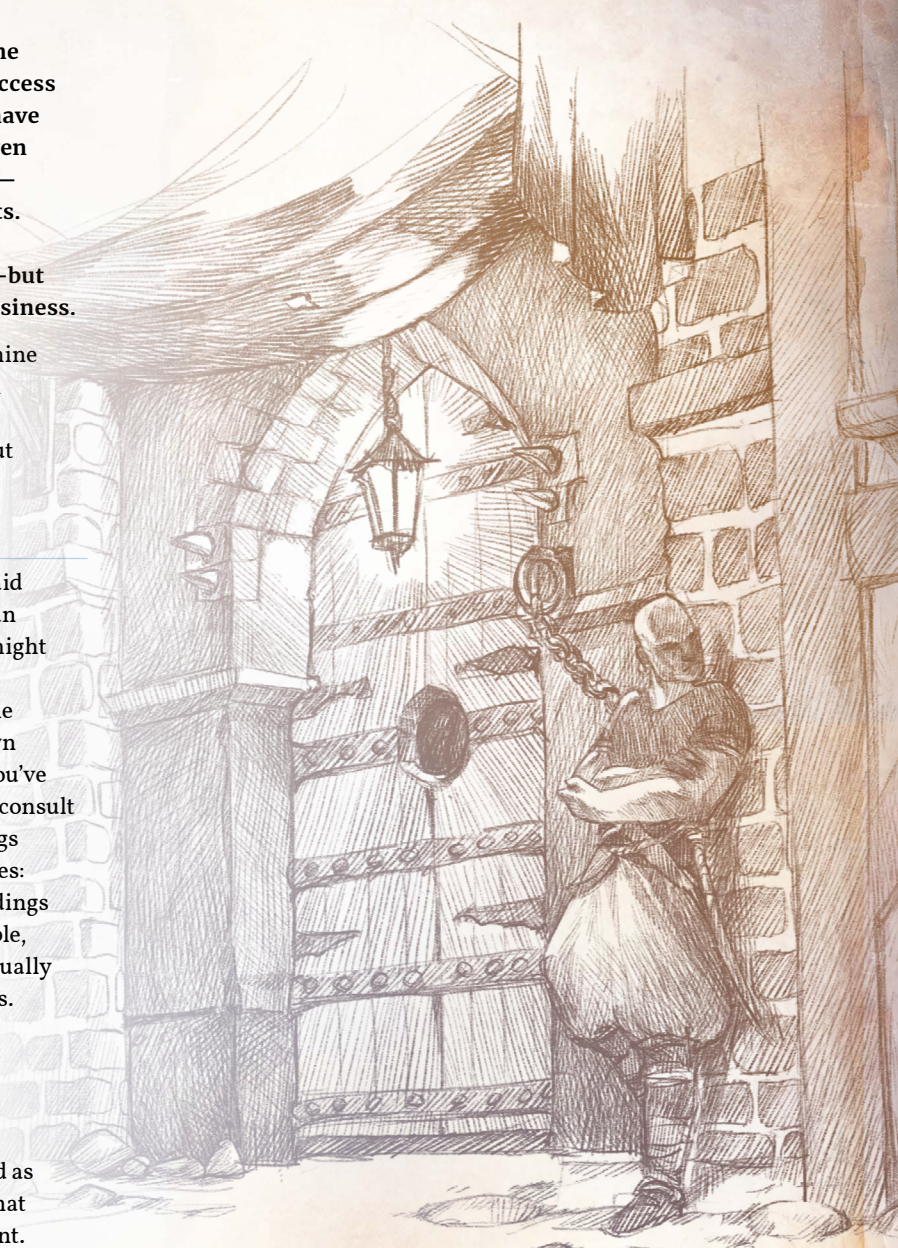
Game Masters can use the following table to determine the size of a cult. The wealth levels listed are typical for cults of the indicated sizes (see the *Wealth & Resources* section for more detailed information), but you can adjust them as needed to suit your tastes.

### BUILDINGS

Most cults have at least one place where plans are laid and meetings held, even if only in the basement of an abandoned inn. Some cults with immense wealth might have entire temples dedicated to their cause or vast guildhalls that can house hundreds of agents. On the other hand, a bandit gang with no building of its own may co-opt a ruined temple as a stronghold. Once you've determined a cult's membership and wealth levels, consult the following table to determine how many buildings it has access to. Buildings are split into two categories: common buildings and strongholds. Common buildings offer some sort of utility, such as armory, forge, stable, and the like. Strongholds are more elaborate, are usually fortified in some way, and act as a base of operations.

#### COMMON BUILDINGS

If your cult has access to common buildings, roll on or choose from the following table to determine the building type(s). Each common building can be used as a meeting place but also has an additional feature that can supplement the cult's activities or serve as a front. Some common buildings can increase a cult's defense score; this information is covered later in this chapter.



Typical Wealth Level	Number of Common Buildings	Number of Strongholds
⊗	1d4 - 1	0
⊗ ⊗	1d4 + 1	1
⊗ ⊗ ⊗	2d4	1d2
⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗	4d4	1d4 + 1
⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗ ⊗	6d4 + 4	2d4

d20	Common Building	Feature
1	Apothecary	Provides access to common potions (e.g., potions of healing), enchanted oils, vials of acid, etc.
2	Armory*	Provides access to common armor, such as leather armor, chain mail, breastplates, and shields
3	Carpenter	Provides access to primarily wooden goods worth 500 gp or less, such as carts, staves, crates, etc.
4	Fighting Pit*	Provides training facilities; halves required training time for weapon proficiency
5	Forge*	Provides access to common weapons, such as shortswords, battleaxes, warhammers, etc.
6	General Store	Provides access to common goods worth 50 gp or less, such as various adventuring supplies (e.g., climber's kit, explorer's pack), torches, rope, hunting traps, etc.
7	Granary	Provides access to rations and fresh water
8	Graveyard	Provides easy means of body disposal and access to corpses for necromancy
9	Hospital*	Provides access to medical assistance as well as to healer's kits, antidotes, etc.
10	Safe House	Provides a safe and inconspicuous place to hide
11	Inn	Provides rations and alcohol as well as recruitment and rumor-gathering opportunities
12	Library	Provides access to a range of books, both common and uncommon; halves required research time for any topic
13	Museum	Provides access to a range of artifacts and treasures; halves required research time for any topic
14	Dungeon	Provides a secure holding place for prisoners or victims
15	Shipwright Hall	Provides access to ship repairmen and boatsmen for hire
16	Shrine	Provides access to holy or unholy items; allows communion with a god or other being
17	Stable*	Supplies mounts, such as saddle horses, worth up to 100 gp; provides more expensive riding options for hire
18	Tailor	Provides access to tailors and custom cult uniforms as well as disguises, traveling attire, and/or fine apparel
19	Theatre	Provides oration training and/or recruit opportunities
20	Workshop	Provides access to tools for item repair and/or creation

\*Increase the cult's defense score by 1. This bonus does not stack with those from other common buildings. Defense is covered later in this chapter.



## STRONGHOLDS

A stronghold can serve as both a meeting place and a fortified defensive position in times of crisis. Strongholds, like common buildings, may have additional features, which are usually tied to the nature of the cult.

A trading company smuggling dark artifacts might use a sizable vault within a bank to hold dangerous treasures; all the while, to most commoners, the cult bank appears to be a normal place of business.

For each stronghold belonging to a cult, its defense score increases by 1; this information is covered later in this chapter. Roll on the following table or choose from the listed options to determine if your cult has access to a stronghold.

d12	Stronghold	Feature
1	Encampment	Can be moved to new locations, which may offer benefits such as access to foraging or natural resources
2	Bank/Guildhall	Provides access to moneylending, vaults, or a venue for services; increases a cult's wealth level by 1, but does not increase its number of buildings
3	Subterranean Tunnels	Can be augmented with traps, hidden passages, and secret entrances
4	Castle	Provides access to significant fortifications, siege equipment, rations, and fresh water; increases a cult's defense score by 1
5	Dark College	Provides access to books, artifacts, and scholarly training; halves required research time for any topic
6	Docks	Provides access to ships of all kinds and free ship repair
7	Dread Fortress	Provides access to defenses such as boiling oil, arrow slits, secret passages, and a portcullis; increases a cult's defense score by 1
8	Opulent Mansion	Provides a private meeting place for cult members; supplies beds, food, and drink; adds one common building (of the Game Master's choice) to a cult's total
9	Hidden Bastion	Provides a specially hidden haven for the cult. Accessible only through certain means, such as a password or ritual; may be hidden from view and/or divination
10	Black Sanctum	Includes ritual chambers that randomly summon extraplanar beings loyal to the cult, such as fey or demons
11	Temple	Provides a place to enlist new converts and commune with deities or patrons
12	Tower	Provides magical defenses, such as special enchantments, illusions, and/or wards

## RESOURCES

A cult's resource score measures its access to a range of goods, including trade wares, weaponry and armor, rations and fresh water, ritual supplies, holy relics, magic items, and any number of other items. To determine a cult's resource score, either roll a d6 (rerolling a 6) or divide the cult's number of buildings by 5 (for a maximum of 5). The higher a cult's resource score, the more likely that it has access to special resources, which can then be applied to its buildings. Roll on the following table to determine the number, if any, of special resources the cult can access. Then roll on or choose from the final table in this section (see "Special Resources") to determine the type of unique resource.

Total Number of Cult Buildings	Resource Score	Number of Special Resources
0-4	◆	1
5-9	◆◆	1d4 - 2
10-14	◆◆◆	1d4 - 1
15-19	◆◆◆◆	1d4
20+	◆◆◆◆◆	1d4 + 1

d10	Resource Type	Description	Uses
1	Spell Components	Natural items such as bat guano, sulphur, or newt eyes.	Can be used to create spell scrolls, carry out normal spells, or assist in ritual casting.
2	Special Materials	Materials can include adamantine ore, dragon scales, and clockwork parts	Can be used to create weapons and armor, magic items, and the like.
3	Ingredients	Natural ingredients such as dried plants or animal parts	Can be used to create poisons, potions, or other consumables.
4	Arms/Armor	Weapons and armor suitable for use by the cultists	Can be used to arm cultists as well as stock training facilities and armories.
5	Magic Items	Special magical objects, such as enchanted mirrors, trinkets, or clothing	These can serve a wide range of uses, from assisting in combat to enhancing stealth.
6	Artifacts/Relics	Mysterious items with unusual, one-of-a-kind powers	These can serve a wide range of uses, from providing glimpses of the future to enslaving the minds of enemies.
7	Sacrifices	Souls, blood, livestock, and the like	Can be used to appease a patron or conduct rituals.
8	Intelligence/Secrets	Information about the cult's enemies or allies	Can be used to form plans or learn the weaknesses of rivals.
9	Potions/Spell Scrolls	Single-use magic items that have a limited benefit	These can serve a wide range of uses, from enhancing the strength of cultists to granting invisibility.
10	Lore	Information about the world, history, etc.	Locate lost sites, learn where to harvest rare ingredients, or discover the weakness of a creature.

## SPECIAL RESOURCES

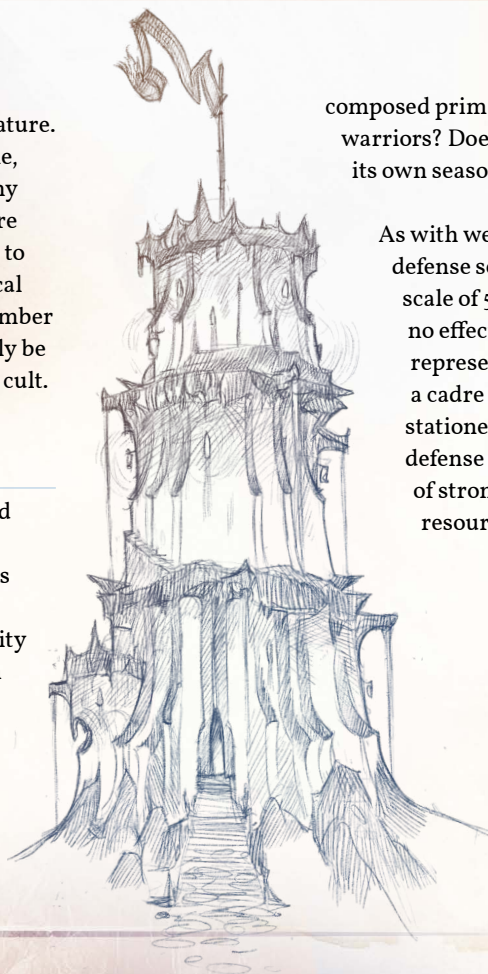
Special resources are typically magical in nature. They are adaptable to arcane, esoteric, divine, natural, eldritch, and elemental magic, or any other form of magic, depending on the nature of the cult. Each special resource is attached to a cult building and provides a specific magical bonus to both said building and any cult member with access. Some special resources may only be accessible to higher ranks depending on the cult.

## DEFENSE

The survival of a cult of scholars may depend on secrecy and a hidden stronghold, but other cults may rely on small warrior armies or even armadas of ships for defense. A cult's defense score is a measure of its ability to defend against and attack enemies. When determining a cult's defensive abilities, think about what forms a defense can take: Do the cultists themselves fight, or do they summon demons from lower planes to serve on their behalf? Is the cult

composed primarily of spellcasters or armored warriors? Does it hire mercenaries or send its own seasoned soldiers into battle?

As with wealth and resources, a cult's defense score can be measured on a scale of 5 stars, with 1 star representing no effective defenses and 5 stars representing very thorough defenses: a cadre of trained warriors, or wizards stationed across strongholds. A cult's defense score is derived from its number of strongholds, plus bonuses gained from resources and common buildings.



## CULT BACKSTORY



Some cults are shrouded in secrecy; for example, the Esoteric Order of the Diamond Mind holds mysteries that must be unraveled to understand its true goals. Others, such as the Daughters of Lightning, will share their history and aims with anyone willing to listen. In both cases a cult's origins and traits can make it endlessly memorable and awe-inspiring.

Once a rough framework is established for a custom cult, Game Masters can add detail by fleshing out the cult's backstory, just as one might do for a character. Cults typically have a founder and some kind of origin event—these can include the first instance of contact with an extraplanar being or the decision to start a secret society after uncovering esoteric arcane knowledge. A cult must be founded with some motivation or goal in mind, such as to summon an entity into the mortal realm or to overthrow the ruling monarchy. After goals and motivations are determined, Game Masters can define their cult's power source, a focus or specialty, and a weakness or secret that could be used to bring it down.

### ORIGIN

The story of a cult has to begin somewhere. A mage cabal might form around the discovery of a book of dark magic. An eldritch cult might begin with one man's tortured visions of a hundred-armed being crawling out of a hole in the sky. If you don't yet have an origin story for your cult, roll on or choose an origin from the following table.

#### d10 Origin

- 1 The cult began after its founding leader excavated an ancient text from a tomb.
- 2 The cult was founded by banished exiles.
- 3 The cult was born from a community of hardened criminals.
- 4 The cult was founded when its leader communed with a strange entity.
- 5 The cult began when its founding members saw a sign from beyond the grave.
- 6 The cult was created after its leader uncovered hidden knowledge in a grimoire.
- 7 The cult was born from disillusioned and well-trained rebels.
- 8 The cult was founded when its leader observed a significant astronomical event.
- 9 The cult was created after its leader heard a message from another plane.
- 10 The cult was born from the survivors of a terrible tragedy.

## GOALS & MOTIVATIONS

Roll on or choose from the following table to decide what goal your cult wants to achieve or what drives its members to continue their work. Options include the unlocking of seven seals of demonic worship in order to learn new, world-changing spells; the creation of an eldritch artifact that grants immortality; or simply a desire for coffers filled with oceans of gold.

#### d20 Goal or Motivation

- 1 The cult believes its religion is the true path and wishes to eliminate or convert all others.
- 2 The cult seeks to control a town, city, or entire kingdom.
- 3 The cult seeks to discover or obtain some lost form of magic: an artifact, a relic, a specific collection of spells, or the like.
- 4 The cult desires boons or greater power from an otherworldly patron.
- 5 Protection of a particular person, place, or artifact is paramount to the cult.
- 6 The cult wishes to exact vengeance against transgressors who harm a place, people, or object.
- 7 The cult desires vast wealth and all the luxuries it provides.
- 8 The cult's patron or leader was wronged; now it is devoted to exacting revenge.
- 9 The cult wishes to turn the world into a paradise in which its acolytes are the new gods.
- 10 The cult believes its members are the agents of an ancient prophecy that must be fulfilled.
- 11 The cult wants to better society in ways completely untenable by societal standards.
- 12 The cult wishes for its members to gain immortality.
- 13 The cult is driven by a desire to perfect humanity, whether physically or spiritually.
- 14 The cult seeks to revive the ideals or practices of a past organization or civilization.
- 15 After seeing its leader deposed or exiled, the cult wishes to reclaim a position of power.
- 16 The cult is trying to summon one or more beings from another plane of existence.
- 17 The cult is attempting to plunge the entire world into chaos.
- 18 The cult aims to unlock an ancient form of forgotten or prohibited magic.
- 19 The cult is trying to open a portal to another realm, where its members can rule.
- 20 The cult hopes to save the lives of its members from a looming apocalyptic event.

## POWER SOURCE

After you've determined how your cult was started and what its members hope to achieve, you can define its source of power. For many cults, no source is needed—its plans can be achieved through the skills and knowledge of its members. However, some cults draw on power from bizarre and terrifying forces, such as a fey patron or the realm of dreams. Roll on or choose an option from the following table to determine a cult's power source.

### d10 Power Source

- 1 The cult draws magical power from a well of souls that consumes spirits of the dead.
- 2 The cult gains infernal magic from a contract signed with an archdevil.
- 3 The cult uses blood rituals to give members supernatural strength and vitality.
- 4 The cult commands eldritch power granted by an otherworldly patron.
- 5 The cult's magic, which takes the form of glamours, is bestowed by a fickle and capricious fey patron.
- 6 The cult's power comes from an ancient grimoire, the reading of which endows magical boons.
- 7 The cult's power comes from the cultivation of spiritual energy, such as qi.
- 8 The cult's power is drawn from a portal to another plane of existence.
- 9 The cult drains the life force of other beings to gain its power.
- 10 The cult draws power by harnessing psychic energy from within the minds of its members.

## FOCUS & SPECIALTY

A cult's focus or specialty is the defining feature of how it operates. Often this feature is linked to the general organization type (determined right at the start of this chapter), but these tables can expand upon that content and put unique twists on otherwise mundane eldritch cults or crime syndicates. Most cults have a single specialty—just roll on or choose an option from the following table one time.

For a more complex *modus operandi*, roll twice and combine the results.

### d10 Focus or Specialty

- 1 The cult is adept at illusory magic, which allows it to disguise its members and deceive its enemies.
- 2 The cult displays a brutality and fearlessness in combat that unnerves its enemies and terrifies the common folk.
- 3 The cult uses the charisma and guile of its members to gain well-placed allies and manipulate people in high places.
- 4 The cult summons lesser entities or opens planar gates to unleash chaos and commit acts of terror.
- 5 The cult conducts criminal and/or illicit activity to gain access to the resources necessary for furthering its goals.
- 6 The cult conducts arcane or esoteric research that grants its members bizarre and previously unknown forms of magic.
- 7 The cult conducts dark rituals, unlocking fearful boons that enhance the bodies and/or magic of its followers.
- 8 The cult kills people in power and replaces them with its own agents.
- 9 The cult crafts and sells high-quality magical items or exotic non-magical items, then uses the gold to fund its true agenda.
- 10 The cult's members rely on the spirits of the dead—whether in the form of ghosts, zombies, or poltergeists—for assistance.



## WEAKNESSES & SECRETS

Most cults rely heavily on secrecy to continue operations without being detected by authorities or massacred by adventurers. This usually means keeping membership, headquarters, goals, and rituals secret from outsiders. However, secrecy can extend to cult members themselves—some cults hide their more distasteful practices from their followers to ensure loyalty, while others keep initiates ignorant in order to exploit them.

In addition, some cults may have weaknesses that are known to members but not to outsiders. These weaknesses could come from the source of a cult's power or from its own members. Roll on or choose from the following table to determine a flaw or a secret for the cult you're creating.

### d10 Weakness or Secret

- 1 The cult's magic drains the life essence from its followers, causing members to age prematurely.
- 2 The cult relies on continued humanoid sacrifices to maintain power.
- 3 The cult's members are weakened by sunlight and/or radiant magic.
- 4 The cult's members are slowly succumbing to a madness that worsens over time.
- 5 The cult's members are infected with a disease that is spreading through the ranks.
- 6 The cult makes continued offerings of extremely high value (i.e., gold or treasure) to maintain power.
- 7 The cult's high-ranking members are routinely deceiving those of lower rank regarding the nature of the cult and/or its goals.
- 8 The cult's members do not have souls; this prevents them from being healed by restoration magic.
- 9 The cult reveres a sacred artifact that, if destroyed, will rip apart the faith and/or loyalty of its followers.
- 10 The cult is reliant on an exotic resource (i.e., mithral or dragon blood); without it, the cult will cease to function.

## SYMBOLS & LOGOS

Like other organizations, cults usually have representative symbols. Whether displayed openly or shown only in secret, adorned on banners or tattooed on inductees, such symbols allow cult members to identify one another as well as allies and enemies. You can use one of the symbols noted in the following table, or you can combine two or more to create a unique image to represent your cult.

Rolling twice with results of "avian" and then "bones" might inspire the image of a raven perched atop a human skull, for instance. Whatever you decide, the symbol should have meaning for your cult; perhaps it symbolizes something to do with its name, goals, leader, or methods.

### d20 Symbols

- 1 **AQUATIC.** Aboleth, kraken, tentacles, anglerfish, shark, giant crab, fins
- 2 **AVIAN.** Bat, eagle, raven, crow, roc, blood hawk, wings, talons, feathers
- 3 **BEAST.** Boar, bull, stag, wolverine, owlbear, dire wolf, hyena, black goat, fangs, claws, paw print
- 4 **BLADE.** Crossed swords, curved knives, three daggers, flaming blade
- 5 **BONE.** Crossed femurs, rib cage, skull, skeletal hand, spine
- 6 **CELESTIAL.** Comet, moon, stars, sun, constellation
- 7 **DRAGON.** Ancient wyrm, drake, wyvern, dragon head, dragon wings
- 8 **ELEMENT.** Flame, lightning, ice shard, crashing wave, whirlwind
- 9 **EYE.** Cat eye, snake eye, dragon eye, closed eye, pyramid of eyes
- 10 **FELINE.** Leopard, tiger, lion, black cat, panther, claws, paw print
- 11 **HAND.** Arcane gesture, closed fist, open hand, pointing finger
- 12 **INSECT/ARACHNID.** Wasp, scarab, scorpion, spider, centipede
- 13 **MONSTER.** Cockatrice, griffon, manticores, hydra, chimera, sphinx
- 14 **OBJECT.** Anchor, chains, chalice, gate, key, lock, mirror, tome, gravestone
- 15 **OCCULT.** Arcane rune, pentagram, sigil, wand, black flame, altar, candle
- 16 **PLANT.** Yew tree, poison ivy, strangling vines, lily of the valley, poppy, thorns
- 17 **REPTILE.** Lizard, Ouroboros, python, viper, crocodile
- 18 **RULERSHIP.** Crown, scepter, throne, orb, tiara, jewels
- 19 **TOOL.** Anvil, hammer, pickaxe, scythe, sickle, vial, tongs, nails, saw
- 20 **WEAPON.** Battleaxe, crossed spears, mace, whip, warhammer

## CULT NAME GENERATOR

The table below provides some options to create a random name for your cult. An ominous, evocative name can spur ideas for a new cult, but sometimes a well-crafted organization needs only a name as the final memorable touch. With this in mind, a name may be your first step for creating a new organization, or it may be your last.

For example, you might start with an idea for a small, exclusive cult of dragon-blooded sorcerers who specialize in fire magic. Looking over the table, you first come up with the name *Children of the Fiery Dragon* but then think it's too obvious. You've already determined that the cult members are all female and are united by their dragon blood, so instead you decide to call them the *Daughters of a Thousand Dragons*.



### d20 Cult Name Generator

1	Acolytes	Ancient, Arcane	Beast, Raven, Snake, Demon
2	Adherents	Blessed, Damned	Darkness, Emptiness
3	Band	Bloody, Corrupted, Sanguine	Dragon, Wyvern, Hydra, Gargoyle
4	Children	Black, Gold, Cerulean, Indigo	Eye, Maw, Gaze
5	Chosen	Eternal, Undying, Deathless	Flame, Spark, Ember
6	Creed	Fiery, Flaming	Fury, Rage, Battle
7	Devotees	Glorious, Victorious, Great, Grand	Light, Sun, Sky
8	Disciples	Holy, Unholy, Sacred, Cursed	Mystery, Sign, Omen, Destiny
9	Exiles	Illuminated/Illustrious	Path, Road, Way
10	Followers	Vile, Noxious	Revelation, Awakening, Dawn
11	Guardians	Thousand, One, Nine	Seal, Portal, Gate
12	Keepers	Omnipotent, Omniscient	Shadow, Dark, Void
13	League/Order	Powerful, Supreme, Mighty	Silence, Nothing, Null
14	Paragons	Radiant, Flaming, Shining	Song, Rite, Invocation
15	Patrons	Resurgent, Rising, Coming	Talon, Claw, Fang
16	Seekers	Sacred, Holy, True	Tenet, Creed, Faith
17	Servants	Shadowed, Unseen, Invisible	Thorn, Spear, Edge
18	Society	Tranquil, Silent, Whispered	Throne, Keep, Castle, Tower
19	Wanderers	Twisted, Mad, Fanatic	Winter, Cold, Frost, Fall
20	Watchers	Wild, Savage, Untamed	Wrath, Fury, Storm

**Combine with:** *of, of the, from, from the, against, for, for the, with, without, within*

**Examples:** *Acolytes of the Beast, Acolytes from the Edge, Children of the Flame, Keepers of the Void, Servants from the Radiant Tower.*

## CULT MEMBERS

**T**he ranks of a cult are often filled with terrifying, bizarre, and intriguing individuals ranging from brawny, dull-eyed thralls who slavishly follow the commands of their superiors to mischievous, quick-witted masters of the arcane arts who are imbued with eldritch boons.

When it comes time to create a dark organization, Game Masters can use the tables in this section to help personify a custom cult's members, especially its leader. While you can simply pick a sensible combination from the tables, rolling randomly can sometimes surprise and inspire you. Write down or digitally note whatever member characteristics you determine—that way you'll have a description handy for whenever the adventuring party encounters your cult.



## CREATING A CULT LEADER

Whether a theatrical puppet master or a ruthless demonic swordmaster, a cult leader is the heart of their organization. Through fear, charisma, or guile, it's the leader who keeps a cult from falling apart, and it's their ambition and vision that propels a cult forward. Some leaders are driven half mad by their own power and delusions of grandeur; others use their wealth and influence to indulge in strange habits or fantasies.

A cult's leader should be the most unique member of the organization and a memorable character in their own right. They should be larger than life; even if their face is rarely shown, the cult they've built should reflect who they are. When creating a cult leader, consider who they were before becoming a cultist: What drew them to found the cult? What drove them to pursue the work they've undertaken? Roll on or choose from the following tables to create your cult's leader!

### APPEARANCE

A distinctive appearance sets your cult leader apart. These tables give inspiration for a cultist's physical appearance as well as a unique physical characteristic or feature: something they carry, regardless of attire, that makes them instantly recognizable and slightly unsettling to behold.

#### d10 General Appearance

- 1 Heavy, rotund body with layers of fat
- 2 Tall and thin with slender, elongated limbs
- 3 Wild looking with lean muscles and long, unkempt hair
- 4 Scrawny and short; moves in short, sharp motions
- 5 Decrepit and sickly looking; movements are shambling and shaky
- 6 Lean and lithe with corded muscles beneath their clothes
- 7 Tall and broad with heavysset features and large limbs
- 8 Stocky and barrel chested with a lack of grace
- 9 Twisted with bent limbs and a lopsided posture
- 10 Emaciated, moves slowly and delicately

## d20 Body Details

- 1 Missing a limb, which has been replaced with a strange prosthetic
- 2 Colorfully styled hair that is fashioned into remarkable shapes or patterns
- 3 A face crisscrossed with a network of scars, which could be from fights or deliberately inflicted
- 4 Empty black sockets where there should be eyes
- 5 Missing teeth or teeth replaced with metal fangs, wooden blocks, or the like
- 6 Eyes, a mouth, ears, and a nose that are all stitched shut
- 7 Skin with the appearance of something else (tree bark, stone, lava, metal, soil, water, moss, etc.)
- 8 Fingers missing from one or both hands, or replaced with new growth
- 9 Skin covered with mysterious, strange-colored tattoos that move of their own accord or appear otherwise enchanted
- 10 A body fused with an item (an amulet embedded in the chest, a sword melded with an arm, or a crown affixed to the head)
- 11 A missing eye, its socket filled by a dark gemstone that glitters with the light of an eldritch constellation or covered by an embroidered eye patch
- 12 An arm eternally wreathed in illusory green flame, flowing arcane energy, or twisting eldritch tendrils
- 13 A body that sheds tiny burning embers that drift in the air
- 14 A voice accompanied by another sound, such as an infernal choir, a bubbling, a terrible echoing, or a fey melody
- 15 A smoky illusion that masks their true identity (a bone mask, a silk veil, a sheet or a piece of parchment, a thick layer of makeup or face paint, etc.)
- 16 A growth of some kind (moss, lichen, parasites, warts, fingers, slugs, etc.)
- 17 Orifices that slowly leak a substance (seeds, blood, ink, maggots, pebbles, sawdust, sand, etc.)
- 18 An obvious wound (a gash in the neck, skin fractured like porcelain, a necrosed limb) that never heals
- 19 Deeply unsettling movement, such as crawling everywhere, flowing amorphously, slowly levitating, or sliding on a slime they exude
- 20 Partially elemental characteristics: frosted hair, fiery eyes, stone fists, gills or webbed appendages

## ATTIRE & ADORNMENTS

This section provides inspiration for a unique fashion, mode of dress, or singular taste that a cult leader might display in their clothing. Perhaps your leader dons a porcelain mask over half their face to hide a patchwork of scars and a milky white eye—the results of summoning a dark god; or perhaps they wear a demonic breastplate decorated with seals and sigils that keep a spirit trapped inside the armor.

### d20 Attire or Adornment

- 1 **ANACHRONISTIC.** Dresses fastidiously in clothing that was fashionable a generation ago
- 2 **SAVAGE.** Has teeth filed to points, wears leather or hide clothing decorated with bone
- 3 **FLOWING.** Wears loose-fitting and voluminous garb that disguises their frame
- 4 **ARMORED.** Always wears armor over clothing, even if only a breastplate
- 5 **FLAMBOYANT.** Dresses in exotic, vibrantly colored, and eye-catching garments
- 6 **MONOCHROMATIC.** Always dresses in a certain color
- 7 **BEJEWELED.** Dons copious quantities of jewelry or clothing affixed with gemstones
- 8 **POOR.** Wears cheap, poor-quality clothing befitting a peasant or a vagrant
- 9 **MASKED.** Always covers their face, be it with a mask, a veil, a scarf, or the like
- 10 **ENCHANTED.** Wears garments featuring magical effects (a shimmering quality, a shifting pattern, a mirror-like exterior, etc.)
- 11 **FEARSOME.** Wears attire decorated with disturbing items (spikes, skulls, eyes, etc.)
- 12 **HOODED.** Always wears a deep hood that obscures their features
- 13 **SLOVENLY.** Wears stained, dirty, and torn clothing
- 14 **EMBROIDERED.** Dresses in clothing elaborately patterned with silk thread
- 15 **REGAL.** Wears a crown and beautiful robes, carries an orb and a scepter (or similar regal garb)
- 16 **SPARSE.** Prefers to show off their skin rather than cover it with clothing
- 17 **STRANGE MATERIAL.** Wears clothing made of unusual fabric or something else entirely (seaweed, snow, human hair, etc.)
- 18 **CHARNEL.** Adorns their garb with bones, flesh, skin, or other relics related to corpses and death
- 19 **BESPECTACLED.** Wears glasses or goggles, perhaps ones with colored or thick eye-distorting lenses
- 20 **PIERCED.** Flaunts multiple flesh piercings that display various shiny metal trinkets

## PERSONALITY

In this and the following sections, Game Masters can combine personalities with mannerisms to make complex, memorable characters, such as a merciless cult leader with a dark sense of humor who approaches torture with a nonchalance that is unnerving to allies. Keep in mind that a leader's mannerisms may be informed by their personality. For example, a fanatic cult leader who constantly attempts to please their god may have a superstitious mannerism—they're always looking for signs of their deity's favor or disfavor.

### d20 Personality

- 1 **VIOLENT.** Hotheaded, aggressive, always ready to use physical force
- 2 **FANATIC.** Zealous, uncompromising, willing to sacrifice their life for the cause
- 3 **BARBARIC.** Brutish, wild, often crude, does not conform to "civilized" behavior
- 4 **HEDONIST.** Constantly indulging in pleasures of all kinds and looking for novel diversions
- 5 **ARROGANT.** Patronizing, overconfident, domineering, difficult to criticize
- 6 **GREEDY.** Obsessed with amassing wealth and/or resources, willing to sacrifice others in order to gain more
- 7 **STOIC.** Taciturn, silent, not easily agitated, rarely shows emotion
- 8 **PATRIOTIC.** Loves something larger than themselves, such as a city, a noble household, or a country
- 9 **BOOKISH.** Studious, quiet, intellectual, contemplative, rarely engages in direct confrontation
- 10 **ENVIIOUS.** Willing to commit awful acts to get what they want, rarely satisfied
- 11 **CHAOTIC.** Seems driven by fickle desires and whims, often acts unpredictably
- 12 **HONORABLE.** Obeys a moral code, shows respect to both enemies and allies, loyal to friends and followers
- 13 **MERCILESS.** Brutal, usually sadistic or callous, punishes transgressions harshly
- 14 **PARANOID.** Suspicious; always wary of interference, betrayal, or ulterior motives
- 15 **PREDATORY.** Scheming, manipulative, always looking for weaknesses to exploit or angles to use against both allies and enemies
- 16 **SNOBBISH.** Faultlessly polite and formal; very conscious of class, wealth, and social standing

- 17 **THEATRICAL.** Presents in an extravagant fashion, relishes drama and danger, treats serious circumstances with levity
- 18 **PRAGMATIC.** Calculating, opportunistic, willing to sacrifice whatever it takes to achieve larger goals
- 19 **MISCHIEVOUS.** Takes joy from deceiving, misdirecting, and/or secretly manipulating others
- 20 **GREGARIOUS.** Focused on building alliances and making deals, charismatic, has great insight into others



## MANNERISMS

To further build out your cult leader, consider adding a distinct mannerism—a sort of characteristic trait or habit they display. Keeping this mannerism simple yet obvious is a fantastic way to make your villain memorable. Imagine a cult leader who speaks in a calm, quiet voice about wanting to peel back their skin and brand their flesh with infernal glyphs, and all the while they never blink. There's a good chance that a moment featuring such a character would be forever seared into your players' memories.

### d20 Mannerism

- 1 **CAUTIOUS.** Always sits with their back to a wall, never lets anyone move behind them
- 2 **INTENSE STARE.** Stares intently at others, never blinks
- 3 **WHISPERER.** Speaks in quiet, husky tones
- 4 **DRONER.** Speaks in only an emotionless, inhuman monotone
- 5 **FIDGETS.** Often fidgets with a gruesome object, such as a skull or an eyeball
- 6 **SHIFTY.** Constantly shifts eyes from person to person in a room
- 7 **DARK HUMOR.** Finds the most despicable or cruel things humorous
- 8 **ALLEGORICAL.** Speaks in metaphors and complex esoteric language
- 9 **SCRATCHER.** Constantly scratches at themselves, even to the point of drawing blood
- 10 **HYSTERICAL.** Bursts into uncontrollable fits of laughter seemingly at random
- 11 **BESTIAL.** Flares their nostrils, widens their eyes, and grunts or snarls, especially when displeased
- 12 **SUPERSTITIOUS.** Makes gestures for protection, sees omens and portents everywhere
- 13 **VICE.** Often indulges in a vice, such as smoking, drinking, gambling, etc.
- 14 **FOUL MOUTHED.** Uses copious curses and obscenities when speaking
- 15 **UNWAVERING SMILE.** Has a perpetually coy expression that never drops, not even in dire circumstances
- 16 **TWITCH.** Twitches unnaturally and unpredictably, suddenly seizes or spasms
- 17 **SOMNAMBULANT.** Looks and speaks as if half-dreaming, uses slurred words, has dull eyes
- 18 **FAST TALKER.** Tends to speak quickly and misleadingly in order to pressure others
- 19 **LIAR.** Lies quickly, easily and often
- 20 **AVOIDANT.** Refuses to make eye contact and socialize.

## BACKGROUND

Now that you've determined most of your cult leader's characteristics, you may want to give them a background. Maybe your cult leader was once a charlatan who conned city dwellers out of their money. Or perhaps they were one of the few survivors of a massacre and are now scarred, both mentally and physically. The background you choose can have a profound influence on your leader's character and especially their view of the world. Their background may have laid a foundation for their journey to becoming a cult leader; a single experience may not be what sealed their fate.

It may also influence how a leader operates. For example, a former scholar might approach overthrowing a kingdom by assessing its factions' agendas and then building an elaborate plan to exploit them. On the other hand, a fiendish character may choose to sow terror and chaos with the help of infernal minions, regardless of the kingdom's internal politics.

### d20 Background

- 1 **WAR SCARRED.** The character experienced the horror and brutality of war, either as a warrior or as a civilian
- 2 **SCHOLAR.** The character spent many years of their life studying books and treatises.
- 3 **FIENDISH.** The character communed with devils, demons, or infernal entities in the past.
- 4 **WILD.** The character spent most of their life among beasts and birds in the wilderness.
- 5 **ABANDONED.** The character was abandoned in some way, perhaps by family, friends, a partner, an educational institution, or even fellow warriors or adventurers.
- 6 **CRIME.** The character was the victim, or the perpetrator, of a serious crime.
- 7 **BUSINESS.** The character was deeply involved in commerce, trade, and wealth.
- 8 **PROPHECY.** The character is part of a prophecy, discovered in their youth, that they now seek to fulfill or deny.
- 9 **DECEIVER.** The character was a charlatan.
- 10 **NOBLE.** The character was once nobility but has since been stripped of their titles.
- 11 **MARKED.** The character was marked by their original family or community as being haunted by evil spirits or bad luck.
- 12 **SHAMED.** The character committed a transgression for which they were expected to repent and make amends.

- 13 **MALADY.** The character was subjected to a nasty condition, such as a disease, a curse, a poison, a hex, etc.
- 14 **EXPERIMENT.** The character was experimented on, perhaps against their will.
- 15 **ADVENTURER.** The character used to be an adventurer and traveled the world.
- 16 **FALL FROM GRACE.** The character was once in a position of power or influence but lost their prestige.
- 17 **MADNESS.** The character experienced something that damaged their sanity.
- 18 **TRANSFORMATION.** The character was transformed in some way, perhaps through wild magic, reincarnation, or mutation.
- 19 **DEVASTATION.** The character experienced some catastrophic event, such as a gruesome family death or a natural disaster.
- 20 **ENSLAVEMENT.** The character was enslaved for a period of time.

## SECRETS

The best leaders have a secret—something they keep hidden from their fellow cultists, and perhaps even from the cult's patron, for their own reasons. This secret can reflect the leader's personality, past, or internal struggles and can be used as a quest hook. For example, the head of the *Ebon Guild of Assassins* might be hiding that they killed their own family to ensure their anonymity. Linking the crest on a signet ring to the family crypt may be the only way to identify the cult leader.

### d20 Secret

- 1 **JEALOUS.** The character resents their lover's other or past entanglements.
- 2 **SHAME.** An achievement the character claims is theirs was accomplished by someone else.
- 3 **HEIR.** The character has an illegitimate child.
- 4 **ADDICTED.** The character is addicted to alcohol or another substance.
- 5 **DISGUISED.** The character is a monster magically transformed into a humanoid.
- 6 **EMBEZZLER.** The character is embezzling vast sums from the cult's coffers.
- 7 **SCANDAL.** The character is involved in a scandal that, if revealed, will force them to step down as cult leader.
- 8 **HUNTER.** The character gets a thrill from hunting and killing humanoids.

- 9 **BIGOT.** The character holds resentment against a certain race, gender, class, etc.
- 10 **FAMILICIDE.** The character killed members of their own family.
- 11 **WOUND.** The character hides an old wound that still pains them.
- 12 **OBSESSION.** The character is obsessed with something, such as preserving ancient relics from a lost civilization.
- 13 **COLLECTOR.** The character has a collection of something hideous (skulls, severed heads, etc.).
- 14 **PAWN.** The character isn't really in charge; they are a mouthpiece for the true cult leader.
- 15 **MEMORY LOSS.** The character is trying to piece together their fragmented past.
- 16 **CHARLATAN.** The character relies on a trick to control the cult.
- 17 **OLD NAME.** The character used to go by a different name or persona.
- 18 **PET.** The character keeps a pet that is precious to them.
- 19 **TOKEN.** The character keeps a token from the past with them.
- 20 **APPEARANCE.** The character hides their appearance from both outsiders and members of the cult.



## FLAWS & WEAKNESSES

The greatest stories feature villains who are powerful and inspire fear, yet these characters also have weaknesses. The weakness is usually not immediately recognizable as such; it is up to the protagonists—the adventurers—to discover the villain's flaw and learn how to take advantage of it. A weakness provides another opportunity to add story and flavor to a character, which can spark memorable roleplaying moments. Perhaps the flaw serves to humanize the cult leader—or perhaps it reveals them to be a true monster.

### d20 Weakness

- 1 **POWER HUNGRY.** The character takes any chance to amass more power, even if it's risky or detrimental.
- 2 **DECREPIT.** The character is old or physically frail, making them vulnerable in physical combat.
- 3 **UNDEAD.** The character is undead, rendering them weak against radiant and holy magics and unable to enter consecrated areas.
- 4 **RECKLESS.** The character takes unnecessary risks, acting impulsively and without planning.
- 5 **SUNLIGHT SENSITIVITY.** The character weakens or takes damage when in direct sunlight thanks to a curse, disease, or other affliction.
- 6 **FRAGMENTED MIND.** The character's mind is compromised, making them more susceptible to magic or effects with psychic influence.
- 7 **COWARD.** The character is craven and retreats when threatened.
- 8 **DISEASED.** The character has an incurable illness that hinders them in some way.
- 9 **ANCHORED.** The character cannot use teleportation magic or leave their location due to a magical effect.
- 10 **LUMBERING.** The character is large and intimidating but cannot keep up with faster, more agile characters.
- 11 **BURNED.** The character was burned in the past; they still fear flames and are vulnerable to fire damage.
- 12 **PHOBIC.** The character has a specific fear of something that is otherwise relatively harmless, such as spiders, open water, snakes, etc.
- 13 **GLUTTON.** The character can't resist delicious food or a full banquet table and refuses to wait for food tasters to test it.
- 14 **MISER.** The character constantly guards their wealth; if an item or a cause begins costing too much, they'll abandon it.
- 15 **CURSED.** The character is afflicted with lycanthropy or a similar curse.

- 16 **BLOODTHIRSTY.** The character always goes for the kill, even when it might be better to retreat or try downing a different foe.
- 17 **DELUSIONAL.** The character is disconnected from reality and believes themselves invincible, untouchable, or otherwise too powerful to be threatened.
- 18 **CONCEITED.** The character believes themselves superior to all and underestimates enemies.
- 19 **SOFT SPOT.** The character has sympathy for a certain type of person or circumstance, such as an orphan or an impoverished childhood, which causes them to let down their guard.
- 20 **ANATHEMA.** The character has a physical vulnerability to a specific weapon or magic, such as cold iron swords that dispel their illusions or necromantic energy that saps their vitality.



## FOLLOWERS

A cult should have more than faceless henchmen. The best dark organizations are composed of a variety of warriors, mages, and craftspeople who all work toward the cult's goals. The following tables are designed to help you flesh out the membership of your cult with common, uncommon, and remarkable roles. Roll on the tables to determine the different roles in your cult, or simply choose those that best fit your organization.

### COMMON ROLES

Common roles are usually filled by low-ranking cultists, though some positions require special skills or knowledge. Performing duties well usually provides an opportunity to advance to a more prestigious role within the cult. A traveling party or characters who join a cult may come into contact with NPCs in these roles; perhaps the party runs into bandit gang members in an alley or overhears the proselytizing of a missionary. Roll on or choose from the following table to determine which common roles exist in your cult.

d10	Common Role	Specialty
1	Tail/Watcher	Follows and watches a specific person and/or place
2	Thug	Intimidates and/or beats enemies, guards areas
3	Mage	Performs low-level magic, such as restorations or illusions
4	Burglar/Thief	Steals gold and/or valuables
5	Missionary/Emissary	Spreads propaganda, enlists new followers, acts as representative
6	Warrior	Fights the cult's enemies
7	Smuggler	Smuggles illegal and/or forbidden goods
8	Beastspeaker	Tames and controls beasts or monsters
9	Fence	Finds buyers for stolen and/or illegal goods
10	Tradesperson	Creates and/or sells items

## UNCOMMON ROLES

Uncommon roles are more specialized than common roles. These positions are usually filled by higher-ranking members who have displayed a level of loyalty, experience, and ability that sets them apart from initiates. These higher-ranking cultists might be employed by player characters for their services and skills, or they may become antagonists of the party. For example, a cult's apprentice wizard could end up in a face-off against the party's spellcaster or be hired for divination services.

d10	Uncommon Role	Specialty
1	Assassin	Arranges and carries out discreet killings
2	Imposter	Assumes identity of nonmembers to carry out goals
3	Enchanter	Creates and/or enchants items for cult use or for sale
4	Scholar	Researches historical and/or magical lore
5	Summoner	Conducts rituals to summon extraplanar creatures and entities
6	Alchemist	Crafts magical potions, poisons, and/or other tinctures
7	Apprentice Wizard	Casts mid-level magic, such as divination or transmutation
8	Spy	Conducts espionage, such as blackmail, sabotage, and gathering information
9	Forger	Creates forgeries, fake documents, and/or facsimiles of objects
10	Torturer	Handles the captivity, interrogation, and/or torture of prisoners

## REMARKABLE ROLES

Remarkable roles are those filled by specialists and savants who have attained the peak of their craft. Here we find spies capable of infiltrating royal courts, wizards whose magic can alter the fabric of space and time, and artificers who can create mystical artifacts that grant staggering power. Cultists in remarkable roles are more likely to be recurring characters and formidable opponents or allies. A party might come to rely on a cult's loremaster for help in tracking down the location of a lost artifact, or duel an enemy champion multiple times over the course of a campaign.

d10	Remarkable Role	Specialty
1	Champion	Fights powerful entities, wields supernatural power
2	Archmage	Casts powerful high-level magic, such as necromancy or conjuration
3	Master Leech	Performs healing, can raise the dead
4	Loremaster	Manages the research and collection of magical and/or historical lore
5	Spymaster	Manages spies and espionage activities
6	Master Thief	Conducts difficult crimes, such as heists
7	Master Artificer	Creates powerful items, weapons, and/or constructs
8	Treasurer	Manages overall finances and resources
9	General	Leads warriors into battle
10	High Priest	Conducts complex rituals, communes with deities and/or patrons



CHAPTER 4

PLAYER OPERATED  
CULTS





# PLAYER OPERATED CULTS

*I would not underestimate these rebels, my lord—rumor says they are led by the same party of adventurers who brought down the Crimson Wurm of Tizamar. That foul dragon swallowed the city of Great Angbad whole. Apparently, the immense hoard of gold and acclaim from that deed was not sufficient—now, these upstart vagabonds seek your throne.*

— Ser Rol Pelton, Advisor to the Regent

Powerful adventurers may become tired of plundering tombs and crawling through dungeons. Rather than taking on quests or serving a kingdom, they may wish to forge their own dark legacy and gain enough power to rival monarchs, sages, or even gods. To this end, they may marshal their guile and might to form a secret cabal... or lay the foundations of an empire.

## THE PROSPECT OF POWER

This chapter offers rules and gameplay options for players who wish to build and operate their own dark organizations. Though the challenges are daunting, the opportunities are vast: player characters might found a new religion based on the worship of a mysterious god, rise to the top of the criminal underworld with their own crime family, explore forbidden secrets of the cosmos, or even seize a throne.

Exploring the darker side of fantasy roleplaying brings its own set of intricacies and challenges, from dealing with established authorities to opposing factions headed by powerful NPCs, to avoiding the ambitions of their own underlings. Along the way, characters will have the chance to gain followers, carry out missions, and manage their cult's menagerie of special members. Beware, however—as tempting as the prospect of power may be, the dangers are just as dire.

## ROLEPLAYING VILLAINOUS CHARACTERS

Roleplaying villainous characters can be difficult for both players and the Game Master. Instead of taking comfort in knowing they'll be hailed as heroes, player characters who found their own cult might find themselves isolated and hated.

Committing heinous acts—whether it's something relatively tame, like robbing a traveler, or truly vile, like murder—tends to have consequences. And they should have consequences—after all, even in fantasy worlds, people seek justice, protection, and vengeance. Building a dark organization shouldn't be a free pass to do terrible things, and as a Game Master, you should continue presenting challenges to your players when they decide to take darker roads, both in terms of gameplay and narrative.

While players operate their dark organization, keep a close eye on them. Being the “villains” can take its toll, and some players may find that operating a dark organization stops being fun once it strays past their comfort zone. Players may feel out-of-character guilt, shame, or aversion to what they or their fellow players do, especially when it involves hurting NPCs. If you feel like the game is making a player (or players) feel uncomfortable, then it's your responsibility to pause the game and start a conversation



to ensure that everyone's having a good time. If you can't find a compromise that makes everyone happy, then it's a sign that running a dark organization may not be the best way to play the game, and that's okay.

## THE PHASES

To create their own dark organization, players have to progress through three phases. As a Game Master, you should guide them through each step and keep detailed notes about their decisions.

**PLANNING.** In the planning phase, the players must make a few big decisions. Firstly, they need to decide what kind of cult they wish to create. Is it a rebel group or a criminal organization? What are its goals? Are the characters themselves the cult leaders, or have they pledged their service to a powerful patron? Once these questions have been answered, they need to consider where they wish to found the cult geographically, plan what the cult's headquarters will look like, and decide whether or not to augment it with workshops, spell forges, and the like. Players should also consider what roles will be filled by NPCs, such as an Alchemist or Assassin.

**BUILDING.** Once plans have been drawn up, construction and preparation can begin. This occurs during the building phase. Here, the cost and time required to build the headquarters, acquire supplies, and recruit special members are calculated. This phase also includes random events that can happen while building and recruiting. Finally, the characters can ask for the patronage of a god, demon, or other entity.

**OPERATIONS.** The operations phase is where the players dive into the challenges and rewards of running their organization. Planning and undertaking missions form a major part of this phase since missions serve to advance the cult's goals and exert its influence. While operating the cult, players will need to determine their monthly operating costs, manage morale, and try to increase their number of followers.

## PLANNING PHASE

During the *Planning Phase*, players choose what kind of organization they wish to create, decide where in the world they intend to found it, and begin to plan out the shape of the headquarters, including its size, additional functions, and fortifications. Once this is done, they can think about which key roles they'll need to fill for the cult to thrive.

***Example.** The players decide that they wish to found a Spy Ring that functions like a ninja clan. Based on their party's funds, they decide to create a Small headquarters in a Port, and add a Vault where they can store their treasure, as well as a Training Room to sharpen their members' skills. Being sneaky ninjas, they decide to augment their headquarters with an Illusory Appearance, some Magical Traps, and Magical Locks. The players also decide that they need to recruit an Assassin, a Spy, a Master Thief, and a Tail.*

## CULT TYPES

The following table provides a list of the basic Cult Types, which are elaborated on in *Creating Your Own Cults*. Alternatively, your players may choose to create a custom *Cult Type* using the existing types as a guideline. Each cult type has its own *Establishment Cost*, representing the initial investment needed to pay for supplies, weapons, etc., and *Favored Missions*, which are missions that the cult is uniquely suited to carrying out.

## HEADQUARTERS LOCATIONS

The location where players choose to found their cult has a significant impact on its cost and growth. There are also more complicated effects that are harder to quantify. For example, establishing a criminal gang in a city usually fares better than doing so in a village, while a religious sect might prosper as easily in a town as on an island.

d10	Cult Type	Establishment Cost	Favored Missions
1	Mages' Cabal	10,000 gp	Craft, Fear, Research, Ritual
2	Druidic Circle	3,000 gp	Fear, Ritual, Retrieval, Spying
3	Religious Order	5,000 gp	Corruption, Diplomacy, Missionary, Ritual
4	Crime Family	11,000 gp	Corruption, Intimidation, Interrogation, Theft/Heist
5	Eldritch Cult	4,000 gp	Fear, Intimidation, Ritual, Destruction
6	Bandit Gang	6,000 gp	Intimidation, Kidnapping, Raid, Theft
7	Spy Ring	15,000 gp	Assassination, Corruption, Interrogation, Spying
8	Rebel Group	12,000 gp	Destruction, Diplomacy, Fear, Raid/Battle
9	Guild/Trading Company	20,000 gp	Corruption, Craft, Diplomacy, Retrieval
10	Martial Order	7,000 gp	Assassination, Raid/Battle, Destruction, Intimidation

## CITY

Cities are a prime breeding ground for dark organizations. They offer a large pool of potential recruits, access to shops and services, and a sea of anonymous faces in which to hide. However, cities represent a significant risk for organizations that wish to hide from the public. They may also offer another, more severe downside: competition. Players may find themselves competing with other dark organizations for influence, recruits, and territory, while the authorities may imprison, interfere with, or destroy any cult that steps too far out of line.

## TOWN

Between a village and a city in terms of size, a town usually gives a cult a moderately sized pool of recruits. Towns are generally centers of commerce and may have guards or watchmen, meaning that a nascent cult will need to tread lightly to avoid interference, discovery, or outright arrests. However, easy access to shops and services, as well as lower prices for buildings and supplies, means that the rewards can outweigh the risks.

## VILLAGE

Villages present unique difficulties and opportunities. Authorities (such as aldermen or mayors) are more easily influenced or supplanted, but funding is scarce, the recruiting base is small, and the risks can be great—even more than in a town or city. Each villager tends to know all of the others, and information moves swiftly along the grapevine, so it's only a matter of time before everyone knows about the new organization, what it's for, and who belongs to it. At the same time, a cult that can instill fear or loyalty in the villagers might find the settlement bent to their will.

## PORT

Ports provide an excellent recruiting pool, thanks to a steady supply of travelers or sailors looking for new berths. Ports often attract those from foreign lands, who may be more receptive to a cult's messages or offers of help. Ports are also hubs for smuggling and illegal activities, ensuring that they possess a thriving criminal underground. However, authorities tend to keep a close eye on ports, though bribery or corruption may be common. Ports also provide an easy means of transport for cult members, as well as targets for intimidation or extortion.

## WILDERNESS

The wilds are lonely, but the solitude ensures that a cult is unlikely to be discovered or bothered. The cost of establishing a cult there is relatively low, but so is the potential for recruitment—wanderers, travelers, and nomads might be the only people who pass by. However, setting up a headquarters near a road or trade route might provide a strong source of income, as well as a small stream of new followers. For bandit gangs, druidic circles, or rebel groups, the wilderness might be a better home than any town.

## SUBTERRANEAN

Subterranean locales are usually lightless, remote, difficult to access, and barren of resources. What they lack in recruitment opportunities, however, they more than make up for in secrecy and security—few enemies may be able to find a cult's underground headquarters, and even fewer may be willing to delve into the dark. Naturally occurring cave systems may provide a cult with ready-made dungeons, while veins of ore or vast reservoirs of groundwater may offer resources that can be exploited.

## RUINS

Ruins provide a neutral space for a cult to establish itself. They are usually remote, but their crumbling architecture can provide the foundation for a new headquarters. Few people visit or even know of most ruins, ensuring that the cult will not be bothered. Depending on the ruin itself, the cult may be able to take advantage of tunnels, vaults, or other structures. Whether an ancient temple or crumbling castle, most ruins should be cleared of monsters and traps before a cult moves in.

## ISLAND

Many islands tend to be sparsely populated, making recruiting and financing a tough row to hoe. When people must devote a significant amount of time to subsistence and commerce, they have less time to devote to a dark organization. Revenue depends on the size of the settlement and in what goods it trades; a village trading in salt fish has less potential revenue than one trading in gold-bearing ore. In any case, islands provide excellent security, as the cult members can see who's coming and going.

dio	Location Type	Establishment Cost Modifier	Recruitment Bonus
1	City	+8%	+3
2	Town	+6%	+2
3	Village	+4%	+1
4	Port	+6%	+3
5	Wilderness	-2%	0
6	Subterranean	-4%	-1
7	Ruins	0%	0
8	Island	+2%	+1
9	Alternate Plane	+10%	-
10	Nomadic Encampment	+4%	+2

### ALTERNATE PLANE

Establishing a dark organization on another plane of existence can be risky, but the rewards can be immense. Building a stronghold on an infernal plane may offer the cult a legion of demons ready to trade their service for a chance at wreaking ruin, while establishing a foothold on a moving cloud in the elemental plane of air may give the cult an unassailable base of operations that can only be reached through powerful magic. The plane's residents may be receptive to the organization, but others may be outright hostile. Players should perform extensive research before attempting to establish their cult in one of these planes.

### NOMADIC ENCAMPMENT

Instead of choosing a fixed location, a cult may choose to be nomadic. This usually involves traversing the wilderness, but as long as a cult can find food and supplies, it can travel anywhere. This might mean setting up outside a city's walls, traveling between ports, or crossing seas. Nomadic cults may use tents, yurts, or magical shelters like houses built on chicken feet or a moving castle. Nomadic cults may find recruits along their path, or seek out places to recruit from.



## HEADQUARTERS & ADDITIONS

**M**ost cults establish some sort of headquarters—a place where members of a cult can come together for meetings, ceremonies, rituals, and other events.

These headquarters range from elaborate mansions to simple warehouses to subterranean complexes, and are typically tailored to the cult's purpose. A cult dedicated to political intrigue and moving among the noble class is unlikely to meet in a sewer, for example.

As well as serving as meeting places and safe houses, cult headquarters might have *Additions*. Additions are optional buildings or rooms based on *Wealth Level* that bestow benefits, such as being able to craft items or hold prisoners. Some additions can even produce resources, such as a *Blacksmith's Forge* creating weapons and armor. See the *Gaining Resources* section for more details about resources.

### SPELL FORGE

These chambers are often decorated with arcane sigils and warding symbols designed to protect those within. They are magical workshops where new spells can be created or old ones perfected, though they can only be used by characters who already have at least some skill in arcane spellcasting. Spell forges can be dangerous places even for the most careful spellcasters, and thus should be built away from meeting rooms or dormitories.

**FUNCTION.** Using a spell forge decreases the amount of time and/or gold required to learn a new spell by half. High-level arcane spellcasters can use the forge to create new spells, though the Game Master will decide what can be created and what is required to do so.

### BLACKSMITH'S FORGE

Blacksmith's forges enable metal ores to be melted down into refined bars and used to create items such as armor, weapons, or metal items like grappling hooks, caltrops, horseshoes, etc. Forges can only be used by trained individuals who are already proficient with smith's tools.

**FUNCTION.** A proficient character can use a *Blacksmith's Forge* to make metal items, including weapons and armor.

*Continued on the next page.*

Wealth Level	Headquarters Type	Number of Additions	Establishment Cost
1	Tiny	1-2	3,000 gp
2	Small	3-4	5,000 gp
3	Medium	4-5	7,000 gp
4	Large	6-7	9,000 gp
5	Huge	8-10	12,000 gp

### ALCHEMIST'S LABORATORY

Filled with vials, flasks, decanters, alembics, and cauldrons, alchemist's laboratories are dedicated spaces for the creation of poisons, potions, and other magical substances. They can only be used by trained individuals who are already proficient in alchemist's supplies, and may be second in danger only to spell forges—an experiment gone wrong may create deadly gases or unexpected explosions.

**FUNCTION.** A proficient character can use an alchemist's laboratory to make potions, poisons, and the like.

### RITUAL CHAMBER

Often decorated with tapestries, altars, braziers, and statuary, ritual chambers are places where summonings and magical offerings can be performed. They are magically infused spaces designed to accommodate ritual casting of all kinds, from the darkest sacrificial rites to the holiest of devotions.

**FUNCTION.** Provided that there is at least one ritual caster present, these rooms can be used by multiple individuals to conduct a magical ritual, such as summoning a demon or gaining a blessing. Enchantments for magical items can also be performed in this room. Rituals and enchantments cast in this room have a higher chance of success and decreased risk.

### ARTIFICER'S WORKSHOP

Whirring gears, clanging hammers, whizzing equipment, and smoking furnaces typify artificer's workshops. These workshops are custom built to allow for the creation of magical or mundane inventions, such as clockwork guardians, siege equipment, or exotic weapons. They can only be used by trained individuals who are already proficient with tinker's tools or an equivalent.

**FUNCTION.** A proficient character can use an artificer's workshop to make new inventions. The amount of time and gold required to create such a project is halved. Enchantments for certain magical items can also be performed in this room.

### TRAINING ROOM

Training Rooms are large spaces kitted out with straw dummies, wooden weapons, cushioned mats, and hanging bags in which cultists can undertake training in melee or ranged combat. Though having a trained master-at-arms can increase their efficacy, these rooms ensure that cultists become more skilled with their weapons and armor.

**FUNCTION.** Cultists who use a training room gain temporary bonuses to Missions that involve combat, such as *Assassination*, *Raid*, *Battle*, or *Destruction*. For each week spent training, NPC cultists gain +1 to those missions, up to a maximum of +3.

### LIBRARY

Whether they consist of wooden shelves of esoteric tomes and leather-bound grimoires or beautifully carved marble alcoves filled with gilt-edged books, libraries can be used by any cultist to conduct research on different topics, ranging from metaphysics to history to the deeds of past empires. Most libraries come stocked with titles spanning a range of topics, though more rare, esoteric, or outright forbidden areas of study might not be included.

**FUNCTION.** Cultists, including the player characters, can conduct research using a library. The cost and time to research is reduced by half, provided that the subject is likely to appear in the cult's library.

### VAULT

Built from solid stone or brushed steel and guarded by mundane or magical locks, traps, alarms, or wards, vaults are the best places for a cult to store their treasures, including coin, artifacts, magical items, and blackmail material. They can range in size from small, carefully crafted rooms to immense caverns sculpted from the surrounding limestone. Guardians, whether mortal or magical, may be recruited to protect these vaults.

**FUNCTION.** A vault allows a cult to store their valuables with greater security. *Vaults* can evade detection by authorities and are extremely difficult to break into, whether through lockpicking, magic, or tunneling.

d12	Addition Type	Establishment Cost	Benefit
1	Spell Forge	2,500 gp	Aids in learning and creating new spells.
2	Blacksmith's Forge	1,000 gp	Aids in creating weapons, armor, and metal items.
3	Alchemist's Laboratory	2,000 gp	Aids in creating potions, poisons, etc.
4	Ritual Chamber	1,000 gp	Aids enchantments and rituals.
5	Artificer's Workshop	3,000 gp	Aids in creating enchantments and inventions
6	Training Room	500 gp	Gives Mission bonuses related to combat and destruction.
7	Library	1,500 gp	Aids in conducting research.
8	Vault	1,200 gp	Securely stores valuable or dangerous items.
9	Torture Chamber	500 gp	Aids in interrogation.
10	Infirmary	3,000 gp	Aids recovery from wounds, poisons, and diseases.
11	Stables	1,500 gp	Provides space for mounts.
12	Dungeon	1,000 gp	Holds prisoners.

## TORTURE CHAMBER

Torture chambers are grisly spaces dedicated to the extraction of information from unwilling victims, and are typically equipped with a range of hideous devices including racks, iron maidens, thumb screws, manacles and shackles, stocks, water tanks, furnaces, and even magical implements designed to induce unbearable suffering.

**FUNCTION.** The longer an NPC prisoner remains in the chamber with a cult member, the higher the chance of the prisoner yielding useful information, but there is also a higher chance of them dying or going mad.

## INFIRMARY

Infirmaries are chambers dedicated to healing and medicine. They might be magical, mundane, or a mix of both. Typically, there is one chamber for emergency treatment, one chamber filled with beds for recovering patients, and one room for surgery or magical healing. Infirmaries are usually stocked with bandages, antidotes, healing salves, and other medicine.

**FUNCTION.** NPC cultists and player characters recover twice as fast in an infirmary, and can be cured of poisons or diseases by spending one full day resting there. Difficult medical operations, such as restoring a severed arm or healing a character of terrible burns, may take up to one week.

## STABLE

Stables usually have stalls, a roof, and an attached paddock. Most come with a supply room to store food

and supplies, such as saddles and ropes. The most common mounts are horses, ponies, and donkeys. For more unusual mounts such as elephants or dire wolves, increase the cost by 50%. For magical mounts such as griffons or pegasi, increase costs by 100%.

**FUNCTION.** Stables allow for the upkeep of around a dozen mounts, irrespective of their size or form. If a mount dies, it takes 1d4 months to find and train a replacement.

## DUNGEON

Not to be confused with their adventurous counterparts, dungeons are prisons used to hold enemies or victims of the cult. Most are dark, small, and uncomfortable, with stone walls or metal bars making up individual cells. Dungeons come with secure locks, chains, manacles, and bowls for food.

**FUNCTION.** Dungeons can be used to hold between 4 and 20 prisoners. They are not magically warded, so prisoners who can use magical abilities to change their forms, walk through walls, or open locks may be able to escape.

## ADDITIONAL FORTIFICATIONS

Players might want to fortify their headquarters. These augmentations are distinct from *Additions* in that their benefits are solely defensive, making it harder for enemies of the cult to get into, out of, or around the headquarters.

See the *Fortification* table below.



d10	Fortification	Cost	Effect
1	Traps (Conventional)	250 gp	May be designed to kill, maim, slow, or alert residents
2	Traps (Magical)	2,500 gp	Perform the same functions as above, but are harder to remove and spot. May include magical effects
3	Arrow Slits	100 gp	Allow ranged weapons to be used against outdoor enemies. Provides a cover bonus
4	Magical Locks	2,500 gp	Secures parts of the headquarters against those without magical abilities and prevents lockpicking
5	Siege Defense	3,000 gp	Adds catapults, portcullis, a moat, or other fortifications against sieges
6	Illusory Appearance	2,500 gp	Disguises the exterior of the headquarters
7	Hidden Doors	250 gp	Allows cult members to move through the headquarters quickly or escape from danger
8	Guard Dogs	100 gp	Alert residents to intruders and attack trespassers
9	Alarm (Magical)	1,000 gp	Warns of intruders. Cannot be disarmed with mundane tools
10	Warding Sigils	2,500 gp	Prevents teleportation into, out of, or around the headquarters, as well as scrying

## KEY MEMBERS

All cults have followers, but key members are different. Amidst the sea of faceless servants and obedient peons, key members have skills and expertise that set them apart. They might be trained Warriors, devious Spies, or ruthless Thugs. While normal followers can generally be sent into battle or to spy on a rival cult's headquarters, key members are more likely to achieve success in their areas of expertise.

*Key Members* are typically NPCs that must be recruited, and they can be difficult to find depending on the rarity of the skills they offer. It's not so hard to find a Thug or Thief, but a Torturer or Archwizard requires more work. A Game Master may determine that to find a new key member, the player characters must embark on a quest or pay someone with underworld connections to set up a meeting. Key members are a great asset to any cult, and must be paid monthly for their services. In return, they offer the cult bonuses to specific *Missions*, access to new items or spellcasting, or the ability to uncover hidden pieces of lore. For example, a Master-at-Arms can train cultists so that they are more competent in *Battle* or *Raid Missions*, while a Master Artificer can create clockwork guardians for the cult's headquarters.

## PROMOTING OR TRAINING A NEW KEY MEMBER

After a normal follower of a cult takes part in a successful mission (see the *Cult Missions* section), the Game Master may decide that that follower has gained enough experience to become a key member. If the players accept the promotion, they may add that follower to the ranks of their key members. Alternatively, player characters may task an existing key member with training a follower to master their skills. This usually requires an investment of 50, 100, or 150 gp, and takes one to three months, depending on whether the key member is *Common*, *Uncommon*, or *Remarkable*. At the end of the period, the follower becomes a key member of the same type that trained them.

If a player character has the appropriate skills, they may train a follower as if they themselves were a key member, though the time and cost involved are the same.

## COMMON KEY MEMBERS

You can choose the following common key members for your organization to perform specialist tasks. Each role has its own strengths and bonus.

### TAIL/WATCHER

Provides a +2 to Spying Missions. Can be equipped with disguises or illusions to hide their identity or presence, which grants them an additional +1.

### THUG

Provides a +2 to Intimidation and Kidnapping Missions. Can be equipped with weapons to fight enemies or threaten victims, which grants them an additional +1.

### MAGE

Provides a +2 to Ritual Missions and enables the casting of low-level spells. Can be equipped with magical items or a Library to conduct research, which grants them an additional +1 to Ritual or Research Missions, respectively.

### BURGLAR/THIEF

Provides a +2 to Theft/Heist Missions. Can be equipped with lockpicks, grappling hooks, or disguises to aid in thievery, which grants them an additional +1.

### MISSIONARY/EMISSARY

Missionaries provide a +2 to Missionary Missions, while Emissaries provide a +2 to Propaganda and Diplomacy Missions.

### WARRIOR

Provides a +2 to Raid/Battle and Destruction Missions. Can be equipped with weapons and armor to aid in combat, which grants them an additional +1.



### SMUGGLER

Allows the cult to smuggle people or goods to other places without detection, or smuggle items, resources, and people into the headquarters. Provides a +1 to Retrieval and Gather Resources Missions.

### BEASTSPEAKER

Allows the organization to recruit one random beast or monster of appropriate level per month. The beast may fight alongside the cult, or perform services like being a mount.

### FENCE

Allows the organization to sell illegal, stolen, or illicit goods for good prices.

### TRADESPERSON

Produces a random amount of mundane items or material per month, such as tools, clothing, furniture, or silk. Some tradespeople may work on larger projects, such as ships or buildings.



## UNCOMMON KEY MEMBERS

You can choose the following uncommon key members for your organization to perform specialist tasks. Each role has its own strengths and bonus.

### ASSASSIN

Provides a +3 to Assassination Missions. Can be equipped with disguises, magical weapons, or poison to aid in their missions, which grants them an additional +1.

### GENERAL

Provides a +3 to Raid/Battle Missions, but requires at least five Warriors to command. If the number of Warriors under the General's command exceeds the number of enemies, then the mission gains an additional +1.

### ENCHANTER

Provides a +3 to Craft Missions that deal with magically enchanting an item. Can be provided with a Ritual Chamber for an additional +1.

### SCHOLAR

Provides a +4 to Research Missions. Can be equipped with a Library to aid their research, which grants them an additional +1.

### ALCHEMIST

Provides a +3 to Craft Missions that deal with creating potions or consumable magical items. Can be equipped with an Alchemist's Laboratory, which grants them an additional +1.

### APPRENTICE WIZARD

Provides a +3 to Ritual Missions and enables the casting of mid-level spells. Can be equipped with magical items or a Library to conduct research, which grants them an additional +1 to Ritual or Research Missions, respectively.

d10	Common Role	Specialty	Monthly Cost
1	Tail/Watcher	Follows and watches a specific person and/or place	5 gp
2	Thug	Intimidates and/or beats up enemies, guards areas	5 gp
3	Mage	Performs low-level magic	30 gp
4	Burglar/Thief	Steals gold and/or valuables	20 gp
5	Missionary/Emissary	Spreads the cult's message and recruits new members	20 gp
6	Warrior	Fights the cult's enemies	15 gp
7	Smuggler	Smuggles illegal and/or forbidden goods	20 gp
8	Beastspeaker	Tames and controls beasts or monsters	20 gp
9	Fence	Finds buyers for stolen and/or illegal goods	20 gp
10	Tradesperson	Creates and/or sells items	10 gp

### SPY

Provides a +3 to Spying Missions. Can be equipped with disguises or magical items that grant stealth, which grants them an additional +1.

### FORGER

Allows the organization to forge documents or items. Provides a +3 to Craft Missions that involve forgery. Can be equipped with an Artificer's Workshop, which grants them an additional +1.

### TORTURER

Tortures prisoners of the organization in order to extract information or bend the prisoners to the cult's will. Provides a +3 to Interrogation Missions. Can be equipped with a Dungeon, which grants them an additional +1.

### MASTER-AT-ARMS

Trains cultists in combat, ranging from swordsmanship to archery to exotic weapons. Cultists gain a +1 to Raid/Battle Missions. Can be equipped with a Training Room, which grants the Master-at-Arms an additional +1.

d10	Uncommon Role	Specialty	Monthly Cost
1	Assassin	Carries out discreet killings	60 gp
2	Enchanter	Creates and/or enchants items for cult use or for sale	50 gp
3	Scholar	Researches historical and/or magical lore	40 gp
4	General	Leads warriors in battle	50 gp
5	Alchemist	Crafts magical potions, poisons, and other tinctures	60 gp
6	Apprentice Wizard	Casts mid-level magic	40 gp
7	Spy	Espionage, such as blackmail, sabotage, and gathering information	50 gp
8	Forger	Creates forgeries, fake documents, and/or facsimiles of objects	50 gp
9	Torturer	Handles the captivity, interrogation, and torture of prisoners	50 gp
10	Master-at-Arms	Trains followers in the art of combat	30 gp

d12	Remarkable Role	Specialty	Monthly Cost
1	Champion	Fights powerful entities and wields supernatural power	200 gp
2	Archwizard	Casts powerful high-level magic	200 gp
3	Master Leech	Performs healing and can raise the dead	180 gp
4	Loremaster	Manages the research and collection of magical and/or historical lore	160 gp
5	Spymaster	Manages spies and espionage activities	150 gp
6	Master Thief	Conducts difficult crimes, such as heists	150 gp
7	Master Artificer	Creates powerful items, weapons, and/or constructs	200 gp
8	Treasurer	Manages overall finances and resources	250 gp
9	Imposter	Assumes identity of nonmembers to carry out goals	10 gp
10	High Priest	Conducts complex rituals and communes with deities and/or patrons	150 gp
11	Deputy Leader	Manages the cult while the real leader is absent	200 gp
12	Orator	Gives riveting speeches and recruits new followers	120 gp

## REMARKABLE KEY MEMBERS

You can choose the following remarkable key members for your organization to perform specialist tasks. Each role has its own strengths and bonus.

### CHAMPION

Provides a +2 to Raid/Battle Missions. When sent to fight powerful enemy Warriors or monsters alone, the Champion provides a +4 bonus to the Mission instead. Can be equipped with magical weapons or armor to aid them in combat, which grants them an additional bonus of up to +2. If the cult possesses a Master-at-Arms and/or a Training Room, the Champion may benefit from one or the other, but not both.

### ARCHWIZARD

Provides a +4 to Ritual Missions, and can cast high-level spells. Can be equipped with magical items or a Library to conduct research, which grants them an additional +1 to Ritual or Research Missions, respectively.

### MASTER LEECH

Heals injured followers or player characters with magic or gruesome surgery. Allows characters to heal from otherwise deadly injuries or diseases, undergo limb or organ transplants, or change their physical appearance.

### LOREMASTER

Provides a +5 to Research Missions. Can be equipped with a Library to aid their research, which grants them an additional +1.

### SPYMASTER

Provides +3 to Spying Missions. Requires at least one Spy employed by the cult. Each time a Spying Mission is successful, the cult gains an additional piece of intelligence or a secret (see the "Gaining Resources" section).

### MASTER THIEF

Provides a +4 to Theft/Heist Missions. Can be equipped with disguises or magic items that provide extra stealth, which grants them an additional +1.

### MASTER ARTIFICER

Provides a +4 to Craft Missions that deal with creating magical or mechanical items (including clockwork devices and weapons). Can be equipped with an Artificer's Workshop, which grants them an additional +1.

### TREASURER

Reduces the organization's monthly costs by 20% and generates 1d10 x 50 gp per month.

### IMPOSTOR

Assumes the identity of a target and imitates them. This task can be treated as a Spying Mission. The Impostor provides a +4 bonus to such missions.

### HIGH PRIEST

Provides a +5 bonus to Ritual Missions that involve communing or communicating with a deity or extraplanar entity. Can be provided with a Ritual Room to aid with their magic, which grants them an additional +1.

### DEPUTY LEADER

Oversees the cult's operations while the normal leaders are absent or indisposed. Provides a +2 Leadership bonus and continues the cult's agenda while the leaders are away.

### ORATOR

Provides a +4 to Propaganda and Diplomacy Missions. Can be provided with magical effects that enhance charisma or extravagant clothes worth 300 gp, which grant a +1 bonus. Provides a +1 to Recruitment Rolls. See *Leadership & Morale* section below.



## BUILDING PHASE

**I**n the Building Phase, the players' plans are put into action. The construction of their headquarters gets underway, along with any additional buildings. Any modifications they've requested in terms of defenses or fortifications are made once the building is complete and, once the headquarters is finished, the player characters can begin recruiting cultists to fill the key member roles of their dark organization.

This stage of the process involves some bookkeeping as costs are worked out, time requirements calculated, and other notes made. This can be done on behalf of the players by the Game Master should they desire, or by the players themselves.

### TOTAL ESTABLISHMENT COST

Once the players have determined the type of cult they want to create and the headquarters they wish to build, they need to determine the total cost of establishing the organization.

*Add together the Establishment Cost for (1) the Cult Type, (2) the Headquarters size, plus any (3) Additions and (4) Fortifications. Add these together, then multiply the sum by the Location's Establishment Cost Modifier. Add that amount to the previous total to create the Total Establishment Cost.*

Here's an example of tabulating the costs of establishing a cult:

		Establishment Cost	Cost Modifier
Cult Type	Martial Order	7,000 gp	
Headquarters Size	Large	9,000 gp	
Additions	Dungeon, Blacksmith's Forge	1,050 gp	
Location	Wilderness	-	-2%
Fortifications	Magical Locks, Conventional Traps	2,750 gp	
Establishment Cost:		19,800 gp	
Establishment Cost Modifier: (based on Location)		-2% (equals -396 gp)	
Total Establishment Cost		19,404 gp	





## HEADQUARTERS CONSTRUCTION AND PREPARATIONS


Building the cult's headquarters and assembling the supplies to run the cult always takes a minimum of one month and progresses at monthly intervals per 1,000 gp of total cost. Looking at our previous example cost of 19,404 gp, we can work out that this cult will take 20 months to build and prepare. The players can either pay the cost up front, or spread the cost over the full 20 months.


Unless the players pay the entire sum up front, the Game Master should roll once for each month to determine if a random event occurs. Roll a die—on an odd result, a positive event occurs, while on an even result, a negative event occurs. Then, roll a d10 and consult the appropriate table to see what impacts the preparation of the cult.

If the players want their cult to be ready more quickly, they can pay an additional 500 gp for each planned month of construction. This extra payment cuts the construction and preparation time in half by hiring more workers and paying a premium to get essential supplies delivered quickly. So, if a cult is estimated to take 20 months to construct and prepare, the players can pay roughly 30,000 gp instead of 20,000 gp to shorten the time to 10 months.

**d10 Positive Event****Effect**

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 1  | A dark being bestows a gift upon the cult's founders.   | Total Establishment Cost reduced by 10%.   |
| 2  | Fear drives workers and merchants to focus all of their attention on the cult's preparations. | Preparation time reduced by one month.   |
| 3  | Followers tear down a nearby ruin and bring the stones to the building site.                  | Total Establishment Cost reduced by 10%.   |
| 4  | A follower summons or creates beings to help with preparations and construction.              | Preparation time reduced by one month.   |
| 5  | A wealthy noble is converted to the cause and makes a generous donation.                      | Total Establishment Cost reduced by 20%.   |
| 6  | Newly recruited followers volunteer to help build the headquarters.                           | Preparation time reduced by two months.  |
| 7  | A wandering transmuter offers to transform sand into gold in exchange for a favor.            | Total Establishment Cost reduced by 30%.   |
| 8  | A dragon, giant, or massive sentient beast offers to help with construction.                  | Preparation time reduced by three months.  |
| 9  | Workers discover an ancient, treasure-filled tomb beneath the site of the headquarters.       | If excavation is successful, reduce Total Establishment Cost by 5,000 gp.              |
| 10 | A sage offers to cast a spell that speeds up time for the characters.                         | Characters lose six months of their lives, but building time is reduced by six months. |
- 

**d10 Negative Event****Effect**

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 1  | A local gang demands that the cult pay protection fees to continue building.                              | Players must pay a fee equal to 10% of the Total Establishment Cost.                                     |
| 2  | A rival cult sabotages the construction site or a shipment of supplies.                                   | Preparation time increased by one month.   |
| 3  | Word of the cult's true nature spreads, and merchants charge you more for goods.                          | Total Establishment Cost increased by 10%.   |
| 4  | A worker glimpses something they shouldn't, and persuades several of their fellow workers to quit.        | Preparation time increased by one month.   |
| 5  | Local mercenaries must be paid off lest they report the nascent cult to the authorities.                  | Players must pay a bribe equal to 20% of the Total Establishment Cost.                                   |
| 6  | A powerful entity curses the building site, causing it to turn swampy. It must be drained.                | Preparation time increased by two months.  |
| 7  | A rival organization intercepts one of the cult's shipments and destroys it.                              | Total Establishment Cost increased by 30%.   |
| 8  | A strange star rises in the daytime skies, sending the workers entirely mad.                              | Preparation time increased by three months.  |
| 9  | The cult's patron or a local spirit is dissatisfied with the headquarters and must be appeased.           | A ritual sacrifice or offering must be made. Total Establishment Cost increased by 2,000 gp.             |
| 10 | A disguised devil tries to undermine the cult by tempting the workers into signing a mysterious contract. | The workers are turned into fiendish spawn and must be killed. Preparation time increased by six months. |
- 

## RECRUITING KEY MEMBERS

*Key Members* are essential for a cult to carry out specialized tasks, especially *Missions*. However, they may take some persuading to join the new cult. Some might require favors, while others might need a large sum of gold upfront to convince them. Game Masters can use the table below to add an extra twist to recruiting a *Key Member*, which usually makes it easier or more difficult to enlist their help.

Depending on their rarity (*Common*, *Uncommon*, or *Remarkable*), key members usually take one to three months to recruit. Once they've agreed to join the organization, their monthly cost must be paid, either by the cult or by the player characters themselves.

### d10 Description

- 1 This person holds opposing beliefs to those of the cult.
- 2 This person has been imprisoned.
- 3 This person has already been hired by another employer.
- 4 This person is wary about the cult's plans, and must be persuaded.
- 5 This person has connections that try to stop their recruitment into the cult.
- 6 This person is interested in helping, but requests a favor.
- 7 This person wishes to join, but first needs help with erasing their current life.

- 8 This person is trying to pay off debts, and asks to be paid one year's wages upfront.
- 9 This person agrees to join, provided that they're given certain comforts costing 500 gp.
- 10 This person wholeheartedly believes in the cult's goals and eagerly joins.

## GAINING A DARK PATRON

Some organizations may want a magical or god-like patron to grant them assistance or boons. If the player characters don't already have direct contact with their chosen patron, then they will need to make contact with the being and solicit their patronage. This is usually accomplished in two steps.

First, the player characters must perform a ceremony or ritual to summon the patron. After this has been accomplished, the characters will usually be asked to demonstrate their worthiness, which might involve a test or making a significant offering. If the offering is accepted or the test passed, then the player characters can work out an arrangement with the entity. These deals almost always push the characters to do dark deeds.

For example, a vampiric patron might demand a steady stream of mortals to feed upon in return for turning the player characters into vampires.

Here are some examples of different kinds of patrons, how the player characters might summon them, and what proof of worthiness they might provide to gain the entity's assistance.

Type of Being	Summoning Method	Proof of Worthiness
Demon/Fiend	Sacrifice a humanoid and recite an infernal chant	Petitioners must commit a horrific act in the entity's name, such as destroying a town
Celestial	Build an altar of stone or silver under the stars and call to the being	Petitioners must allow the being to inspect the souls of its petitioners to judge their intentions
Archfey	Recite a song or rhyme at midnight in a wild place, such as a forest	Petitioners must answer riddles or solve a puzzle to prove their wit
Eldritch	Open a rift to the being's plane	Petitioners must open their minds to the eldritch being and attempt to retain their sanity
Dragon	Seek out the dragon's lair and gain entry	Petitioners must make an offering of a rare, powerful item or vast sums of gold
Elemental	Recite the elemental's true name three times in a place where the element is strong, such as a lake or volcano	Petitioners must withstand the fury of the being's element
Spirit/Undead	Raise the being from their resting place or tomb	Petitioners make offerings of blood, flesh, or souls to sate the hunger of the being
Beast/Plant	Seek out the being in the wilds and kneel before it	Petitioners must withstand the being's fury or fight it to a standstill

## OPERATING PHASE

**D**uring the operating phase, the cult begins to enact its plans and exert its influence. The organization undertakes insidious missions, gains valuable resources, gains and loses followers, and deals with misfortunes and windfalls.

During this phase, player characters need to pay the monthly costs of their *Key Members*, plan *Missions*, and monitor their cult's *Morale*. To start, figure out the cult's starting size (see the following table). Most organizations start with only the player characters, so it's not unusual to begin as *Tiny*. However, if the player characters have already gathered a following of people ready to become official members of the new cult, it might start as *Small* or even *Large*.

Cult Size	Followers
Tiny	3–11
Small	12–49
Large	50–199
Very Large	200–1000
Huge	1000 or more

## GAINING RESOURCES

Resources are special assets that don't include gold or jewels. These resources may make the cult or its members more powerful (such as armor or spell scrolls), assist the cult in creating things (like ingredients or clockwork parts), or serve as offerings for the cult's patron (such as souls or blood). These resources can be acquired through use of the cult's *Additions* or by the player characters themselves.

Another way for a cult to gain resources is through *Gather Resources Missions*. The Game Master should determine the cost, time, risk, and difficulty class of the *Mission* based on the rarity or difficulty of acquiring the desired resource. For example, gathering spell components or ingredients may only take one week and 20 gp, but searching for a useful artifact or magic item might take up to eight weeks and cost 5,000 gp.

Some resources cannot be gathered through *Additions* or *Gather Resources Missions*—intelligence, secrets, and lore may require a *Spy* or *Research* mission, while sacrifices may require a *Kidnapping* mission.

d10	Resource Type	Description	Uses
1	Spell Components	Natural items such as bat guano, sulphur, or newt eyes.	Can be used to create spell scrolls, carry out normal spells, or assist in ritual casting.
2	Special Materials	Materials can include adamantine ore, dragon scales, and clockwork parts	Can be used to create weapons and armor, magic items, and the like.
3	Ingredients	Natural ingredients such as dried plants or animal parts	Can be used to create poisons, potions, or other consumables.
4	Arms/Armor	Weapons and armor suitable for use by the cultists	Can be used to arm cultists as well as stock training facilities and armories.
5	Magic Items	Special magical objects, such as enchanted mirrors, trinkets, or clothing	These can serve a wide range of uses, from assisting in combat to enhancing stealth.
6	Artifacts/Relics	Mysterious items with unusual, one-of-a-kind powers	These can serve a wide range of uses, from providing glimpses of the future to enslaving the minds of enemies.
7	Sacrifices	Souls, blood, livestock, and the like	Can be used to appease a patron or conduct rituals.
8	Intelligence/Secrets	Information about the cult's enemies or allies	Can be used to form plans or learn the weaknesses of rivals.
9	Potions/Spell Scrolls	Single-use magic items that have a limited benefit	These can serve a wide range of uses, from enhancing the strength of cultists to granting invisibility.
10	Lore	Information about the world, history, etc.	Locate lost sites, learn where to harvest rare ingredients, or discover the weakness of a creature.

## CULT MISSIONS

Missions can consist of daring heists to steal a shard of a dark god from a subterranean vault, clandestine spy operations to discover the weakness of a crime lord, or clever propaganda campaigns designed to rally the common folk against their rulers. Each one can bring a cult closer to its ultimate goal...or spiral into a disaster.

Missions are the primary way that player characters command their cult members and advance the cult's agenda. Typically, players assign cult members and **Key Members** to undertake missions without the player characters' direct involvement. This means that the cult can take on multiple missions at once while the player characters deal with other issues.

The Missions table details different mission archetypes, which range from crafting items to interrogating prisoners. If the players come up with missions that don't fit the ones in this section, then the Game Master can improvise. The chance of success for some Missions can be increased by certain **Key Members** or **Additions**, such as a **Torturer** for an **Interrogation Mission** or an **Alchemist's Laboratory** for a **Craft Mission**.

Each mission has an associated time and cost to carry out, a risk level that shows how much the mission's success

or failure impacts the cult's **Morale**, and a difficulty class that determines the success or failure of the mission. These can be adjusted by the Game Master based on the specifics of the mission; stealing a key from an old beggar for a **Theft Mission** won't require as much preparation and cost as stealing a signet ring from a prominent noble.

### THE MISSION ROLL

The success or failure of a mission is determined by a d20 roll, which may have bonuses or penalties applied to it. If the total of the roll meets or exceeds the difficulty class of a mission, it succeeds.

*Use the following to calculate the Mission Roll: (Any Key Member Bonuses + Cult Type Bonus + any additional bonuses/penalties + d20 roll) vs. Mission difficulty class. More than one Key Member may be assigned to a Mission to grant additional bonuses, up to a maximum of +8.*

Cult Type also adds a bonus to the roll, as shown in the **Cult Type** table in the **Planning Phase** of this chapter. The listed mission types in the Cult Type table gain a +2 bonus to the roll. For example, Guilds and Trading Companies gain a +2 bonus to the roll on **Corruption** and **Retrieval** missions.

Mission Type	Time	Cost	Risk Level	Difficulty Class
Assassination	4 weeks	800 gp	5	16
Corruption	3 weeks	1,000 gp	4	12
Craft	3 weeks	600 gp	1	12
Destruction	1 week	50 gp	3	10
Diplomacy	2 weeks	200 gp	4	14
Fear	2 weeks	50 gp	2	8
Gather Resources	1 week per 50 gp	varies	1	8
Intimidation	1 week	50 gp	1	8
Interrogation	1 week	50 gp	1	8
Kidnapping	3 weeks	200 gp	4	14
Missionary/Propaganda	4 weeks	500 gp	4	12
Raid/Battle	4 weeks	700 gp	5	17
Research	3 weeks	200 gp	1	12
Retrieval	3 weeks	500 gp	3	12
Ritual	2 weeks	500 gp	3	14
Spying	4 weeks	450 gp	4	15
Theft/Heist	4 weeks	500 gp	4	15

## PLAYER-LED MISSIONS

Though Missions are usually led by NPCs, player characters can choose to lead Missions, either as a group or individually. For these Missions, the Game Master can choose to use the rules for “Absent Players” (see below) and summarize the Mission after determining success or failure using the Mission Roll, or you can craft an encounter that fits the Mission and run it like a normal session, with any Key Members or followers accompanying the player characters as NPCs.

## PREPARING FOR MISSIONS

Taking steps to prepare followers for an upcoming mission can increase their chances of success. If the player characters provide their cult members with detailed information about their objective, potential tactics, routes, or other important details, then the Game Master can grant a +1 bonus to the Mission Roll to reflect this.

If the player characters equip their cultists with appropriate gear, such as vials of poison for assassinations, climbing ropes and grappling hooks for spying, thieves’ tools for a heist, etc., then the Game Master can grant a +1 bonus to the Mission Roll to reflect these preparations.

If the player characters take preparatory measures themselves to assist with the mission’s progress, such as casting scrying to keep an eye on the location or enchanting the cultists with spells that enhance their abilities, then the Game Master can grant a +1 bonus to the Mission Roll to reflect their assistance.

## STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Depending on the Mission, the Game Master may decide that a minimum number of followers must be sent to avoid a penalty to the Mission Roll. Alternatively, the Game Master may grant a bonus to the roll if extra followers are sent on the Mission.

For example, the player characters may decide to undertake a Destruction Mission to burn down the commerce district of a city. However, destroying the entire neighborhood might be difficult to do with only three followers assigned to the Mission, which means the Mission Roll would be made with a -2 penalty. Sending twenty followers, on the other hand, might earn a +4 bonus to the roll.

## ABSENT PLAYERS

If a player is absent from the game for a session, then they can let the Game Master know that their character is willing to participate in a Mission while they’re gone. This allows absent players to contribute to the success of the organization even if they’re not able to play normally.

An absent player can identify one of their relevant skills, such as History or Stealth, and ask the Game Master to add its modifier to the Mission Roll.

If the player character has special equipment or abilities that may be useful for the Mission, then the Game Master may grant additional bonuses.

If a player character doesn’t have a relevant skill stat, then they can instead grant a bonus based on the character’s level, according to this table:

Level	Bonus
1–4	+1
5–9	+2
10–14	+3
15–20	+4

## UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

After a Mission is completed, the Game Master can choose to roll a d10 on either the Fortunate or Unfortunate Outcome tables. These tables provide twists to a mission that may either benefit or harm the cult.

### d10 Fortunate Outcome

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 1  | One of the cultists on the mission managed to steal an additional piece of loot.                       |
| 2  | Additional information about the target was gained during the mission.                                 |
| 3  | The cultists gained a single-use magic item while on the mission.                                      |
| 4  | The cultists conducted the entire mission without drawing attention to themselves.                     |
| 5  | The cultists gained information that grants the next mission that they undertake a +1 bonus.           |
| 6  | One of the cultists on the mission gained a significant skill, turning them into a related Key Member. |
| 7  | The cultists managed to gather some additional useful resources.                                       |
| 8  | The cultists managed to recruit an additional 1d4 cultists.  |
| 9  | The cultists’ performance pleased the cult’s patron, who bestows a boon.                               |
| 10 | The cultists made an important contact during the mission.   |

## d10 Unfortunate Outcome

- 1 One of the cultists on the mission was killed.
- 2 One of the cultists on the mission was imprisoned.
- 3 One of the cultists on the mission left behind evidence that can be traced to the cult.
- 4 1d4 of the cultists on the mission lost faith, and deserted the cult.
- 5 One of the Key Members on the mission was killed or deserted.
- 6 The cultists brought an item back to the headquarters that is cursed.
- 7 The cultists were compromised on the mission, and gained a -1 penalty to the next mission.
- 8 The cultists brought something contagious back with them (a plague, curse, etc.)
- 9 The cultists angered someone, who becomes a rival of the cult.
- 10 The cultists drew the ire of a monster, which then attacks the cult.



## LEADERSHIP & MORALE

**F**ach month that the cult is in operation, a **Morale Roll** must be made. This roll represents how confident the cultists are in the organization, its agenda, and its leaders. Has their fervent faith in the cult's patron waned, or are they still as zealous as ever? Have successful missions boosted their resolve, or are they starting to become frustrated after a string of failed operations?

When making a **Morale Roll** for the cult, the cult's leader should add up the **Risk** results of all **Missions** undertaken that month, with successful Missions adding to the total and failed Missions subtracting from the total. From there, add the cult leader's charisma attribute (or equivalent).

*This number is added to a d10 roll.  
(Mission Risk Total + Leader Charisma Score + d10) = Morale Roll*

If the result of the roll is nine or lower, the cult's morale drops one **Morale Level**. If the result is ten or above, the cult's morale rises one **Morale Level** instead.

If the player characters wish to raise the cult's morale level outside of the morale roll, then they may spend 3,000 gp once per month to raise it by one level. Alternatively, they may declare that the cult's members may rest for one month and undertake no Missions, which also raises the morale level by one.

**STARTING MORALE:** At its outset, any new cult or organization begins at **Morale Level 3**.

Use the **High Morale Effect** table to generate additional effects for a successful morale roll.

Morale Level	Description	Effect
5	Followers are zealous toward the organization's goals and have full confidence in its leaders and mission.	The cult gains a +2 to Recruitment Rolls.
4	Followers trust the cult's leadership and are determined to achieve the cult's goals.	The cult gains a +1 to Recruitment Rolls.
3	A few followers are dissatisfied, but their doubts are minor. The cult's goals are still seen as attainable.	The cult gains no bonuses or penalties.
2	A large portion of the cult's followers doubt the organization's success and its leaders.	The cult takes a -1 to Recruitment Rolls. The cult loses members.
1	Followers have no confidence in the organization's leadership or direction, and expect the cult to fail.	The cult takes a -2 to Recruitment Rolls. The cult loses members.

### d10 High Morale Effect

- 1 The cult immediately gains a number of new followers equal to its Recruitment Die.
- 2 The cult receives a donation of 500 gp.
- 3 The cult leader gains a magical boon from their patron.
- 4 The next mission undertaken has a +2 bonus.
- 5 A cultist makes a research breakthrough.
- 6 A cultist discovers a critical piece of intelligence.
- 7 The cult attracts a new, random Key Member.
- 8 One of the cult's rivals offers to sign a truce.
- 9 The cult gains a new ally.
- 10 The cult gains 1d10 of a random resource.

Use the *Low Morale Effect* table to generate additional effects for a failed *Morale Roll*.

### d10 Low Morale Effect

- 1 A member secretly becomes a spy for an enemy of the cult.
- 2 A member defects to join a rival organization.
- 3 The cult leader becomes cursed by their patron.
- 4 The next mission undertaken has a -2 penalty.
- 5 The location of the cult's headquarters is revealed to an enemy.
- 6 A cultist gives up cult secrets to the authorities.
- 7 One of the cult's Key Members abandons the cult.
- 8 One of the cult's rivals launches a new attack on the cult.
- 9 The cult gains a new rival who wishes to exploit the cult's weakness.
- 10 Something valuable in the cult's vaults or inventory goes missing.

## GAINING & LOSING FOLLOWERS

Each month, there is a chance that membership in the cult rises or falls. This is mostly dependent on the cult's *Morale Level*—cultists might become disillusioned with their role, their patron, or the cult's goals, and decide to leave. Alternatively, they might be spreading word of the cult far and wide or gaining infamy among the criminal underworld, attracting new followers. After making the *Morale Roll* for the cult, make the *Recruitment Roll*.

The cult gains a number of followers equal to:

(Location Recruitment Modifier + Any Morale Bonuses/Penalties + Recruitment Die based on cult Size)

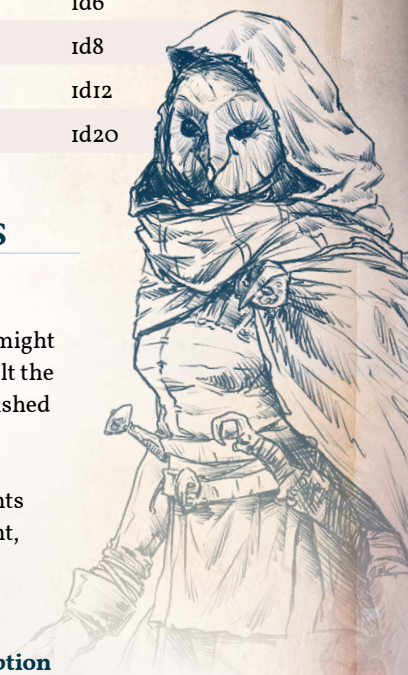
The cult only loses members when they are killed or the cult's *Morale Level* drops below 3. A cult loses a number of followers equal to its *Recruitment Die*.

Organization Size	Followers	Recruitment Die
Tiny	3–11	1d4
Small	12–49	1d6
Large	50–199	1d8
Very Large	200–999	1d12
Huge	1000+	1d20

## TIDINGS & EVENTS

In the course of operating a cult, misfortunes and lucky breaks will inevitably befall it: foes of the cult might seek to undermine it, or even assault the headquarters. New contacts established by the cult might come through, providing the organization with priceless information. Use the Events Table to randomly generate an event, choose an event, or use the entries as inspiration to create your own.

d10	Positive Event	Description
1	New Recruit	A remarkably talented recruit seeks to join the cult. This may be a Key Member.
2	Dark Patron	A dark being or group admires the organization's goals or methods and offers aid.
3	Powerful Ally	The cult forges a pact with a powerful ally, who might be a noble, a sage, or another valuable individual.
4	Corruption	The organization's agents learn that an influential person is susceptible to bribery or blackmail.
5	Surge of Faith	Impassioned speeches and powerful tactics cause a rise in membership, giving a +3 bonus to Recruitment Rolls.
6	Generous Donation	A cult member or ally gives a large donation to the cult, ranging from 500 to 5,000 gp.



7	Discovery	The cult makes a breakthrough of some kind, giving access to a new spell, magic item, or something similar.
8	Festivities	The cult hosts a festival in the name of its patron or leader, giving a +2 bonus to Morale Rolls.
9	Strange Talents	Each cult member gains a small, temporary benefit thanks to the work of the cult's patron or a magical spell.
10	Information	The cult discovers information regarding the location of an artifact, a rival's headquarters, etc.

**d10 Negative Event Description**

1	Shakedown	In order to avoid persecution, the organization is forced to pay a significant sum to an authority figure or rival organization.
2	Embezzlement	A trusted member is found to have stolen a substantial portion of the cult's money or resources.
3	Secret	One of the cult's most closely guarded secrets has been discovered.
4	Warning	The organization receives a warning that the cult is in imminent danger.
5	Wrath	A cult member does something that incurs the wrath of a powerful extraplanar entity, possibly the cult's own patron.
6	Territory Incursion	Another dark organization has intruded into the cult's territory, threatening its recruitment.
7	Assassination	Members of the cult, including the player characters, are marked for death.
8	Infiltration	The organization is infiltrated by spies, informants, or saboteurs.
9	Incarceration	Some of the cult's leading members, possibly even the player characters, are imprisoned.
10	Enforcement	Civil authorities have tasked the city watch, militia, army, or some other armed force to dismantle the cult.

## THE END GAME

**W**hile some cults become victims to powerful rivals or their own ambitions, others may survive to see the player characters leave of their own accord. Perhaps the players and their characters are tired of the ruthless competition that comes with the pursuit of power, they've grown resentful of serving the depraved whims of their patron, or they want to pass on their legacy to another leader to oversee day-to-day affairs while they return to adventuring.

This section contains advice for what to do when the players have had enough of running a cult, and want to either disband it or pass it on to another. It also includes consequences of a cult's failure and destruction.

### DISBANDING

If the players decide to disband their cult, they may create a power vacuum in which ambitious former members rise to form a new cult from the remains of the old one. The cult might devolve into chaos as members seize resources or strongholds for themselves, or even go into hiding to avoid being hunted down by former enemies. Former members may go on sprees of destruction or begin to use their training and powers to enrich themselves by intimidating others. In order to safely disband a cult, the player characters will need to slowly release key members and allow the Morale Level of the cult to drop slowly over time, so that the cult naturally disperses. Even then, former members may still sow chaos and destruction as they splinter off from the cult.

### PASSING ON THE LEGACY

If the player characters want to cease their association with the cult, but aren't necessarily interested in seeing it dissolved, then they might pass the cult's leadership on to another individual. Typically, this will be another Key Member of the cult, though it could also be another NPC that they are close with, or an existing member of the cult who is chosen by the cultists themselves. In order to successfully pass on their legacy, the player characters must appropriately train and brief the new leader and ensure that the cult itself has a good Morale Level before they leave. Otherwise, the cult could refuse their new leader or devolve into a power struggle, both with disastrous results.

### FAILURE

Not every organization, even one set up by clever players, can endure the test of time. A cult can fail for any number of reasons, from internal betrayal to magical disasters. The *Consequence of Failure* table gives some thought starters or ready-made consequences for failure that directly impact the player characters.

## OPTIONAL MECHANICS

Consider implementing some of the optional rules below to make gameplay more complex or interesting. These can come into play during the Planning, Building, or Operations Phase.

### SKILLS

Player characters involved in the *Building and Operations* phases may be allowed to use their skills to enhance certain activities. For example, characters with proficiency in mason's tools might be able to speed up the construction process while characters with high Charisma or proficiency in Persuasion might be able to increase the number of people recruited by the cult each month. While some skills are likely to be less obviously useful, such as proficiency in Nature or History, work together with your players to come up with ways in which their characters can help out, if they so desire.

### CONNECTIONS

Player characters with connections within or at the Location that they wish to set up their headquarters might be able to drastically reduce the building cost during the Building Phase. For example, if they're friends with the nobility, then they might be gifted a mayor's second home to serve as a headquarters, or if they have connections with a local mercenary company, then they might be allowed to build a Training Room at a highly reduced cost.

If the characters are getting most of their costs reduced by connections, consider what those individuals would want in return instead of money. Perhaps a local wizard who creates a spell forge doesn't want payment in gold, but would like first pick of any new magic items that the characters find while adventuring.

### REQUIREMENTS

As a Game Master, you might require certain Cult Types to have specific Key Members, Additions, or a Patron to move onto the Operations Phase. For example, you might decide that a Druid Circle is not allowed to have a headquarters building, but must instead have a Sacred Grove in a Wilderness Location that can only host Additions like a Ritual Chamber. Perhaps a Mage Cabal is required to have a Library and a Loremaster to function, and must gain a certain number of spell components each month.

### ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE LEADERSHIP

If the player characters do not plan to manage their cult's day-to-day operations, then they need to hire another Key Member to do so (most likely a Deputy Leader). If the cult is not being actively led by a player character, then the Game Master may reduce or remove the Leadership Bonus for Morale Rolls, or roll more random events from the *Tidings & Events* table.

Consequence of Failure	Description
Imprisonment	The player characters wind up in prison, serving lengthy sentences, if not terminal ones, for their crimes.
Bankruptcy	The player characters are stripped of all of their assets, from cash to estates to their personal magic items and treasure.
Cursed	A powerful curse is imposed on the player characters, whether by an extraplanar entity, a powerful archwizard, or a divine being.
Blacklisted	Society rejects the player characters; their reputations are ruined, so they can't join societies, engage in trade, or even gain quests for adventure.
Marked	The player characters are technically free citizens, but each has been tattooed or branded with a mark of shame that tells everyone of their misdeeds.
Hated	The player characters are free to do as they like, but the common people know them on sight and loathe what they see, spitting on them and cursing their names.
Threatened	The player characters have escaped immediate consequence, but their crimes were so foul that their lives are under constant threat of exposure or assassination.
Stripped of Power	The player characters have their in-game character abilities painfully stripped away, making them no better than farmers.
Exile	The player characters are forced into exile, sending them far from their previous lives into a rough-and-tumble frontier where even daily survival is a struggle.
Execution	The player characters are sentenced to death. This can range from kneeling before a guillotine to being fed to a dragon. The execution is carefully watched and guarded to prevent rescue or escape.

# APPENDIX I: CREATING INFERNAL ITEMS



cattered throughout the world are troves of dangerous and wicked magical items. Some are lost to history; others lie in wait for new owners who will use them to wreak havoc on the world. Meanwhile, accursed forges and occult workshops craft new horrors for those willing to pay unspeakable prices.

This chapter provides resources for Game Masters and players to create custom items, either by modifying existing items or by creating new ones from scratch. When reading this chapter, the Game Master should keep in mind that its contents can be used in three different ways:

**LOOT CREATION.** The Game Master may use this chapter to create nefarious loot for players to find during their adventures.

**NPC KIT CREATION.** The Game Master may use this chapter to create special equipment, weapons, etc., for key nonplayer characters, such as cult members.

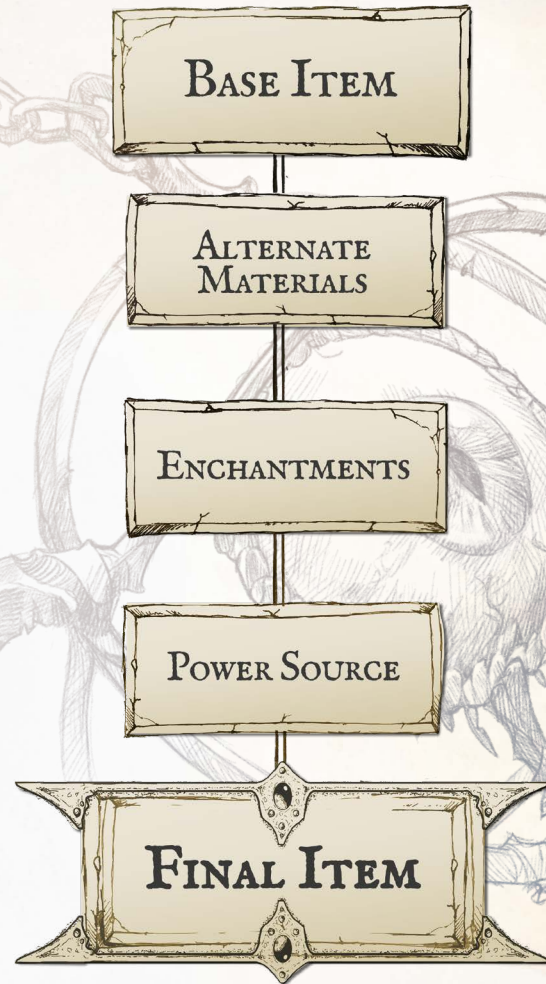
**PLAYER CRAFTING.** The players may approach a cult for help in crafting an item; the help provided may range from enchantment to forging a totally new item. The Game Master should guide players through this process.

## CREATING CUSTOM ITEMS

The flowchart details the process of creating a custom infernal item from start to finish. It is a simple linear process with only three essential steps: pick an item, pick a major enchantment, and calculate the cost and time required. Other options, such as alternate materials, minor enchantments, item details, curses, and so on, can be used to add additional flavor.

### BASE ITEMS

Initially the Game Master or player must pick a base item to modify. This item could be created from scratch by a player, or it could be an existing non-magical item. Typical base items include weapons, armor, robes, shields, and the like. The item might require specific equipment (such as a forge for a suit of plate armor), specific skills (such as smithing), and certain tools (such as smith's tools). If a player character has the necessary skills or tools, they can assist in making the item. Game Masters can ignore these requirements when creating custom items for loot or for NPCs.



At this stage, take note of the base item's cost (for example, plate armor might cost 1,500 gp). Record this somewhere, as you will need to refer to it later. Also note the weight of the item, especially if its original material is likely to change.

### ALTERNATE MATERIALS

At this stage, the Game Master or player may wish to change the base item's material of origin. The new material could reflect some element of a cult, or it might have a more practical use. Sometimes the material change has no significant impact on the item (for example, a cloak of leather versus one of silk). However, exotic materials like blackthorn or skin usually impact the item significantly. Obviously some materials are not appropriate for all uses—plate armor cannot be made from silk.

The following table presents a variety of materials and the additional properties they grant to items. The additional property might apply to only a certain kind of item; this is denoted by the italicized item category at the start of the entry.

Material	Property	Cost
Adamantine	<i>Armor:</i> protects wearer from critical hits; <i>Weapon:</i> increases damage dealt to items	500 gp
Blackthorn	<i>Weapon:</i> causes targets to wither	150 gp
Bone	<i>Worn item:</i> improves intimidation	50 gp
Cold Iron	<i>Armor:</i> fire resistance; <i>Weapon:</i> deals additional damage to fey and fiends	500 gp
Copper	<i>Worn item:</i> protects against disease	5 sp
Gemstones	Increases value; <i>Spellcasting focus:</i> can be used in place of some material components	3,500 gp
Gold	Increases value	500 gp
Iron	None	1 gp
Ivory	Increases value	500 gp
Leather	None	1 sp
Mithral	<i>Armor:</i> lightweight, improves stealth	350 gp
Obsidian	<i>Weapon:</i> deals additional fire damage	350 gp
Onyx	<i>Spellcasting focus:</i> powers infernal spells	150 gp
Silk	None	100 gp
Silver	Increases value; <i>Weapon:</i> damages lycanthropes	50 gp
Skin	<i>Worn item:</i> causes fear	15 gp
Steel	Increases durability	10 gp
Stone	None	1 gp
Teeth	<i>Worn item;</i> causes fear	10 gp
Wood	None	5 sp

## MAJOR & MINOR ENCHANTMENTS

It's said that some artifacts have helped cults emerge from obscurity; others have granted patrons the fear and the respect they craved. These items are imbued with dark magic—hideous power from the space between stars, infernal hellfire, hexes crafted by loathsome fey, or black sorcery drawn from humanoid sacrifice. Who could forget Spineshatter, the mace Countess von Durie of the Golden Tower wielded when her cult's infernal ties were finally uncovered? The devastation wrought by that weapon stains the annals of history...

Enchantments on items can vary widely depending on the item and its intended purpose. A major enchantment typically allows an item to do something that impacts the game system, such as bonuses to damage rolls, hit rolls, armor classes, saving throws, skill checks, ability scores, hit points, or the like. Depending on your system, determine what category the enchantment falls into: *common*, *uncommon*, *rare*, *very rare*, or *mythical*. An item might be single-use, which makes it less rare than a version with infinite uses.

Major Enchantment Rarity	Cost	Cultist Rank Requirement
Common	50–100 gp	Any rank or associate
Uncommon	101–500 gp	Initiate and higher
Rare	501–5,000 gp	Fanatics and higher
Very Rare	5,001–15,000 gp	Leaders and higher
Mythical	15,001 gp and higher	Patrons only



## MAJOR ENCHANTMENTS

**W**hen a silvered sword is immersed in blood from sacrificed wolves at a ritual's end, what dark enchantment is placed upon it? Does it emerge stained red with blood and able not only to mark prey cut by the blade but also to track prey across realms? Does it levitate out of the sanguine pool, all the while emanating an aura of crimson light that puts fear into the hearts of its foes? Do ribbons of blood continue to stream from a sharpened edge that curses its victims with lycanthropy? These are examples of major enchantments, which change the nature of an item and grant it new abilities.

The following tables provide examples of major enchantments of different rarities. Each additional major enchantment of a certain rarity increases the item's overall rarity. For example, an item with three common major enchantments becomes a rare item.

The enchantments are sorted into *Common*, *Uncommon*, *Rare*, *Very Rare* and *Mythical*.

### Common Enchantment

### Effect

Arcane	Provides small bonus to magical skills
Bane	Penalizes foes damaged by an imbued item
Beast Speak	Grants ability to communicate with animals
Fearsome	Provides small bonus to intimidation
Spider Climbing	Increases climbing speed
Subtle	Provides small bonus to stealth
Light Eating	Extinguishes lights in a medium radius
Moon Feeding	Grants bonus in moonlight
Thieving	Increases ability to pick pockets or locks
Rotting	Rots food and drink

### Uncommon Enchantment

### Effect

Acid Blood	Injuries to the wielder deal acid damage to the attacker
Disguise	Disguises appearance
Serpentine	Summons a giant snake
Shadowed	Creates an aura of darkness
Terrifying	Causes fear in targets
Vermin Swarm	Summons a swarm of pests
Bloodthirsty	Performs better when bathed in blood
Entrancing	Increases charisma
Counterfeiting	Creates a fake version of an item
Bat Sight	Grants echolocation abilities

### Rare Enchantment

### Effect

Blood Tide	Summons waves of blood
Devil's Sight	Grants ability to see through magical darkness and illusions
Hellfire	Deals extra fire damage
Infernal Summoning	Summons a minor devil ally
Whispering Aura	Deals psychic damage
Wounding	Causes bleeding wounds
Venomous	Poisons foes



Deathly	Creatures killed by an imbued item cannot be resurrected
Darkvision	Grants ability to see in darkness
Mind Warping	Creates illusions drawn from a target's mind

**Very Rare Enchantment**      **Effect**

Winged	Grants ability to fly
Bloodthirsty	Damage dealt by an imbued item heals the wielder
Gaseous	Transforms the wielder into a gaseous state
Shape Changing	Grants ability to transform into animals
Shadow Step	Grants ability to teleport between shadows
Withering	Causes exhaustion in targets
Tongues	Grants ability to speak an exotic language
Raising	Reanimates dead bodies as zombies
Demonic Strength	Increases strength to superhuman levels
Mind Control	Grants control of a creature's mind

**Mythical Enchantment**      **Effect**

Corrupting	Changes a target creature's alignment
Deathly	Deals instant death in creatures with low hit points
Imprisonment	Traps souls
Regeneration	Grants constant health restoration
Resurrection	Allows the wielder to return from the dead
Vorpal	Dismembers or decapitates
Command	Commands minor undead, fiends, or aberrations
Obscuring	Conceals identity of the wielder
Disintegrating	Disintegrates non-magical materials and creatures
Petrifying	Turns creatures to stone

## MINOR ENCHANTMENTS

In addition to major enchantments, an item can have up to three minor enchantments. These tend to have only a minor effect on the game system and are sometimes unintended properties that reflect the cult or cultist that created it. For example, a demon-worshipping cult may create items that give off smoke, feel hot to the touch, smell of sulfur, or chant an infernal incantation when used.

The following table can be used to determine the price of an item with a minor enchantment.

Enchantment Rarity	Cost
Common	25–50 gp
Uncommon	51–250 gp
Rare	251–2,500 gp

Common Enchantment	Effect
Screaming	Screams threats at foes
Smoking	Puffs smoke
Booming	Increases volume of the user's voice
Ichorous	Oozes sludge
Secretive	Conceals a small item
Slug Blood	When cut, the user bleeds slugs
Sound	Creates a noticeable sound, like whistling
Temperature	Feels hot or cold to the touch
Murmuring	Murmurs garbled words
Ashen	Produces a cloud of ash



### Uncommon Enchantment

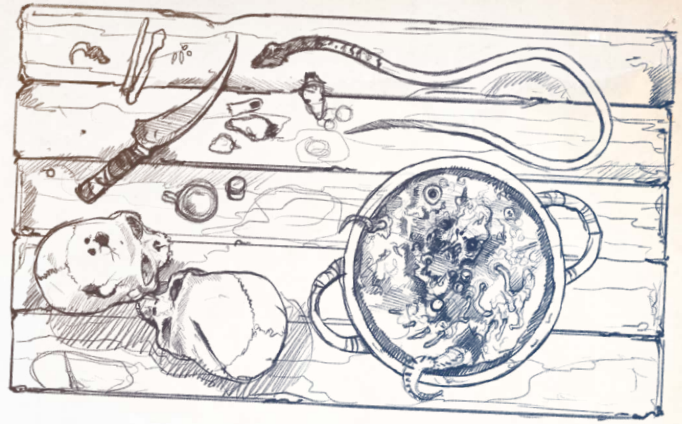
### Effect

Bleeding	Drips blood
Magnetic	Attracts small metal items
Sticky	Clings to surfaces; hard to accidentally drop
Tattooing	Creates inked designs on the user's skin
Toothed	Has a small mouth and bites everyone but the user
Corpselight	Glow in the presence of dead bodies
Disguised	Appears as a mundane item to everyone but the user
Floating	Floats in midair if dropped
Defiling	Unhallows sanctified places or objects
Freezing	Freezes small amounts of liquid on contact

### Rare Enchantment Name

### Effect

Flaming	Gives off illusory flames
Shadowbound	Becomes invisible when in shadow
Vigilant	Whispers warnings to its bearer
Dreambound	Hides an imbued item in the user's dreams
Maddening	An imbued item causes temporary madness in others when viewed
Covetous	An imbued item irresistibly tempts viewers to touch it
Unnameable	An imbued item can be spoken of by no one but the user
Eye Burning	Hurts the eyes of those who view it
Animated	Moves on its own and obeys simple commands
Dark Counsel	Advises the user in dark matters via telepathy



## POWER SOURCES

Automatons, clockwork gear, magic items, and other wondrous items may be powered by something more exotic than just plain magic. As is often the case for cults, magic items are sometimes powered by grisly rituals or offerings.

For example, a Shadow-wreathed Mace of Terror might be powered by bathing in the blood of slain serpents, and a Screaming Suit of Bone Plate might only gain damage resistances when infused with burning hair. If the item derives its energy from nearby people, activity, or other items, those entities will lose some of their own power in the process. For example, an item that feeds on the life force of those around it might cause nearby creatures to weaken. **Tip:** Even though a cultist may know how to power an item, characters might not.

### d50 Power Source

- 1 **ALCHEMICAL INGREDIENTS.** The item must be fed rare ingredients.
- 2 **ARCANA.** The item drains the magical ability of the user.
- 3 **AROMAS.** Using the item requires unpleasant fragrances.
- 4 **AURAS.** The item drains the health of those who touch it.
- 5 **ASTRAL CURRENTS.** The item functions only when certain stars align.
- 6 **BEAUTY.** Using the item makes the user uglier.
- 7 **BLOOD.** The item must be fed fresh humanoid blood.
- 8 **BONES.** The item consumes bones, reducing them to dust in the process.
- 9 **CHARGES.** Using the item drains magic from other items nearby.
- 10 **DARKNESS.** The item can function in only shadow or darkness.

- 11 **DEATH.** The item must be interred with the dead between uses.
- 12 **DEMONS.** The item consumes any demons bound to it.
- 13 **DREAMS.** The item feeds on dreams and gives nightmares to anyone nearby.
- 14 **EMOTIONS.** The item's user becomes cold and expressionless.
- 15 **ETHER.** The item must be charged in the spirit realm.
- 16 **FEAR.** The item cannot be used unless in the presence of frightened creatures.
- 17 **GHOSTS.** The item functions best in graveyards and haunted places.
- 18 **GLYPHS.** The item must be ritually inscribed with sigils or runes before each use.
- 19 **GOLD.** The item must be bathed in molten gold between uses.
- 20 **HEARTS.** The item must devour animal hearts before use.
- 21 **KNOWLEDGE.** The item eats knowledge from nearby minds when used.
- 22 **LEY ENERGY.** The item must be buried in earth between uses.
- 23 **LIFE FORCE.** Using the item drains life from surrounding plants and animals.
- 24 **LIGHTNING.** The item can be recharged only during storms.
- 25 **LODESTONE.** A new lodestone must be inserted into the item each time it is used.
- 26 **MAGICAL POWER.** The item feeds on spells cast within its vicinity.
- 27 **MEMORIES.** After each use, the user forgets something.
- 28 **MENTAL ENERGY.** The item mentally exhausts those nearby when used.
- 29 **MESMERIC POWER.** Energy is drained from those who look upon the item.
- 30 **MOONBEAMS.** The item can be charged only in moonlight.
- 31 **PAIN.** When the item is used, it causes the wielder great pain.
- 32 **PORTAL.** When activated, the item creates a portal that slowly closes.
- 33 **PSIONIC ENERGY.** The item requires its user to possess psionic power.
- 34 **QUINTESSENCE.** The item feeds on the fifth alchemical element, which is created with rituals.
- 35 **RADIANCE.** Requires captured celestials, which produce radiant power.
- 36 **SALT.** The item recharges only when buried in salt.
- 37 **SHADOWS.** The item feeds on the user's shadow; when it disappears, the user dies.
- 38 **SIGHT.** The item temporarily blinds the user when activated.
- 39 **SOULS.** The item feeds on souls, which must be captured and stored.
- 40 **STARLIGHT.** Charging the item requires starlight captured in gemstones.
- 41 **STRENGTH.** The item drains the physical might of the user.
- 42 **TIME.** Activating the item ages the user.
- 43 **VENOM.** The item drinks venom harvested from poisonous snakes.
- 44 **VERMIN.** The item must be fed with rats, slugs, cockroaches, or maggots.
- 45 **VOMIT.** The item recharges only when bathed in vomit.
- 46 **WARMTH.** The item sucks warmth from its vicinity when used.
- 47 **WEALTH.** The item consumes wealth, such as coins, with each use.
- 48 **WILLPOWER.** The item requires constant concentration, exhausting the user.
- 49 **WINE.** The item recharges only when bathed in wine.
- 50 **WRITING.** Ink from nearby books and scrolls is erased when the item is used.



## THE FINISHED ITEM



At this stage, write down a visual description of the item, as well as its effects and enchantments, both major and minor.

Make sure to include plenty of detail so that the item feels unique and flavorful.

You might also wish to name it at this stage, drawing inspiration from the table entries or from the commissioned cult. If the item was commissioned by a player, the Game Master or the player should total its overall costs and ensure that any requirements for creation are met, such as unusual materials, specific tools, or the ability to cast certain spells.

## FINAL COST OF CREATION

If the item was commissioned by a player, the Game Master or the player should add together the various costs (base item, alternate materials, enchantments, curses, etc.) and divide the total by five. The resulting number is how many workdays are required to create the item. If multiple people are working on a single item, then divide the number again, this time by the number of individuals. All individuals must meet the item's skill requirements in order to create it. Once a character pays for the item, the craftspeople can begin work and will deliver it after the determined number of workdays has elapsed.



## OPTIONAL ITEM DETAILS

Making a truly memorable piece of loot or putting the finishing touch on a new hell-forged helm requires a little flavor. Special details can turn an otherwise boring Cloak of Invisibility into a dreaded Mantle of the Nine Serpents. The following optional item details include flaws, history, intents, and other intriguing features. Feel free to use the entries that follow as inspiration.

### FLAWS

Cult members and characters alike lust after powerful magical items, yet great power rarely comes without a price. Giving an item a flaw can introduce intriguing roleplay opportunities or help balance the item's power.

d20	Flaw
1	<b>ABERRANT.</b> Using the item draws the attention of aberrations.
2	<b>COMPLICATED.</b> The item takes twice the normal time to use.
3	<b>CONSPICUOUS.</b> The item cannot be used stealthily.
4	<b>FRAGILE.</b> The item breaks easily.
5	<b>HEAVY.</b> The item weighs double the normal weight.
6	<b>LIMITED EFFECTS.</b> The item affects only certain types of creatures or targets.
7	<b>LOUD.</b> The item makes loud noises when used.
8	<b>PESTILENT.</b> The item emits a cloud of disease when used.
9	<b>POWER REQUIREMENT.</b> The item requires additional power, such as elemental energy.
10	<b>REEKING.</b> The item has an unpleasant aroma.
11	<b>SACRILEGIOUS.</b> Using the item draws the attention of fiends.
12	<b>SLIPPERY.</b> The item is easily dropped.
13	<b>TARNISHED.</b> The item is extremely dirty and cannot be cleaned.
14	<b>TRANSMUTATION.</b> Prolonged use of the item causes changes to the user's appearance.
15	<b>UNHEALTHY.</b> Prolonged use of the item causes poor health in the user.
16	<b>UNHOLY.</b> Using the item draws the attention of celestials.
17	<b>UNPREDICTABLE.</b> Using the item rarely yields repeatable results.
18	<b>UNWIELDY.</b> There is a high chance of failure when using the item.
19	<b>VERMINOUS.</b> Using the item attracts swarms of vermin.
20	<b>VULGAR.</b> The item is so disgusting that it causes horror and revulsion in others.

## ORIGIN & PAST EVENTS

Some dark items may be newly forged, but others may have been passed down for years or even generations. During their time on this plane, such items may have been involved in dark rituals, hideous deeds, and disgusting crimes. Providing a glimpse into an item's history can intrigue players or even serve as a new quest hook.

### d20 The item was originally...

- 1 Birthed from the corpse of a humanoid slain during a ritual
- 2 Forged by a devil working a forge in the mortal realms
- 3 Meant to serve as a tool for the avatar of a dark god
- 4 Created by a ritual that temporarily extinguished the stars
- 5 Vomited forth by a demon in exchange for a lifetime of service
- 6 The result of a failed experiment
- 7 Created from the remains of an infamous monster
- 8 Found inside a magic circle in an abandoned tower
- 9 Spewed forth from a portal to another realm
- 10 Brought back by a resurrected person who retained no knowledge of it
- 11 Delivered to a cult by a meteor strike
- 12 Washed ashore on a desolate beach on the edge of the world
- 13 Found beneath the pillow of a cultist plagued by nightmares
- 14 Delivered as a boon designed to corrupt the heart of a hero
- 15 Found within the heart of a dragon
- 16 Created by a cultist who was possessed by their cult's patron
- 17 Drawn from a cauldron belonging to a hag coven
- 18 Bathed in the blood of the dying god that granted its power
- 19 Found in the depths of a forbidden lake outside the borders of civilization
- 20 Created by a madman who believed the item to be his greatest work

### d20 In the past, the item...

- 1 Caused the death of a legendary hero
- 2 Was used to dethrone a ruler and usurp their power
- 3 Was used in a betrayal that is now immortalized in plays and songs
- 4 Caused a cataclysmic event that wiped out a city
- 5 Caused a scholar's descent into madness
- 6 Was prized by a dragon or a hag who wants it back
- 7 Was used by a notorious thief who sold their soul
- 8 Was saved from a catastrophic shipwreck in which all hands perished
- 9 Tortured the enemies of a cruel noble
- 10 Guarded by a monastery or a temple
- 11 Caused a war that ruined two noble houses
- 12 Intimidated the rivals of a crime family
- 13 Was owned by a famous adventurer who turned to the path of darkness
- 14 Was passed down through a noble family for generations
- 15 Took hundreds of lives as sacrifices in a mass murder
- 16 Corrupted a pair of young lovers to covet the item and murder each other for it
- 17 Was used in strange swamp rituals by a tribe of lizardfolk
- 18 Was a symbol of tyranny and suffering for a region or kingdom
- 19 Was one in a set of similar items, though all the others are lost
- 20 Served as the sentient leader of a cult



## CURSES

Many items infused with dark magic become host to curses, which range from relatively minor to absolutely deadly. Curses can activate immediately when an item is touched or used; they can also activate after attunement or a longer period of possession. Some curses can be removed from items, but others are inseparable once placed.

### d10 Weapon Curses

- 1 Each time the weapon draws blood, its wielder is crippled with pain.
- 2 Each time the weapon kills a sentient creature, its wielder enters a bloodthirsty rage.
- 3 The weapon cackles with glee whenever it is used to make an attack.
- 4 The weapon refuses to attack certain creatures, such as demons or cult members.
- 5 Each time the weapon kills a creature, its wielder is overcome with sorrow.
- 6 Each time the weapon kills a creature, it ages the wielder.
- 7 Each time the weapon spills blood, its wielder becomes nauseated.
- 8 Each time the weapon kills a creature, a devil attempts to possess the wielder.
- 9 Each time the weapon kills a sentient creature, it summons a lesser demon.
- 10 If the weapon draws blood during the day, its wielder has nightmares that night.

### d10 Armor Curses

- 1 The wearer loses control of their actions upon taking damage.
- 2 The armor fuses with flesh and cannot be removed once donned.
- 3 The armor acts like a living being and tries to exert control over its wearer.
- 4 The armor's wearer takes on a demonic appearance.
- 5 Devils can track the armor while it is being worn.
- 6 A creature cannot be revived or resurrected while wearing the armor.
- 7 A creature's carrying capacity is halved while wearing the armor.
- 8 The armor becomes magnetic, attracting nearby metal items.
- 9 Any living creature the wearer touches sees them as a hated enemy.
- 10 The wearer takes damage whenever an ally within 30 feet takes damage.

### d10 Clothing Curses

- 1 The wearer takes on the appearance of a corpse.
- 2 The wearer is compelled to kill any creature they defeat without mercy.
- 3 The wearer is damaged by sunlight.
- 4 Plants begin to grow around the wearer's limbs when the item is worn outside.
- 5 Swarms of vermin are attracted to the wearer.
- 6 The item smolders continually and may suddenly burst into flame.
- 7 A doppelgänger of the wearer is created the first time the item is worn.
- 8 The wearer is unable to sleep if other creatures are sleeping within 30 feet.
- 9 The wearer's speed is reduced.
- 10 The wearer stinks of sulfur while wearing the item.

### d10 Magical Implement Curses

- 1 The item tempts others to steal it from its bearer.
- 2 The item consumes a gold piece with each use.
- 3 Each time the item is used, its bearer polymorphs into a random beast for 1 hour.
- 4 Each time the item is used, its bearer's allies become frightened for 1 minute.
- 5 Magical flames appear randomly within 15 feet of the item with each use.
- 6 The item cools its surroundings to freezing temperatures with each use.
- 7 The item emits a thunderous boom with each use.
- 8 The item summons a minor fey creature with each use.
- 9 The item has a chance to destroy a random non-magical item within 10 feet.
- 10 The item creates a gallon of saltwater with each use.



### d10 Amulet or Ring Curses

- 1 The wearer's hand tries to pick the pockets of passersby.
- 2 Any food the wearer touches becomes bland and tasteless.
- 3 The wearer feels compelled to lie whenever asked a direct question.
- 4 The wearer forgets one known language and learns one new language with each dawn.
- 5 When the wearer falls asleep, they can't be woken for 8 hours.
- 6 This ring severs the digit on which it was worn with each use.
- 7 Each time this amulet is used, its wearer loses their ability to speak for 24 hours.
- 8 Using this item sends anyone nearby into a violent rage.
- 9 This item causes its bearer to wander in a random direction with each use.
- 10 The item engulfs its wearer in flames with each use.

### d10 Ammunition Curses

- 1 The ammunition always breaks on impact.
- 2 The ammunition screams when it leaves the weapon.
- 3 When placed in a quiver or a case, the ammunition turns to snow.
- 4 The ammunition chimes like a bell when jostled.
- 5 The ammunition leaves a trail of green smoke when fired.
- 6 Each time a creature fires the ammunition, they are frozen in place for 6 seconds.
- 7 The ammunition can be fired in only a southerly direction.
- 8 The ammunition is as heavy as stone until fired.
- 9 Trees rapidly grow wherever the ammunition falls.
- 10 The ammunition becomes stuck inside whatever it hits.

### d10 Potion or Scroll Curses

- 1 The effects of alcohol are intensified after the item is used.
- 2 The item explodes after use.
- 3 The caster vomits poisonous snakes after the item is used.
- 4 The caster experiences confusion after use.
- 5 The caster bleeds from the eyes after use.

- 6 The caster falls asleep for 1 hour within 30 minutes after use.
- 7 Once used, this item turns into a swarm of ants.
- 8 The caster feels compelled to argue with the nearest humanoid 1 hour after use.
- 9 The caster is enveloped in silence for 10 minutes after use.
- 10 The caster's skin sloughs off 1 hour after use.

## EVIL SCHEMES

A powerful magical item is terrifying to behold, but an item with dark desires of its own is something else entirely. Over the course of centuries, only one such item might be recorded, though many more are likely to exist. Some such magical items may possess sentience or personalities, but all have dark goals. Some items accomplish this through actions of their own; others manipulate their bearers to achieve their goals.

One such notorious item is the *Hand of Narkul*. It is rumored that the Hand aimed to open a rift between the mortal realm and the Outer Dark with the goal of unleashing hideous aberrations into the world. Legend says that when the Hand's bearer realized what was happening, they tried severing their own arm to remove it. But the Hand had other ideas: it strangled its wielder before it could be severed, then reanimated the corpse in order to continue its hideous work.

### d10 Scheme

- 1 This item wishes to cause the user despair and stops only when all hope is lost.
- 2 This item wishes to eradicate an entire culture from the world.
- 3 This item won't rest until it has shed the blood of a thousand mortals.
- 4 This item wishes to be taken to the plane of existence in which it was created.
- 5 This item wishes to attract worshippers and form a new cult.
- 6 This item wishes to wreak vengeance on a person or an organization.
- 7 This item wishes to cause suffering on a worldwide scale.
- 8 This item seeks to bring about the destruction of nature wherever it goes.
- 9 This item wishes to plunge the world into chaos.
- 10 This item wishes to kill a god or a pantheon of gods.

## APPENDIX II: BLACKSTAR'S VILE RELICS

**H**ere follows a record of the abominable and unholy items that once formed the bulk of Blackstar's infamous collection. These trinkets, weapons, and artifacts should be used with the utmost care—if they are to be used at all. According to scattered accounts, Blackstar was a mage of note who began their career in the *Libris Arcanum*—a most secretive order dedicated to training chroniclers whose lives' work is to record the history of the realms and, so the rumors say, prevent the most dire of world-shaking threats from coming to pass.

Of course, most will doubtless know that Blackstar did not remain aligned with the goals of the *Arcanum* for long. Rather, they quickly developed a taste for the darker side of magic. Early on in their life, they began collecting items that had sordid histories or belonged to notorious figures. Some decades later, Blackstar had a vast assemblage of hideously powerful and dangerous items that could each threaten a kingdom on their own, let alone combined. Luckily for history, Blackstar never displayed a taste for conquest or destruction. Perhaps they viewed dominion or chaos as being too petty for them. Over time, Blackstar certainly became more than mortal. Although the accounts vary, scholars believe that the dark magic that infused the items in Blackstar's collection began to warp the mage; over Blackstar's lifetime, they changed from a curious, mesmerizingly intelligent scholar into a wary, covetous creature, obsessed with protecting their collection of relics. This change in behavior was reflected in their physical form: the last account of Blackstar claimed that they had grown numerous, spider-like arms that stretched from their torso in all directions, along with twelve eyes spaced equidistantly around their now entirely bald head.

After lurking at the edges of history and legend for centuries, Blackstar disappeared. No one knows their fate, but most theories speculate that something in the collection itself consumed them or removed them from this plane of existence. In time, Blackstar's legendary vault was uncovered and the collection was split up. Many of the items ended up lost or stolen, as so often happens to sinister artifacts. Below, you'll find a collection of all known objects within Blackstar's collection. The curatorium has done its best to catalog the known lore and powers of each item in layperson's terms, but keep in mind that not all are of equal power—or danger.



### BOOKE OF ALZAQIRAX

**ITEM VALUE:** 210,000 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Spellcasting

**POWER SOURCE:** Souls

**DESTRUCTION:** 

**UTILITY:** 

**DANGER:** 

Alzaqirax lived several millennia ago, and was one of the ur-sorcerers who wrested the secrets of magic from the creatures who poured through the Great Rift. Unfortunately, Alzaqirax's magical techniques were built on the sacrifice of souls in exchange for power. Because of this, he is viewed with both awe and disgust by modern wizards. Alzaqirax eventually lost his mental faculties, a by-product of one of his world-changing spells going awry. As the madness took hold, he feverishly scribbled his knowledge into a great tome, lest his mastery be lost to oncoming generations of wizards. The *Booke* has three hundred and thirty-three pages, and each page has three hundred and thirty-three words interspersed with three mystical diagrams. There is neither rhyme nor reason to the *Booke's* organization, but the words hammer at the reader's mind.

**BURGEONING POWER:** A person who reads from the book sees their magical powers increase. If a person reads for thirty minutes, then they temporarily gain a new spell that they have the ability to cast; that spell has the maximum possible effect. If a person reads for sixty minutes, then they temporarily gain a new spell they have the ability to cast that does not belong to their class or spell list. If a person reads for ninety minutes, then their mastery of sorcerous fundamentals is such that damage-causing spells that they cast do the maximum possible damage. Each effect lasts until the following dawn.

**INSTANT MASTERY:** The final effect is permanent: if a person reads for two hours, then they automatically gain one to four levels in a chosen spellcasting class other than their own. This effect can only be used once per person.

**ARCANE SACRIFICE:** To use any of the Booke's abilities, the souls of three sentient creatures must be offered to it. Then, for each half hour spent reading the Booke, roll 1d6. On a 3, the reader's maximum health points are reduced by one-third. This effect cannot be dispelled.

## ARKTON'S FLUTE

**ITEM VALUE:** 86,500 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Manipulation

**POWER SOURCE:** Life Force

**DESTRUCTION:** 

**UTILITY:** 

**DANGER:** 

A century ago, there lived a bard named Miles Arcon, who was a mediocre performer and an obscure poet. While traveling during a tremendous storm, he discovered a bronze flute buried in the heartwood of a tree that had been split open by lightning. In the weeks after finding the flute, his star rose like none other: he trod across the boards of the kingdom's most prestigious theaters, performing solos with such virtuosity that they strained the minds and bodies of others who transcribed and performed them. Arcon changed his name to Arkton, and he soon found himself drowned in acclaim and accolades. After a few short years of fame, he suddenly retired and bequeathed the flute to a protégé. Arkton was rumored to have rapidly aged during his whirlwind tour, but this was never confirmed. His protégé enjoyed the spotlight for only a few months before throwing the flute into the sea.

**MALIGNANT INTELLIGENCE:** The flute is highly intelligent, evil, and catty. It wants to be center stage in grand concert halls, not jammed into some adventurer's belt or knapsack.

**INSTANT MUSIC:** A creature can tell the flute to play itself, though they can't command it to use its other powers and this ability at the same time.

Each of the following powers can be used once per day.

**ARKTON'S GAVOTTE:** The flutist's playing fascinates everyone who can hear it, causing them to stop whatever they're doing and listen. As part of the music, the flutist can add a subliminal suggestion that the listeners are compelled to carry out.

**ARKTON'S PAVANNE:** The flutist's lively skirl inspires everyone who can hear it to dance for as long as the flutist plays.

**DOUBLE TIME:** The flute rapidly ages its owner, causing them to grow old twice as fast. If they use the flute often, then they will age even faster.

## VOIDSHADOW

**ITEM VALUE:** 208,500 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Protection

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** 

**UTILITY:** 

**DANGER:** 

Woven from threads spun from the space between the stars, Voidshadow is a robe that absorbs light, causing it to appear to be a robe-shaped hole in the world. However, gazing at it closely reveals that the robe's dark material seems to glitter, as if it holds tiny stars inside its fabric. The robe is rumored to be the gift of strange, silent beings from the stars, who created it as a gift. The robe's original owner, as well as every subsequent owner, are strangely absent from history: scholars and historians have records that mention the robe itself, but the identities of its wearers have been erased or lost.

**STARTHREAD:** The essence from which the robe is knitted is immensely tough, repelling attacks like chain mail. Furthermore, it can exude an aura of magical darkness at will, blocking line of sight to the wearer and extinguishing lights in a large radius around it.

**EVERBREATH:** While wearing the robe, the user can breathe normally in any environment (including a vacuum) and is resistant to harmful gases, be they natural or magical.

**ANONYMITY:** Upon death, the wearer is erased from history. Not even their own family remembers them. When the wearer dies, their body instantly disappears as though they never were. The astral realm claims the wearer's soul and memory as payment for Voidshadow's use.



## MIRROR OF INTRIGUE

**ITEM VALUE:** 81,800 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Spying

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** 

**UTILITY:** 

**DANGER:** 

To secure his ascendancy to the throne amid a royal court notorious for subtle intrigue and sudden betrayals, Yulinas, Prince of Grane, beseeched a dark god of secrets and treachery to grant him a gift. In return, he received a silvered mirror adorned with a platinum frame, forged into the shape of a thousand feathers. Yulinas was warned that anyone who gained possession of the mirror would know his most intimate secrets. Yulinas immediately became obsessed with the mirror, spending all of his time spying on his rivals. He began poisoning his enemies and framing others for their murders, stoking distrust and fear amid the court until he finally claimed his crown. Victorious, Yulinas took all manner of precautions to keep the mirror out of anyone's hands but his own, keeping it secret from even his lovers. Ridden with unquenchable paranoia, he slowly went mad and eventually leapt from his own tower, leaving the mirror hidden for years.

**MIRROR PORTAL:** The mirror may be used as a small portal that connects to any other mirror that the user knows of, as long as the other mirror's surface is intact. The user can reach through the mirror, push items through, and speak through it, as well as listen. The user may even force their entire body through the mirror, if they are small enough.

**SECRET SIGHT:** This item allows the user to scry other creatures that they know, even if the user is only aware of the other creature's existence and has not previously met them. Furthermore, it amplifies mind-control spells cast through it, and suppresses the resistance of creatures targeted by these spells.

**SECRET KEEPER:** The owner of the mirror has their deepest thoughts and secrets stored within it. Anyone else who stares into the mirror for more than a minute can gain knowledge of the owner, including their thoughts and plans.

## TINNARD'S POCKET WATCH

**ITEM VALUE:** 60,000 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Time Manipulation

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** 

**UTILITY:** 

**DANGER:** 

Tinnard was a gnomish chronomancer who was originally trained as a clockmaker. After finding the secret to merging her two professions, Tinnard created the pocket watch from mithral, porcelain, and powdered diamonds. With the ability to slow time, she accomplished multiple lifetimes of work, earning her renown as a mage and scholar. However, as her life drew on, she became more and more afraid of dying, and paused or slowed time for longer and longer periods. Eventually, the concentration involved in maintaining the watch's magic became too much for Tinnard, and she was turned to dust as the full weight of all of the borrowed time came crashing down on her. The watch has no hands, but the workings produce a maddening, irregular ticking that has no discernible rhythm or pattern.

**TIME MANIPULATION:** The pocket watch can change the flow of time. It can be used to stop, slow, or speed up time for as long as the user is able to maintain concentration upon it. The difficulty of maintaining concentration increases every minute. If the user fails, then they may disintegrate from the physical exertion of manipulating time.

## THE RED CLAWS

**ITEM VALUE:** 94,800 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Combat

**POWER SOURCE:** Blood

**DESTRUCTION:** 

**UTILITY:** 

**DANGER:** 

These gauntlets are fashioned from leather, fur, bone, and razor-sharp claws fashioned from crudely smelted iron. The claws emerge from the knuckles of the gauntlet, and are used to slash and stab at foes while keeping the wearer's hands free. The weapon's simple moniker comes from the layers of dried blood that coat the iron claws, which has turned them a dark scarlet. The claws were created by Urogoth, a barbarian allied with a circle of druids who prized the strength of creatures like the bear and cougar. After wielding the claws for the first time, it is said that Urogoth killed so many men in a single fight that he transformed into a monstrous bear, leaving the claws behind. The claws' primitive design evokes primal, predatory instincts in those that view them, and prey animals who see them are stricken with terror. It's whispered that the user of the claws is doomed to the same fate as Urogoth, though few wielders survive long enough to discover the truth.

**WOUNDING WEAPON:** Attacks made with the claws create deep gashes that continue to bleed, causing the target to become more fatigued with the more blood they lose.

**SANGUINE STRIKE:** Each time the wearer of the claws draws blood from an opponent, it soaks into the claws, making their next attack more damaging. If the wearer misses an attack, the claws' damage reverts to normal.

**BLOODLUST:** Each time the wearer kills a sentient creature using the claws, they have a chance of going berserk. If they fail a mental save, they temporarily lose control and immediately attack the closest creature within a short range.

**BESTIAL TRANSFORMATION:** Over time, the claws begin to transform their wearer. The first sign of this transformation is animalistic features such as elongated limbs, sharpened teeth, and slitted pupils. The next stage is heightened perception and lowered intelligence, followed by the final stage: loss of language and full transformation into a beast-like form, which forces the user to only consume the flesh of creatures they kill.



## FORGEHEART

**ITEM VALUE:** 73,750 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Crafting & Spellcasting

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** 

**UTILITY:** 

**DANGER:** 

This enormous gemstone, about the size of a human heart, was found at the root of Cloudspear Mountain over three thousand years ago by the dwarves of the Viskar clan. The gemstone is an uncut ruby that internally glows with the light of a thousand forges. Originally considered a holy relic of the dwarven god of smiths, Kharad, Forgeheart was used in the desperate Battle of the Ashes, where the Viskar clan forced one smith after another to craft powerful magical weapons using the ruby—a process that reduced each of the smiths to a pile of ash. After peace was finally achieved, however, the power of Forgeheart ripped apart the Viskar clan: one faction believed that the ruby was the key to the clan's ambitions, while the other pointed to the charred corpses of the smiths who drew on the stone's power too greedily. Rumor has it that the gem was the only thing found among the ruins of the clan's stronghold. Forgeheart is instantly recognizable by all dwarves.

**HEARTCRAFTING:** A user trained in crafting can use the ruby to craft magical items from mundane materials. The user must be able to cast the magical effect that they wish to imbue into the crafted item, or persuade another mage to create the effect. If the crafting attempt fails, Forgeheart creates a fiery blast based on the power of the intended item.

**HANDS OF THE FORGE:** The bearer of the stone can heat their hands to immense temperatures, enough to melt iron like butter. A combatant can use their heated hands to deal searing unarmed strikes, leaving burns on those they touch.

**CONSUMED BY FLAME:** Each time Forgeheart is used, its bearer's temperature rises. If the bearer's temperature reaches a certain threshold, they begin to combust, turning to ash as the heat spreads through their body. If Forgeheart remains unused for three days, the bearer cools to their normal temperature.

## DROWNED DEVIL'S SHAWL

**ITEM VALUE:** 142,600 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Protection & Summoning

**POWER SOURCE:** Life Force

**DESTRUCTION:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

**UTILITY:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

**DANGER:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

This ripped black flag is dyed with the silhouette of a red devil and perpetually drips seawater. It can be worn as a shawl, and is fastened with a silver skull-shaped brooch. The flag once belonged to the infamous pirate galleon *The Drowned Devil*, whose crew formed an alliance with the hells. The pirates hung their victims from the mast beside the flag wherever they sailed, enabling the fiends to claim their souls.

When *The Drowned Devil* was eventually sunk, the flag was sought for years by navies and privateers who wished to prove that the pirates' reign of terror was finally over. Weeks later in a far-flung port, a corpse washed ashore wrapped in the flag, bringing with it a scourge of spectral pirates that looted the docks. Now, the ghostly crew of *The Drowned Devil* plagues the dreams of anyone who claims the flag as their own, showing the wearer visions of being dragged down into the hells.

**SOUL OF THE SEA:** The wearer of the shawl can breathe in water as if it were air, swim with the speed of a shark, and walk on water. Furthermore, the shawl deflects all physical projectiles, which bounce harmlessly off of the flag.

**CREW OF THE DAMNED:** Once per day, the wearer of the shawl can summon a group of ten to twelve spirits to help man a ship under their command or to terrify their foes on the battlefield. The spirits can undertake manual labor aboard a ship as if they had physical forms. In battle, they are immune to non-magical damage and use spectral weapons such as cutlasses and dirks. Unless they are on a ship, the spirits disappear one hour after being summoned.

**INFERNAL CURSE:** Each time the spirits are summoned, the wearer of the shawl becomes more and more ghostly. In the first stage, they become physically weaker but immune to necrotic damage. In the second stage, they must concentrate to remain corporeal. In the final stage, they become wholly undead and incorporeal.

## HAND OF DREAD

**ITEM VALUE:** 191,350 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Summoning

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

**UTILITY:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

**DANGER:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

This tallow-coated hand is stained black and features abyssal symbols engraved into the preserved skin. It has been turned into a candle, with a wick traveling down through each finger. This dreadful artifact is surrounded by the abyssal whispering of demons who tempt mortals with promises of power. The original Hand of Dread was cut from the body of a dying king and used to summon an infernal being known as the Marquis of Crowns, who then imbued the Hand of Dread with power.

**ABYSSAL SUMMONING:** Lighting one of the five candles on the hand summons a demon of immense power. It remains until the candle is blown out, or for one hour (after which the candle burns out on its own). The demon serves the summoner and cannot attack the bearer of the Hand of Dread. It may be asked to bestow a boon, grant a wish, attack an enemy, or anything else at the Game Master's discretion.

**DEMONIC KNOWLEDGE:** Whoever possesses the hand can speak the tongues of both demons and infernal creatures, as well as sense the presence of demons from up to a one-mile radius.

**PAY THE PRICE:** Once the final wick of the hand has finished burning, the user must permanently reduce two of their attribute scores. In addition, the user must slice off their hand and turn it into the next Hand of Dread. The burner is magically compelled to commit this act and pass the hand on to another.

## BONES OF THE EARTH

**ITEM VALUE:** 133,600 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Protection

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

**UTILITY:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

**DANGER:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

In ages past, a terrifying creature known as the Leviathan was worshipped by the lizardfolk. Near-invincible and ever-hungry, it was an engine of destruction whose power could humble even gods. When it was finally struck down, its bones remained in the Carbion Forest for uncounted millennia. In time, the barbarian Jarrin Falstaff fashioned a suit of armor from the ossified pieces of bone left by the creature, which now resembled ancient stones.

However, the Bones of the Earth retained a shard of the Leviathan's lust for destruction, and new wearers of the armor command both awe and terror.

**ANCIENT RESISTANCE:** The skin of the wearer becomes encrusted with stone, granting them resistance to non-magical weapon damage and immunity to poison and disease.

**OSSIFYING TOUCH:** Once per day, the wearer of the armor can touch another creature and turn them into stone. Initially, the creature is paralyzed by the touch, and then they become petrified as the stone spreads across their skin.

**ENGINE OF DESTRUCTION:** After wearing the armor for an extended period of time, the user gains superhuman strength for one hour per day. During this period, they are possessed by a blind rage that causes them to attempt to destroy anything around them, including buildings, trees, and even mountains.

## DRAKESCALE MANTLE

**ITEM VALUE:** 217,250 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Combat & Protection

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** *⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️*

**UTILITY:** *⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️*

**DANGER:** *⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️*

This cloak is made of dragon scales cut from still-living wyrms. The scales have lost their color, fading to a dusky grey that glistens with ghostly iridescence. The mantle was made by the great wyrmslayer Wyllfar the Scorched, whose obsession with dragons drove him to imitate their cunning and mercilessness. Unfortunately, Wyllfar became warped by the mantle: after killing his tenth dragon, the wyrmslayer found himself enamored by its hoard and transforming into the very thing he hated.

In time, Wyllfar himself was impaled during a fiery rampage and his own hoard was seized. The mantle was blasted and crushed by the survivors, but it remained intact. The mantle sat forgotten in a vault for a century before it was taken up again.

**DRACONIC ASPECT:** The mantle's wearer cannot be frightened by dragons and resists the effects of their breath weapons. The wearer also gains the ability to fly and can spew a gout of flame from their mouth in a line up to sixty feet long. Dragons slain by the wearer of the mantle turn to dust when the lethal blow lands, preventing them from becoming undead or being reanimated.

**COVETOUS CURSE:** The wearer of the mantle can sense treasure within a five-mile radius, especially gold. For every 5,000 gp worth of treasure the wearer



possesses, they may increase one of their attribute scores by one. When this treasure is lost or spent, the attribute scores decrease accordingly.

**LURE THE WYRM:** Dragons can sense the presence of the mantle. They are overcome with the desire to destroy the mantle, which serves as a reminder of their ancestors' dark fates.

## REDTHORN LASH

**ITEM VALUE:** 204,500 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Combat

**POWER SOURCE:** Pain

**DESTRUCTION:** *⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️*

**UTILITY:** *⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️*

**DANGER:** *⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️ ⚔️*

Woven from black, thorny vines, this whip is the twisted creation of a hideous fey being known as the Prince of Thorns. Before it was stolen from the Faerie Realm, it was used by the Prince to humiliate and punish those who failed to serve him well—or entertain him. The Prince found that the whip could extract the most exquisite pain by lashing the mind of its victim, not just their flesh. Soon, the Prince began drinking in the anguish and terror of his victims, and discovered that it tasted sweeter to him than any ambrosia. The lash was eventually stolen by a member of the

Prince's court and hidden away in the mortal realm. The lash is sentient and wishes to return to its master, but as long as its wielder keeps it entertained with new victims, it is content to remain with them.

**STINGING STRIKES:** After being struck by the whip, the target must overcome the mental anguish of its strike. If they fail, the user of the whip decides whether the target becomes stunned or charmed for one turn. Subsequent strikes make resisting these effects increasingly difficult.

**COMMAND OVER NATURE:** The wielder of the lash can commune with animals or plants and enlist their aid. They can also cause plants or trees to grow or wither in a thirty-foot radius around themselves at will, and can cause roots to erupt from the earth and entangle foes.

**EXQUISITE PAIN:** The wielder of the lash has their perceptions of pleasure and pain switched. They become compelled to whip themselves each day until they inflict damage equal to one-quarter of their total health points.


## HEXBRINGER

**ITEM VALUE:** 216,750 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Curses & Protection

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** 

**UTILITY:** 

**DANGER:** 

Hexbringer is a stout walking staff formed from a blackthorn branch and painted black with pitch. Its top has been bent into a rough spiral, which has been woven over with threads that form a warped spiderweb. The staff is notorious for its ability to weave curses that cannot be removed or dispelled, especially since its wielders have mostly been hags. Hexbringer was originally crafted by the bog hag Granny Gumrot, whose spite and horrific arcane power were so great that her soul became bound to the staff. It is this lingering spirit that prevents the curses from being lifted, and it's her ill will that brings curses down on other wielders of Hexbringer.

**ARCANE PROTECTION:** The user of the staff becomes immune to low-level spells and has a bonus to resisting higher-level spells.

**CURSEMAKER:** The staff empowers curse magic, making the effect more debilitating. It also prevents curses from being lifted—instead, the effects of the curse can only be suppressed temporarily. The staff allows the user to cast three curse effects: blindness, forbidding the target from taking a specific action, and physical weakness. In addition, the wielder of the staff may craft new, custom curses at the Game Master's discretion.

**AFFLICTION:** Each time the staff is used, a random, minor curse is cast on the wielder. These effects are temporary, but can include blindness, draining the user's strength or intelligence, bad luck, or becoming afflicted by a virulent disease.

## SKINSHIFTER'S CLOAK

**ITEM VALUE:** 216,450 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Shapeshifting

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** 

**UTILITY:** 

**DANGER:** 

Knitted together from the skins of dozens of animals, the skinshifter's cloak is a gory trophy of slain beasts. Even though the skins have been cured, they still reek of musty death, and occasionally slough off chunks of maggoty flesh or shed coats of greasy, bloodstained hair. The cloak is abhorred by lycanthropes and druids, and causes revulsion and fear when seen by most mortals. The cloak was crafted in an abhorrent ritual performed by a circle of corrupted druids for a ranger known only as the Ripper. The druids intended to exchange the cloak for the Ripper's protection, but they were betrayed. The Ripper slaughtered the druids and hung their skins from the trees of their sacred grove, then carved a bloody swath through the forest and the surrounding settlements. The Ripper haunted the wilds for decades before disappearing, leaving only the cloak and a trail of mutilated wolves behind.

**GORY TRANSFORMATION:** The wearer of the cloak can transform into any beast whose pelt has been stitched onto the fabric of the garment. The transformation lasts until the following dawn, or until the wearer is knocked unconscious in their beast form, at which point they revert. While in the beast form, the wearer's clothing and items fuse with them, and they retain their intellect and personality. Alternatively, the wearer can transform into a hybrid of humanoid and beast, though this transformation only lasts for one hour.

**GRUESOME ADDITION:** If the wearer slays a beast while wearing the cloak, they can skin that beast and stitch its pelt onto the cloak, allowing them to transform into this beast as well as any others represented in the cloak. No matter how many pelts are added, it never seems to grow too long. However, as a cost for adding a new beast, the stitcher gains the animosity of the beast's kin, and is actively hunted by that type of beast whenever they are within a reasonable proximity.

## SURGESTONE

**ITEM VALUE:** 190,000 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Spellcasting & Protection

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡

**UTILITY:** ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡

**DANGER:** ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡

This eye-sized blue gemstone contains a swirling maelstrom that never rests, and is marked at times by flashing arcs of electric blue lightning. The stone is cold to the touch, and delivers small shocks when passed from hand to hand. The stone was crafted by one of the Sorcerer Princes of Arisaji, who wished to master the art of lightning.

According to legend, the Sorcerer Prince purposefully destroyed several towns with massive thunderstorms, teasing the forks of lightning out of the clouds and studying their effects on stone, metal, and flesh. With these cruel experiments complete, the Sorcerer Prince created the Surgestone as a masterwork of arcane magic, but its nature was tainted by his depravity.

**EYE OF THE STORM:** The bearer of this stone is protected from elemental spells that target a large area, rather than an individual. These spells affect everything around the bearer instead. Furthermore, the bearer cannot be damaged by thunder and lightning, nor affected negatively by them (they cannot be deafened by thunder, for example).

**PSYCHIC STORM:** The bearer of the stone can summon up a storm within the mind of a creature that they can see. The storm manifests as a painful migraine that disrupts the target's senses, causes immense pain, and breaks their concentration. The psychic storm lasts for one minute, or until the target overcomes it.

**UNLEASHED WRATH:** Whenever the bearer of the stone takes damage from any source, a bolt of lightning courses from the stone toward the source, dealing a large amount of lightning damage. In addition, anyone who touches the bearer is dealt lightning damage, even if they do not intend harm.

## FLAMETALON

**ITEM VALUE:** 165,400 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Spellcasting

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡

**UTILITY:** ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡

**DANGER:** ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡

Once belonging to a majestic phoenix, this talon is stained with vibrant orange and red dyes that never fade. It leaves scorch marks on those who touch it, despite never feeling hot or even warm. The Flametalon was created by a cult called the Flamehearts, an order of mages who worshipped fire's ability to create and destroy. Though the Flamehearts were eventually wiped out because of their infamous burning crusades, the Flametalon survived their destruction.

To be used, the Flametalon must be pierced through a creature's skin. This immensely painful act drains a portion of the user's health and wreathes their body in an aura of flame. Those who possess the Flametalon find themselves enamored with fire, eventually becoming obsessed with it.

**INFERNO:** With a snap of their fingers, a creature pierced by the Flametalon can target another creature that they can see. If the creature fails at resisting the Flametalon, they catch on fire. The fire cannot be extinguished, and after a short time, the target explodes into a large fireball that immolates anything around them.

**REBORN FROM THE ASHES:** A creature that was pierced with the Flametalon turns to ash upon death. The creature rises from the ashes after a period of twenty-four hours, provided that the relic and ashes are still intact. If the relic is removed from the pile of ashes, or the ashes are blown away, the process does not occur. A creature resurrected this way loses some of their memories and skills. After multiple resurrections, they are reborn as a mindless humanoid elemental whose sole intent is to destroy all around them with fire.

## HARBERK'S GREED

**ITEM VALUE:** 242,100 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Combat

**POWER SOURCE:** Wealth

**DESTRUCTION:** ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡

**UTILITY:** ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡

**DANGER:** ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡

This vicious axe is gilded with a layer of gold that shimmers even when darkness falls. It is inscribed with runes inlaid with twinkling gemstones that refract the light of the gold into complex geometric patterns. The axe's edge is so keen that it can cut clean through granite and iron alike, and each time it is swung it emits a sound like the screams of a dying dragon.

The axe was created for an infamous barbarian raider named Harberk, who wished for a way to breach the Golden City of Anar Yari and defeat its stone guardians, who protected the gilded temples and vaults. Harberk made dark offerings to a god of bloodshed and war, and his reward was Harberk's Greed, a weapon that could cleave through city walls.

**CLEAVING BLOW:** Although the axe weighs almost nothing, it can cut through almost all non-magical materials with ease, including stone, steel, and dragon scales. Only a person with greater wealth than its current wielder may lift it or take possession of it.

**ANGUISHED AVARICE:** For each day that the axe is in a creature's possession, it consumes some of their wealth. The quantity begins at 1 gp per day, then doubles each subsequent day. The wealth stolen by the axe is restricted to gold, gemstones, and treasure. Once the axe's owner is stripped of all treasure, the axe continually tries to take control of its owner, forcing them to steal wealth to feed it further.

## WORMRIDDLED STAFF

**ITEM VALUE:** 136,500 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Necromancy & Protection

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

**UTILITY:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

**DANGER:** *⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔ ⚔*

This crude staff of obsidian is shaped like a stretched spiral with a toothed maw at either end. It is immeasurably old and marked with symbols unknown by any scholar or sage. It was created at the dawn of time, when the world was still being shaped and mortals worshipped other gods. This staff was carried by a priest who served a being known only as "That Which Lurks Below."

That Which Lurks Below is only whispered of in ancient texts and histories, but it is usually portrayed as a titan made of worms who feasts on the bodies of the dead. Some claim that it is the original ruler of the earth, and it is said that the bearer of the staff will become the instrument of its resurrection and return.

**BIRTHED OF THE EARTH:** While wielding the staff, the user can imprison one large creature in the earth at a time, summon swarms of worms that will drain the creature's life force, and raise the creature as a powerful, worm-riddled zombie. In addition, the wielder gains a burrow speed of fifty feet and projects a twenty-foot aura of terror. If the wielder is killed while touching stone or earth, they are resurrected with their maximum health reduced by half. Otherwise, they die.

**WORMRIDDLED:** For each night that the staff is wielded, the user is swarmed by worms. They can only complete their rest if they swallow one or more of the worms. The more worms swallowed, the more the wielder can hear the voice of That Which Lurks Below. If its commands are obeyed, then the number of creatures that the wielder can imprison and raise increases.



## NECROCHILD

**ITEM VALUE:** 78,600 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Necromancy & Spellcasting

**POWER SOURCE:** Flesh

**DESTRUCTION:** 

**UTILITY:** 

**DANGER:** 

This bizarre doll resembles a bloated humanoid infant with an enlarged head and eyeless sockets. Its mouth opens to reveal a dark vortex of necrotic magic, and it sometimes wriggles or screams of its own accord. Undead beings are drawn to the Necrochild, while those devoted to holy orders, such as paladins or clerics, may feel physically weak in its presence. The Necrochild was created by the Brotherhood of Graves during a ritual that consumed the lives of the entire city of Hardhold, and its cries sometimes echo those who were sacrificed. The Brotherhood had intended the Necrochild to be an avatar of necromantic rebirth, with the ability to resurrect the dead and call spirits into new bodies. Instead, the Necrochild sucked out the souls of the members of the Brotherhood and left their empty husks among the ruins of Hardhold.

**EMPOWERED NECROMANCY:** Necromancy spells cast by the carrier of the Necrochild are empowered; they last for twice their normal duration, deal twice the usual damage, and affect twice as many targets.

**SICKLY FORTITUDE:** Each time the Necrochild's carrier kills a creature using necromancy magic or creates an undead creature, they gain a large amount of temporary hit points.

**INSATIABLE HUNGER:** In order to gain the benefits of the Necrochild's magic, its bearer must conduct an hour-long ritual each day that involves feeding it the flesh of a recently killed creature. Failure to do this means that the benefits of the Necrochild do not apply for twenty-four hours. If the user fails to feed the Necrochild for three days, it begins to feed on its bearer, slowly sapping their constitution score (or equivalent) until it falls to zero and the bearer disintegrates entirely.

## THE LANCE OF VORYA

**ITEM VALUE:** 217,400 gp

**SPECIALTY:** Vampirism

**POWER SOURCE:** None

**DESTRUCTION:** 

**UTILITY:** 

**DANGER:** 

This wicked lance has a ferociously jagged tip that always seems to bear a veneer of rust, no matter how frequently it is cleaned. The shaft is made of charred yew wood, and the lance tip bears a symbol that looks like a screaming face. When wielded, the lance constantly drips blood. The lance once belonged to a vampire lord named Vorya, who burned the forests and cities of his domain to cover his kingdom in a cloud of ash, which blocked out the sun and allowed his vampiric servants to walk freely. After a century of his tyranny, Vorya was killed by the paladins of the Burning Maces, who used the lance as a stake to spear Vorya through the heart. All attempts to destroy the lance failed, so it was stored in the paladins' vaults until it one day disappeared, though some claim that it turned into a bat and escaped of its own accord.

**VAMPIRIC STRIKE:** Blood drawn by this weapon soaks into the wood, and then into the veins of its wielder, restoring their health with each wound that they deal.

**SPREADING CURSE:** Humanoids killed with the lance that are then buried by the wielder rise during the following night as vampire spawn under the wielder's control. The spawn are charmed by the wielder while they hold the weapon, but if they are separated from it, a spawn may try to wrest it from them and take control.

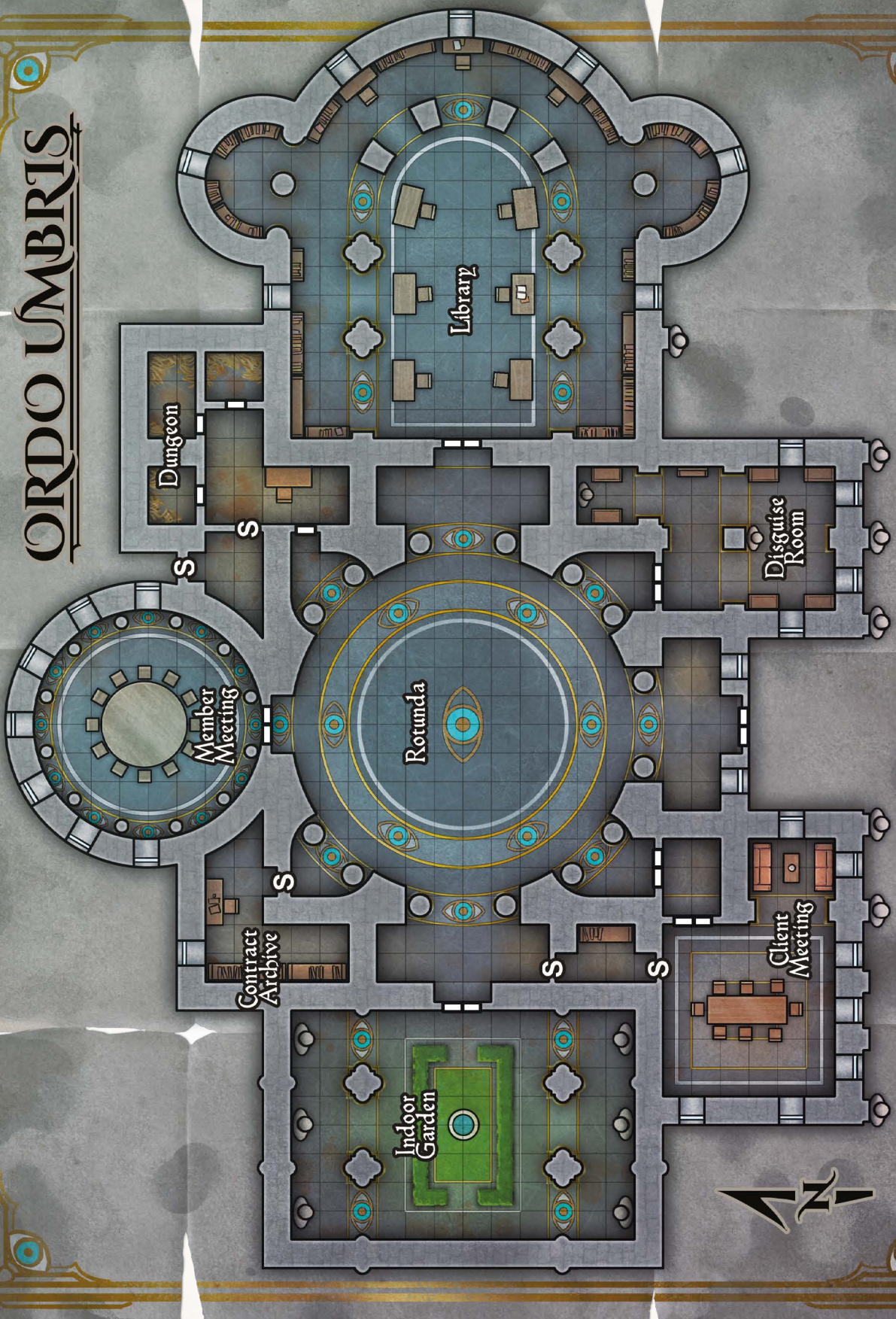
**PARASITE OF THE NIGHT:** The wielder gains the traditional weaknesses of a vampire, but without any of the supernatural powers. They become burned by sunlight, cannot stand garlic, cannot cross a threshold without being invited, cannot cross running water, and are scorched by holy water.

APPENDIX III:

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CULT HEADQUARTERS MAPS

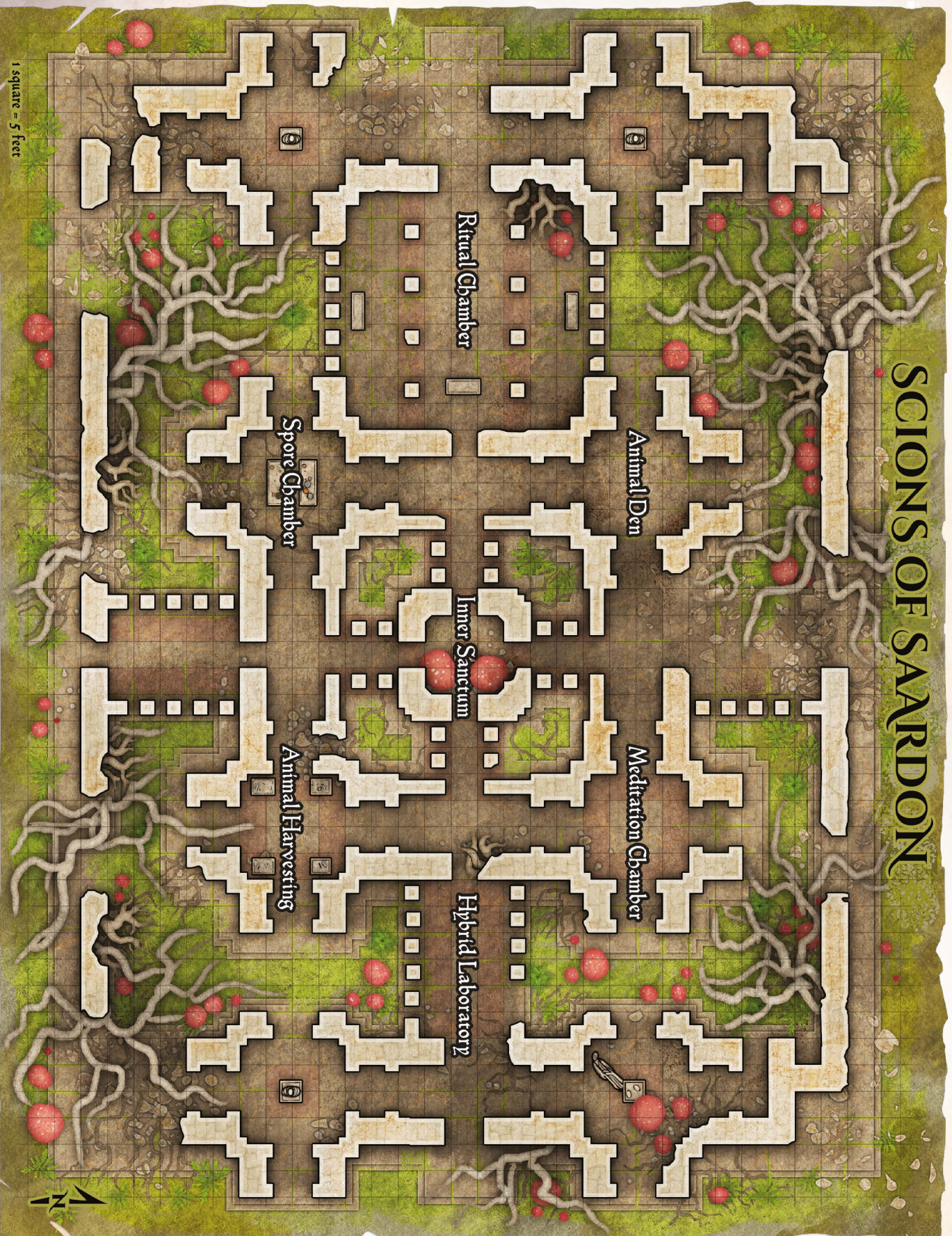
# ORDO UMBRIS



1 square = 5 feet

J. Torrance

# SCIONS OF SARDON



1 square = 5 feet

Ritual Chamber

Animal Den

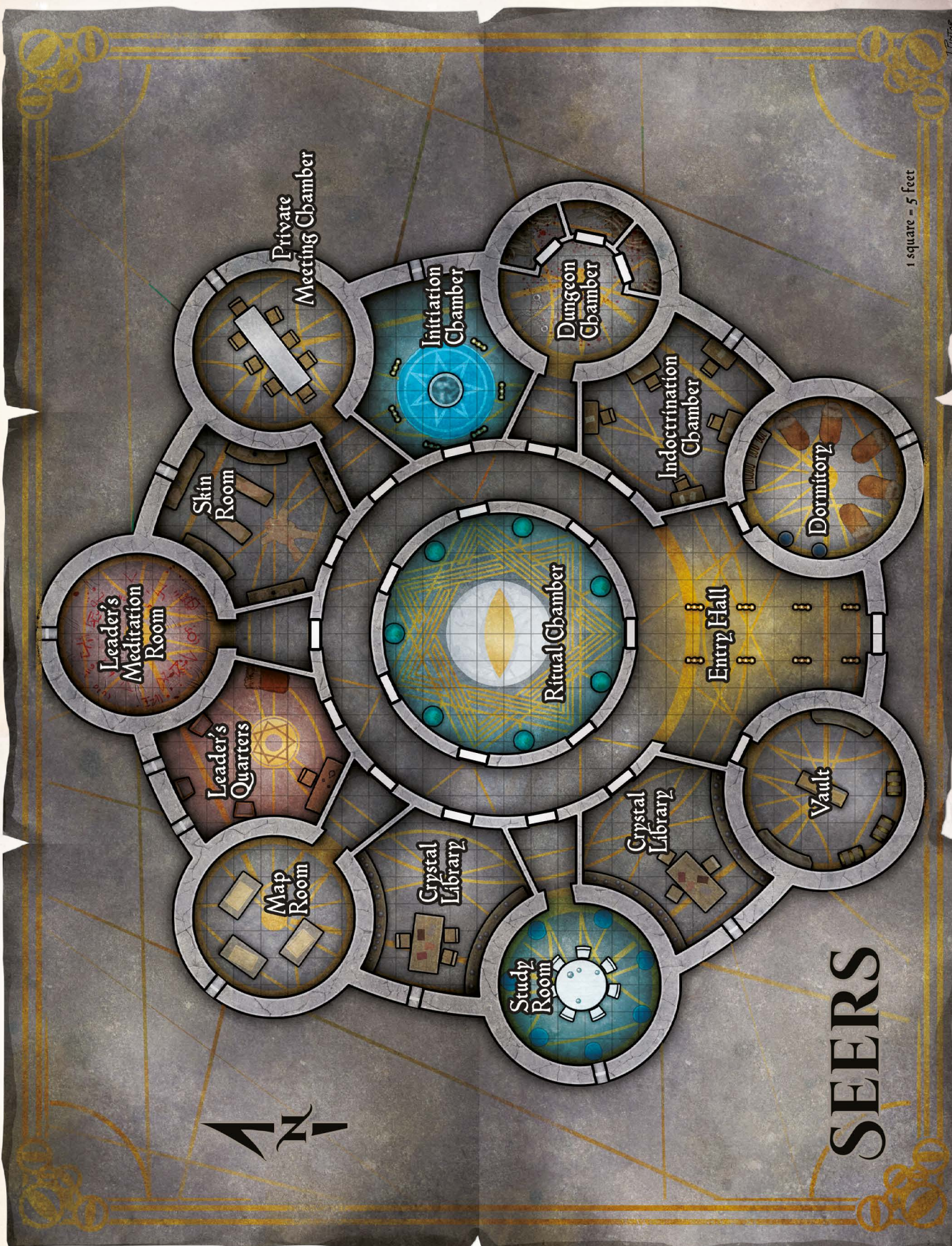
Spore Chamber

Inner Sanctum

Meditation Chamber

Animal Harvesting

Hybrid Laboratory



# SEERS

1 square = 5 feet

# DREAMWEAVERS



1 square = 5 feet

Entrance

Black Room

White Room

Silver Room

Gold Room

Stage

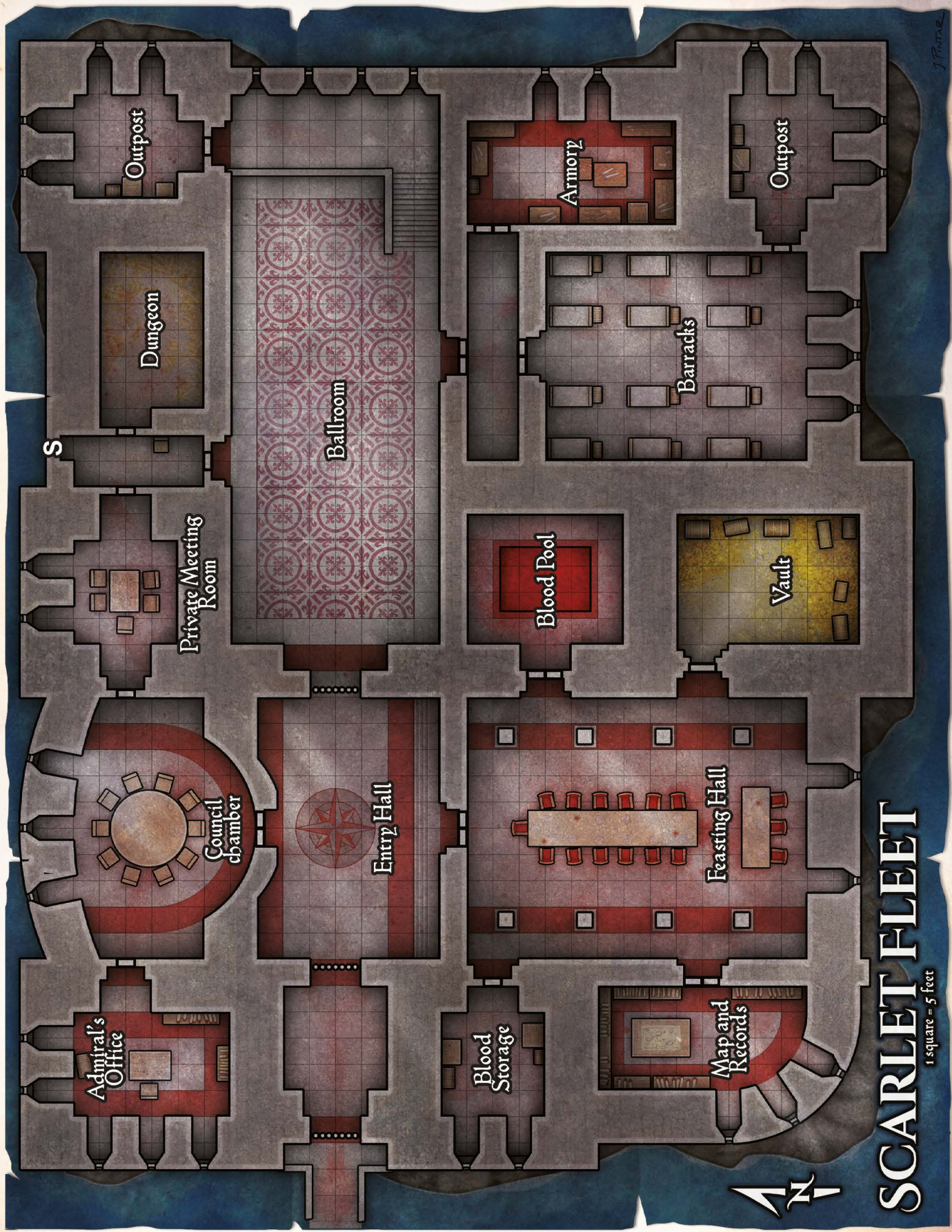
Green Room

Scarlet Room

Indigo Room

Lavender Room

S



S

Admiral's Office

Council chamber

Entry Hall

Blood Storage

Blood Pool

Map and Records

Feasting Hall

Vault

Barracks

Armory

Ballroom

Private Meeting Room

Dungeon

Outpost

Outpost



# SCARLET FLEET

1 square = 5 feet

J. P. Stone

# NOX LIBRIS



Reading Room

Vault

Summoning Room

Spell Lab

Main Library Floor

Armory

Barracks

Secondary Library Floor

Head Librarian

Front Desk

Entry Hall

Dormitory

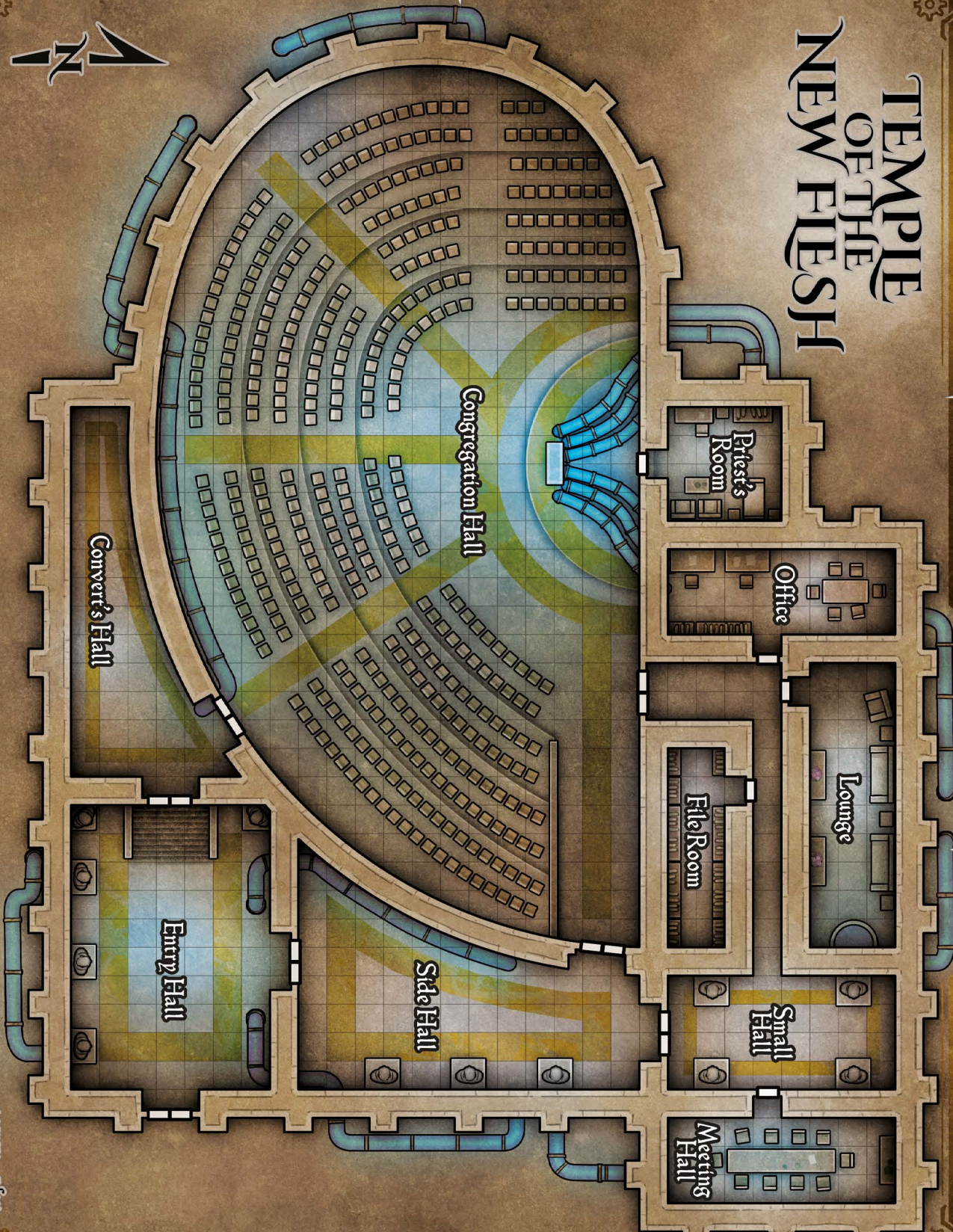
1 square = 5 feet



1 square = 5 feet

# THE JUSTICARS

# TEMPLE OF THE NEW FLESH



Congregation Hall

Convert's Hall

Entry Hall

Side Hall

Priests' Room

Office

Lounge

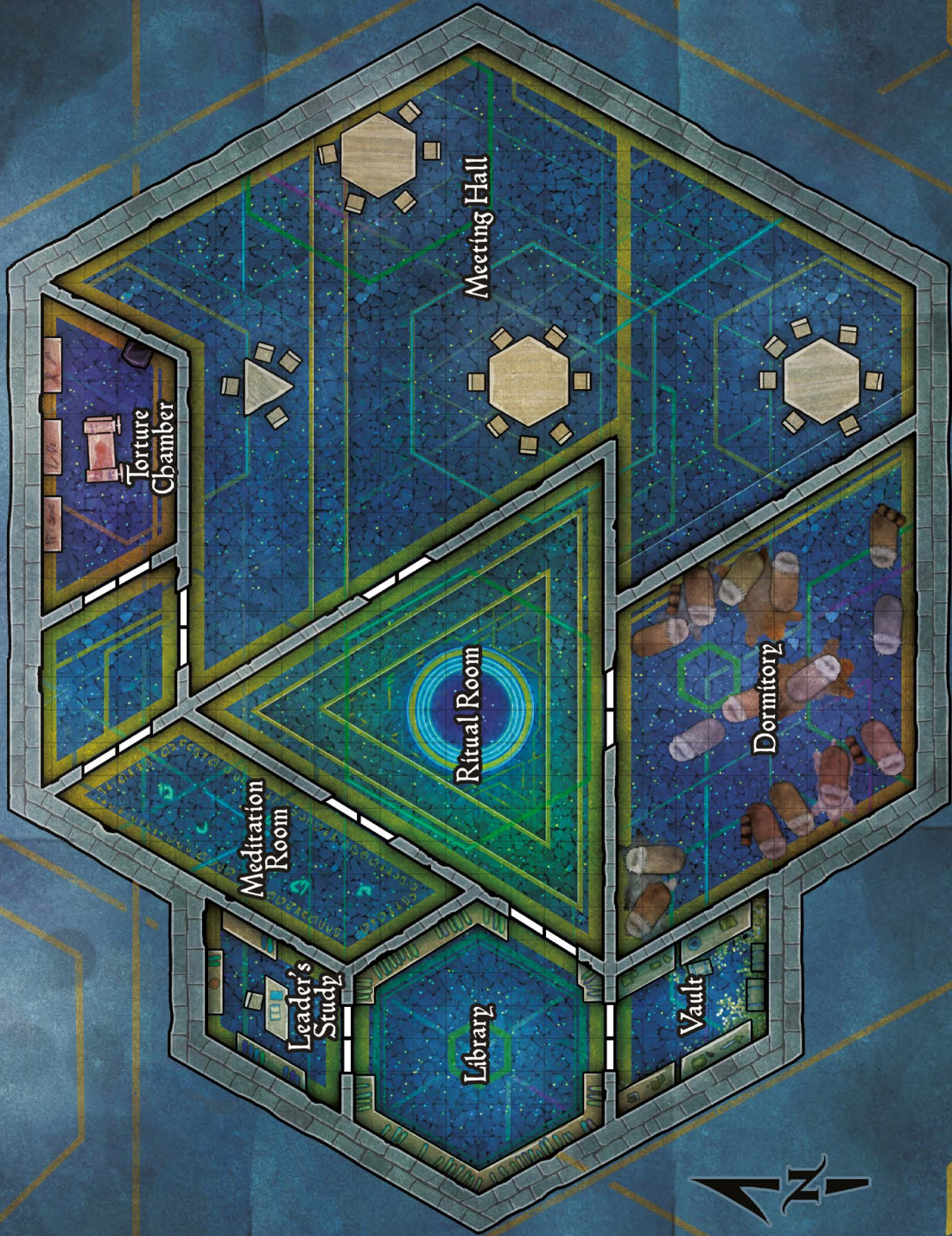
File Room

Small Hall

Meeting Hall

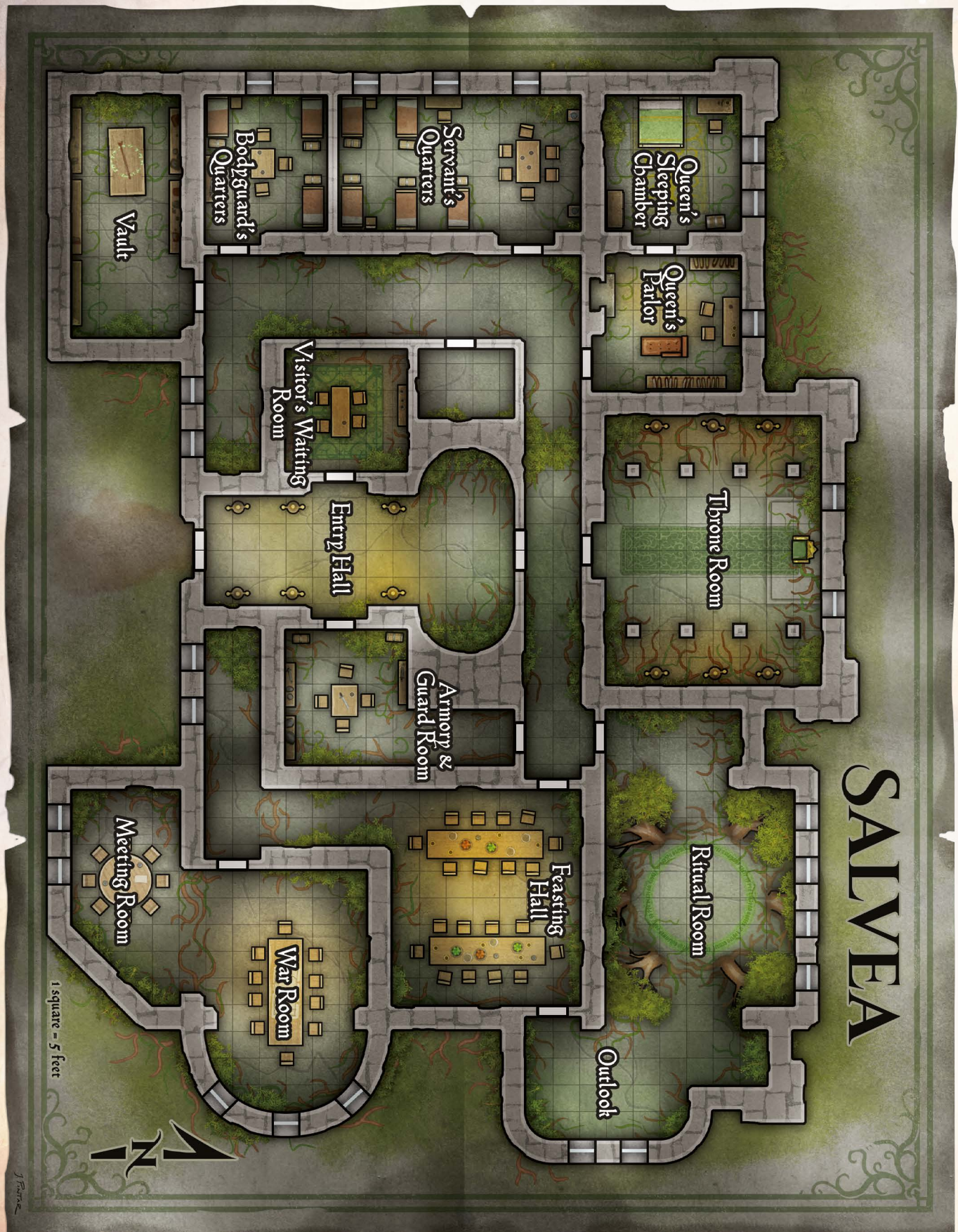
1 square = 5 feet

# PROPHETS OF THE VOID



1 square = 5 feet

# SALVEA



Queen's  
Sleeping  
Chamber

Queen's  
Parlor

Throne Room

Ritual Room

Outlook

Servant's  
Quarters

Armory &  
Guard Room

Feasting  
Hall

Bodyguard's  
Quarters

Visitor's  
Waiting  
Room

Entry Hall

War Room

Vault

Meeting Room

1 square = 5 feet





*“All this evil is such hard work...  
it takes ages to get blood out from beneath your nails.”*

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383	Christopher Kitiona	471	Chris Jones	563	Warren C	652	Mark Gunter
384	Nicholas Crabtree	472	Mark Gautier	564	Amber Ackerley	653	Drew Gruening
385	Ferdinand von Schenk	473	Ryden G	565	Kendrick Hernandez	654	Quib
386	Josh Peters	474	Nicholas Huppert	566	Rachel Kimmel	655	Abi Rowe
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388	Robert H Hudson Jr	476	Jonathan P Francia	568	Roger Cawte	658	Christine Martin-Resotko
389	Richard Hodge	477	Kevin Pagliarini	569	David Lawson	659	Caleb Lyons
391	Shawn Daugherty	478	Kody Christoffer	570	Dominik Oshowski	660	Vincent Beaulieu
392	Daniel Tiecher	479	mobralrox	571	Nicholas Leavitt	661	James Burke
393	Philip Newton	480	Cristina B	572	Dean Magill	662	Jim Dawn
394	Shawn M. Halversen	482	Robyn and Tony D	573	Bart Van Damme	664	Harold S. Hughes III
395	McKay Brown	483	Jordan Kemp	574	Kristiyan Damyanov	665	Evan Jones
396	Jimmy Takata	484	Reuben Wood	575	Joey Trapp	666	Lee Paxton
397	Sam Taylor	485	Trevor Hardy	576	Daniel León Espinosa	667	Rom Elwell
398	Drew Lyall	486	Juan Mojica Jr	577	Matthew Redding	668	Oliver Hertel
399	Martin White	487	David Chamberlain	578	Eric Miller	669	Brian Smith
400	Chris and Maddie Jones	489	Dana Wilson	579	Timothy Gile	670	Robert c Flipse
401	Joe Coupal	491	Joseph R. Blackmon-Dishaw	580	Marcus Mulholland	671	Edwin Mark Dakin
402	Evan Johnson	492	Nicola G	582	Chibby	672	Alex Fossel
403	Steven Walsh	493	Thomas Foulds	583	Sean Gorman	673	Jamie Denney
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410	Steven Ness	499	Thor Demik	589	Nick Bardelson	680	Marcus Shepherd
411	Mark Westbrook	500	Bramme Vanaelst	590	Greg Lohman	681	Phil Stepp
412	Shawn Hanf	501	Christopher Inagotable Majetich	591	Robert Huss	682	Simon Jeffreys
413	Ben O'Brien	502	Christopher Keppler	592	Terry McKelvey	683	Anonymous
415	David Past	503	David Clarkson	594	Kevin Martz	684	Curtis Reet
416	Stanley Sterken	504	D. Hentz	596	Jennifer Pyle	685	James Jones
417	Jason Sidel	505	Anthony Georgis	597	John Campbell	686	Ethan Rauch
418	Philippe Niederkorn	506	Larry Curtis	598	Philippe Bélanger Roy	687	Scott Chambers
419	Michael R. Decker	507	Bastian Busch	600	Kale Knowles	688	Wout Coveliers
420	Harald Zubrod	508	Christopher Stoll	601	Dennis Foster	689	Chad Challman
422	Jackie Feller	509	Adam Ansari	602	Geoffrey Brodak	690	Jason Warren
423	Ted McClintock	510	Travis Yocum	604	Tim Alberth	691	Iwan Lemmens
424	Jay Ay Bee	511	Carsten Wollsen	605	James Terry	692	Ben Lane
425	David Ruskin	512	Daron Yamauchi	606	Claus Olesen	693	Zachary DeFoor

694	Greg Roth	783	Andrew Holaway	868	Wyn Alexander	953	Albert Duenas
695	William Wenger	784	William Adams	869	Forrest McDonald	955	Mark Glenn Jespersen
696	James Jester	785	Cassia Müller	870	Lubomír Boďa	956	JF Paradis
697	Fengh	786	Fox Carter	871	Kalle Lukkala	957	Matthias Vandaele
698	William P Bridges IV	787	wandering acorn	872	Камен Йорданов Фугтеков	958	Jacques Nicholson
701	Sean Tadsen	788	Rod Meek	873	Daniel Vestal	959	Robert Gorman
703	Timothy Martin	789	Joshua Renz	874	Wilson Wilsonson	960	Dana Corrigan
704	Robert Goulding	790	Sébastien Louvet	875	Justin Sadosky	961	Bossman
705	Fredrik Blom	791	David Goodheart	876	Eapen Leubner	962	Dee Taylor
706	Rob Duke	792	Ryan Haskins	877	John Garlick	963	Ryan Cherry
707	Nathan 'The Dragon of War' Smith	793	Sean Meagher	878	Laura Cressman	964	Burton Gamble
708	Laszlo Acs	794	Jason Gabel	879	Steffan-rene Cowan	965	Drouot Maxime
709	Edward Ray	795	Ingjald Pilskog	880	Jason Dawson	966	Lowell G Burton
710	Miguel Pol	796	Victor Gonzalez	881	Nikola Todorovic	967	Alyssa Hadfield
711	Michael Ramage	798	Daniël Harmsen	882	Shaunna Young	968	Walter Brediger, III
712	Marius Schuller	799	Christopher Sulat	883	Matthew Arnot	969	Walter Hosking
714	Arch DeLux	800	Kyle Webb	884	Bobby Ragan	971	Christian Wenham
715	Mark Brown	801	Tuck Allman	885	Neil McKenzie	972	Brandon Jones
716	Jeff	802	Brian Atkinson	887	Strum the Morose Musician	973	SLYD3VIL
717	Spellarena	803	Tim Yurchak	888	Warren Sistrom	974	Bruce Paris
718	Nathan Amor	804	Jeff Harden	889	William Spurlin	975	Paul Markham
719	Frank Lubbers	805	Greg Trombley	890	Dave Walker	976	Zach Yokell
720	Y. K. Lee	806	Andrew James	891	Greg Traeger	978	Bradley Smeja
721	Eric Lunsford	807	Michael Spredemann	892	Mohit Sadhu	979	Adria Riley
724	Astrid Portner	808	Joseph Sherer	893	Entayan	980	Adam Bourgeois
725	Jason Straub	809	Henrik Gjerp	894	Thiago Malta Fernandez	983	Pete Shaw
726	William P Redifer	810	Mario Gauthier	895	Thomas	984	Elizabeth Williams
727	John & Kimberly Poole	811	Dao Nguyen	896	Robert Martin	985	Adam Fry
728	Eric G	812	Dave Wagner	897	Al Wyvern	987	Joel Grote
729	Willy Van Pol	813	Charlie Vavrick	898	Okra	988	Dave Powell
730	Jo Cook	814	Dakoda Ryan White	899	Chris Seal	899	Andrew Souza
731	David Hollingsworth	815	Bruce McB	900	Ian Brockbank	990	Roman Bespflug
732	Corey Wood	816	John Larrimore III	901	Charles Town	991	Evelyn Lee
733	Ryan Bowler	817	Daryl Graham	902	Jonathan Chiaravalle	993	Nat Skinner
734	Al Petersen	818	Piotr Kamoda	903	Ed Picard	995	Andrew Griggs
735	Peter McIntyre	819	Thomas Pontette	904	Robert Pack	996	Maxime Chartrand
736	Carter Gale	820	Dennis Santini	905	Valerie Lever	997	Michael Yonchak
737	Sean Pelkey	821	Rowena Knill	906	Camilla Lorenz	998	Ian Krug
738	Robert Burns	822	Jacopo De Angelis	907	Wybe Buising	999	Roger Farley
739	Simon Birks	823	B Kam	908	Roger Van Cleave	1000	David Nebauer
740	Nizor Belg	824	Michael Russell	909	Brian McGarry	1001	Wayne Pitrof
741	Franck Tarendeau	825	George H. Webster III	910	David Casey	1002	Jennine Cerra
742	Patrick Manson	826	Jon Whitehouse	911	Simon Hunter	1003	Max Kaehn
743	Shaelynn Bingham	827	Josh Birks	912	Tony Gentry	1004	Miguel Ortiz
744	Joni Nyman	828	Steve Holian	913	Filip Biörsmark	1005	Christopher Earl Carlsen
745	Schupo Kuribo	829	Joe Beet	914	Matthew Carroll	1006	Richard Copperwaite
746	Shya Corak	830	Matthew Wells	915	Ron "Khaalis" Owen	1007	Travis Atkinson
748	Martin Hackett	831	Jon Giam	916	David Jack	1009	Martin Hveisel Kaas
749	Michael Holland	832	Davison Schanno	917	Victoria Wilmington	1010	Alex Vandenhoven
750	Tommaso De Benetti	833	Phillippe Gense	918	Patrick Schneider	1011	Matthew Lemay
751	Ryan Burbridge	834	Josue Macias	919	Katie Kraeski	1013	Christopher Brown
752	Nathan W Stroh	835	Chris Black	920	Martin Krans	1014	Jennifer Lark Kent
753	David McCown	836	Christopher Williams	921	Melissah Burt	1015	Jonathas
754	Greg Cunningham	837	John C Griffith	922	Aaron VanderWoude	1016	Lorenzo Suiker
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760	Topher Bostick	843	Lawrence T Yap	929	Craig Oliver	1022	Rennie Saunders
761	Hannah Prest	845	Jess Stanley	930	Josh Hare	1023	Adam Watts
762	Peter Freeze	846	Robert Mull	931	Lana	1024	Aaron Kirkpatrick
763	Sally & Parker McBride	847	Don Roberts	932	Aaron Hunt	1025	Carlos Ignacio Rivera
765	Niels Juel Specht	848	Jean-Jacques Payot	933	Joe Dillon	1026	Gilles JOFFROY
766	David Lundy	849	Rafael Adson Barbosa Barros	934	Don D	1027	Travis Morgan
767	Kasper Andersen	850	Jessica Renee	935	Taylor Stout	1029	Garrett Farmer
768	Bob Schrempp	851	Paul R. Bang	936	chandler christensen	1030	Descamps Axel
769	Chris Henderson	852	Vincent Annoni	937	David Marshall	1031	William Vansickel
770	Troy Everett	854	John Paul Luchenski	938	Andrew Crouch	1032	Daniel Malone
771	Daniel R Curtis	855	Romina Rovira	939	Niv Levy	1033	Edurne Pascual
772	Daniel Hodge	856	Dominick Vermilyea	940	Alfie Sadler	1034	Hyldrid Carcosa
773	Kirk Graves	857	John "Johnkzin" Rudd	941	Zakrophos	1035	Eric Duffy
774	Amanda McRoberts	858	Farhad	942	Steven Santana	1036	Chris Read
775	Jörg Peters	859	Martin Mandler	943	Dragonicus	1037	Martin Heim
776	Orson Davis	860	Mike Nussbaum	944	Nathan Erik Olsen	1038	Iain Haukka
777	Andrew O'Donnell	861	Chad O'Brien	945	Scott Maynard	1039	Andrew Jeffree
778	Daniele Fusetto	862	Thimo Wilke	946	Maria Storm Smith	1040	John MacFadyen
779	Arend Goodwin	863	Connor Fender	948	Steven Wales	1041	Kellgoth
780	Lee Wygant	864	Michael Lamb	949	David Stevens	1042	Anthony Baumayr
781	Jeff Moyer	865	Ian Blacker	950	Andy Dunning	1043	John-Carl Kullmann
782	Alex Milligan	866	Chuck Van Norman	951	Steven Ward	1044	Kevin Morrow
		867	Gari Aitken	952	Skippy Kempert	1045	Wade Gerald Sullivan

1046	Matt Whitaker	1132	Lloyd Moore	1224	Tyler John solomon	1313	Tyler briggs
1047	Rasmus Bækgaard	1133	Michael Feldhusen	1225	Jeremiah Bruce	1314	Bret Meador
1048	Anja Kraus	1134	Mike & Dollie	1226	Volodymyr L Revenok	1315	Zach Jernstrom
1049	David Olorenshaw	1135	Karissa K.	1227	Guillaume "TheOnlyBrecks"	1316	Russel Miner
1051	Christian Löw	1136	Andrew Hurst		Labrecque	1317	Joe Cirillo
1052	Kirby W	1137	Nick Martin	1228	Alicia Colicchio	1319	Jason Bliss
1053	Ellen Churchill	1138	Phil Millar	1229	Christian Knoll	1321	Shadow
1054	Tim Ratti	1139	Lloyd Rasmussen	1230	Michael Bruno	1322	Matt Sywenky
1055	Clint Sharp	1140	Anthony Wallace	1231	Jerold H Farver Jr.	1323	Devin Croak
1056	Ewan Tolladay	1141	Joseph Guzman	1232	Randolph Partain	1324	Mark Yopp
1057	Darren Shilhan	1142	Richard Kice	1233	Steven VanWart	1325	Ben Chance
1058	Jean-Marc Rivas	1143	Adrian Rosu	1234	Dane Poyfair	1328	Gerald Reid
1059	Tables FLGS	1144	Stewart MacLean	1235	Brian Zuber	1329	Blake Taylor
1061	James L Young	1145	Jason Croci	1236	John Doe	1330	Matthew in Danbury
1062	John Gingras	1146	Andrew Wright	1237	Matthew Coenen	1331	Neil Borg
1064	Robert Peiffle	1147	James Juden	1238	Anonymous	1332	Asger Lademark Heegaard
1065	John Geoghegan	1148	Kiera Davidson	1239	Philip W Rogers Jr	1333	Chris Bloom
1066	Douglas Mawhinney	1149	Hannes Wilms	1240	John Rogers	1334	Cody Griffore
1067	Lucas Metzen	1150	Claudia Blood	1241	Silvio George Sibia	1335	Ekrl
1068	Phillip Tola	1151	Brandon Wright	1242	Dagur Logi	1336	Delana Gifford
1069	Matthew S. Jensen	1152	John Gardiner	1243	Gabriel L. Fields	1337	Brandon Maier
1070	Robby Tóth	1153	Travis LaVanway	1244	Daniel Smith	1338	Joel Anderson
1071	Justin Hadden	1154	David Stephenson	1245	Daniel Jung	1339	Michael Magnotte
1072	Nemus	1155	Warwolf tabletop	1246	Ian Barnes	1340	Zach Hunt
1073	Kevin A Swartz	1156	Nick Lolopulos	1247	Robert "Frostrazor" Brambley	1342	Bradley Wold
1074	Evelyn Rose O'Meara	1157	Yvonne Chung	1248	Kelly Clark	1343	Stephen Haynes Jr
1075	Joshua Louis	1159	Boulangéot Guillaume	1249	Gary Williams	1344	Jeremiah Walters
1076	John Bravo	1160	Matthew C.	1251	Nick Fotopoulos	1345	Brooke Elise Miller
1077	Anthony Muller	1161	Liam Butler	1252	Scott Desmarais	1346	Cynthia Steeves
1078	Maxime Bombardier	1162	Costa Petroutsas	1253	Catrina Roush	1347	Shelby W
1079	Murray Smith	1163	Anthony James DuBois	1254	Takahiro Hashinaka	1348	Hamish Laws
1080	Cornelia Hebrank	1164	Rory Blunt	1255	Joey Bradner	1349	Stephen Lane
1081	Nikoloz Elbakidze	1166	Jess Strickland	1256	Jeremy Mayer	1350	John Kusters
1082	Jennifer Rohlfing	1167	Steven Cathcart	1257	Matthew H	1351	Sky Ortiz
1083	Dennis Renneberg Andersen	1168	Erika Hasebe	1258	Dai	1352	Christopher McDowell
1084	Daniel Montero	1169	Dan Abrahmsen	1259	Forrest Garner	1353	John Pyrich
1085	Josiah Brown	1170	Daniel Marjoram	1261	Jarret Warren	1354	Elizabeth Pollock
1086	Josh Newton	1171	Myles C. Allen	1263	Derrick C aka Darkrynn	1355	Erik Comtois
1087	Ginette Beavis	1172	Justin Prazen	1264	Lief Hurt	1356	Dominion
1088	Philippe DeSoye	1173	Bryan Dryer	1265	Ryan Velez	1357	Brian Longstreet
1089	Johanna Pape	1174	Anthony Davis	1267	Anonymous	1358	Charles Cameron
1090	Joseph McKoy	1175	Randall Ogen	1268	Jeff Aldridge	1359	Trevor Jeffo
1091	Wm Terry Newman	1176	Sam Lonsdale	1269	Matt Downer	1360	Jason Broadley
1092	Peter Fox	1178	Scott Campbell	1270	Nate Cooney	1361	Joe Paris
1093	Michael J. Barden	1179	Clayton Smith	1271	Marcus Rommel	1362	David Marshall
1094	Akma Nirmala	1180	Craig Earl	1273	Alli Miller	1363	Michael G. Palmer
1095	Kristian Hyytel	1181	Russell Ventimeglia	1275	Christine Delisle	1364	Steph Wetch
1096	Nicolas Abco	1182	Goffin Geoffrey	1276	Frank Fish	1365	Jeremiah Johnson
1097	Ulrike "HeavensRevenge" Georgi	1183	Mare Matthews	1277	Gregory Ford	1366	Brian Fruhwirth
		1184	Joe Wiggins	1278	Cody Louthian	1367	Tom Morgan
1098	Robin Mayenfels	1185	Brian Bush	1279	Richard Lee Hurst	1368	Bryan Britt
1099	Mark James Featherston	1186	Celine Turcotte	1280	Andy Yeoh	1369	Dakota Steeves
1100	Michael Leavitt	1187	Alex Hoffman	1281	JPS Nagi	1370	Rob French
1101	Bjorn V	1189	Scott Campbell	1282	Patrick Ciraco	1371	Alistair Lamb
1102	Jeremy Schweinler	1190	Luke McGrath	1283	The Weule Bros	1372	Holly Field
1103	Mark E. Henaghen	1191	Talon Marsden	1285	William (Bill) Reger	1373	Bert L. Medley
1104	Brian Pampaselle	1192	Cornelia Siegmund	1286	Seth Thomson	1374	Brian D Larsen
1105	Ningxuan Wen	1193	Kazimierz Luska	1287	Christopher Nelson	1375	Chuck Sherman
1106	Damian Spence	1194	Andrew Krieser	1288	Emily Finch	1376	Jeffrey Kreider
1107	Sven Jesus Martinez Lutzke	1195	Andrew Barr	1289	Jason G Bryan	1377	CJDIU
1108	Aidan Grey	1196	Nathaniel Foy	1290	Amanda Van Akker	1378	Steve Fortson
1109	Kelly Rush	1197	Justin Marcotte	1291	Scott Turner	1379	Matt Larabee
1110	Troy Partridge	1198	Heath Page	1292	Brian Perlis	1380	Bou Houliston
1111	J. Fish	1199	Ben Brogren	1293	Ethan Uhlig	1381	Doug "Dhomal" Raas
1112	Christopher Carmichael	1200	Jeremy Pinske	1294	Bob Riekkoff	1382	Brian Hefling
1113	Andrew D. Detmer	1201	Terrelle Shaw	1295	Patrice Demagny	1383	Danny Awalt Jr.
1114	Michael Gamboa	1202	Katie Chaffin	1297	Jym Coke	1384	Arksanktuary
1115	Jacob M	1203	Jobin Veach	1298	Cory Matt	1385	Mark Muston Jr.
1116	M. Luther	1205	David A Smith	1299	Alberto Faria	1386	Jeremiah Lee
1118	Ted Kremenek	1206	Josue Pena	1300	Zachary Morris	1387	Johnathon Daigle
1119	Valerie Newell	1207	Tim Recker	1301	Chelle Thayer	1388	Gabriel Gauthier
1120	Andrew Primus	1208	Luke Fabis	1302	Jordan Jeovanny	1389	Mary & Chris Bidwell
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1122	Chris Matthews	1210	Rafi Spitzer	1304	Brendan Heap	1391	Ehrich Blackhound
1123	Adam Howell	1211	Idilio Santos	1305	Martin Kern	1392	Broc Smith
1124	Nancy Luo	1212	Joe Younger	1306	Walter McWilliams	1393	Anders Jansson
1125	Andrew Turpin	1213	Brenton Heath	1307	Micah R. Maloney	1394	Rafael Hynes-Bishop
1126	Robert Cain	1214	Tyler Sutherland	1308	Genevieve Cogman	1395	Andrew Swaney
1127	Hunter Becker	1217	Sean Werner	1309	Blake Webb	1396	Roymond Olson
1128	Reindert van Dam	1218	Christoffer Voll	1310	Joshua Leshner	1397	Norman Obst
1129	Cadence Yungwirth	1220	Nicholas Allen	1311	Ian Priestster	1398	Daniel Klinglesmith V
1130	Damien Penn	1223	Jack Ulrich	1312	C. Kettering	1399	Tudy

1400	Kenneth Gatt	1491	Koest and Mellula
1401	Steven Cairnduff	1492	Iain Sims
1403	Michael Field	1493	Petr Burian
1404	Markus Emrich	1494	Andrés Fernández Noriega
1405	Peter Farsang	1495	Pia Pedersen
1406	Iris Gehrman	1496	Heather Waite
1407	Philipp Leito	1498	Miguel Puig
1409	AK Grey Wolfe	1499	Harrison
1410	Askorn	1500	William Filios
1411	Jamie Andreson	1501	Keith Chapin
1412	Igor Valster	1502	NGWMJason
1413	Courtney Fisher & David Ramirez	1503	Nathan Gribble
1414	Olof.N	1504	Steve Slaggy
1417	Jonathan Stockwell	1505	Japhet Palencia
1418	Simen André Knutsson	1506	Scott Berry
1419	Jeremy V	1507	Siobhan Durkan
1420	John M. Portley	1508	Sophie Hunter
1421	Daniel Jimenez Vera	1509	Andy Gullikson
1422	Loki Carbis	1510	William Fellars
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1425	Sabina Walter	1513	Christine Miller
1426	Stoffe	1514	Axel Tuohy
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1440	Alexander Engel	1530	Sterling Bates
1441	Kevin Martin	1531	Damien Kirby
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1459	Bastian Djuretic		
1460	Lo		
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1467	Arnaud MAURY		
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1473	Xia Chang		
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1475	Dan Vehslage		
1476	Scott Ace Wall		
1477	Cherlyn Cochran		
1478	Stuart Woodhall		
1479	Wayne Rossi		
1480	Dylan Moore		
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