

AGE 12+

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS[®]

THE BOOK OF VILE DARKNESS[™]



ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT

Robert J. Schwalb

W&M

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS[®]

THE BOOK OF VILE DARKNESS[™]



DUNGEON MASTER'S BOOK

Robert J. Schwalb





CREDITS

Design
Robert J. Schwalb

Cover Illustrations
Wayne Reynolds, Wayne England

Development
**Stephen Schubert (lead), Jeremy Crawford,
Tanis O'Connor**

Interior Illustrations
**Tom Baxa, Zoltan Boros, Anna Christenson, Eric Deschamps,
Steve Ellis, Wayne England, Colin Fix, Ralph Horsley,
Tomasz Jedruszek, Todd Lockwood, Christopher Moeller,
Chris Seaman, Brian Snoddy, Skan Srisuwan, John Stanko,
Chris Stevens, Gabor Szikszai, UDON, Eva Widermann,
Sam Wood, Kieran Yanner, James Zhang**

Editing
**Tanis O'Connor (lead), Dawn J. Geluso,
M. Alexander Jurkat**

Additional Proofreading
Daniel Helmick

Cartography
Mike Schley

Managing Editors
Christopher Perkins, Jeremy Crawford

Graphic Designer
Trish Yochum

D&D Senior Group Manager
Mike Mearls

Publishing Production Specialist
Erin Dorries

D&D Senior Producer
Christopher Perkins

Prepress Manager
Jefferson Dunlap

D&D Senior Creative Art Director
Jon Schindehette

Imaging Technician
Carmen Cheung

Art Director
Mari Kolkowsky

Production Manager
Cynda Callaway

D&D Brand Team
**Liz Schuh, Kierin Chase, Laura Tommervik,
Shelly Mazzanoble, Chris Lindsay, Hilary Ross**

Special Thanks
Steve Richards, Brian Rudnick

Game rules based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® rules created by **E. Gary Gygax** and **Dave Arneson**, and the later editions by **David "Zeb" Cook** (2nd Edition); **Jonathan Tweet**, **Monte Cook**, **Skip Williams**, **Richard Baker**, and **Peter Adkison** (3rd Edition); and **Rob Heinsoo**, **Andy Collins**, and **James Wyatt** (4th Edition).

620-34416000-001 EN
ISBN: 978-0-7869-5868-9



First Printing:
December 2011
9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

U.S., CANADA, ASIA, PACIFIC,
& LATIN AMERICA
Wizards of the Coast LLC
P.O. Box 707
Renton WA 98057-0707
+1-800-324-6496

EUROPEAN HEADQUARTERS
Hasbro UK Ltd
Caswell Way
Newport, Gwent NP9 0YH
GREAT BRITAIN
Please keep this address for your records

WIZARDS OF THE COAST, BELGIUM
Industrialaan 1
1702 Groot-Bijgaarden
Belgium
+32.070.233.277

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, D&D, Wizards of the Coast, *The Book of Vile Darkness*, *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, *Monster Manual*, *Rules Compendium*, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*, *Dungeon Master's Kit*, *Monster Vault*, *Manual of the Planes*, *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*, *Demonomicon*, *Player's Option: Heroes of Shadow*, all other Wizards of the Coast product names, and their respective logos are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast in the U.S.A. and other countries. All characters, and their distinctive likenesses are property of Wizards of the Coast LLC. This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast. Printed in the U.S.A.
©2011 Wizards of the Coast LLC, P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707. Manufactured by: Hasbro SA, Route de Courroux 6, 2800 Delemont, CH. Represented by: Hasbro Europe, 2 Roundwood Ave, Stockley Park, Uxbridge, Middlesex, UB11 1AZ UK. Please retain package for future reference.

Visit our website at DungeonsandDragons.com



DUNGEON MASTER'S BOOK

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

EVIL UNEARTHED	4
Product Overview.....	6
The Book of Vile Darkness.....	6
Evil in the Game.....	8

CHAPTER 2

EVIL CAMPAIGNS	10
Creating Evil Adventurers.....	12
Evil Adventuring.....	14
Campaign Themes.....	17
Campaign Arcs.....	18

CHAPTER 3

VILE ENCOUNTERS	22
Creating Vile Encounters.....	24
Vile Terrain.....	27
Vile Curses.....	29
Vile Diseases.....	32
Vile Traps and Hazards.....	35

CHAPTER 4

VILLAINS AND MONSTERS	40
Creating Villains.....	42
Vile Monster Themes.....	46
Chaos Beast.....	47
Devotee of Darkness.....	49
Doomdreamer.....	50
Maenad.....	51
Moilian Dead.....	52
Slave to the Nine Hells.....	54
New Monsters.....	58
Angel, Fallen.....	58
Demon, Hordeling.....	60
Devil, Wrath.....	61
Dragonspawn, Nhagruul.....	62
Filth Hag.....	64
Tsochar.....	65

Vile Organizations.....	68
Chosen of the Sun.....	68
Dark Brotherhood.....	68
Disciples of Nhagruul.....	69
Kargatane.....	70
Servants of Xopos.....	71

CHAPTER 5

DARK REWARDS	72
Cursed Items.....	74
Sinister Items.....	77

CHAPTER 6

THE VILE TOME	80
Adventure Background.....	82
Adventure Synopsis.....	82
Running the Adventure.....	83
Book of Vile Darkness (Artifact).....	83
Encounters.....	86
Ending the Adventure.....	95

PLAYER'S BOOK

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
Playing Evil.....	2
Evil Adventuring Groups.....	3
Creating an Evil Adventurer.....	5
Arcane Evil.....	7
Divine Evil.....	7
Martial Evil.....	8
Primal Evil.....	8
Psionic Evil.....	9
Shadow Evil.....	9

THEMES	9
Cultist.....	11
Disgraced Noble.....	13
Infernal Slave.....	15
Reaver.....	17
Vile Scholar.....	19

PARAGON PATHS	21
Blood-Crazed Berserker.....	21
Contract Killer.....	22

Demonologist.....	23
Idol of Darkness.....	26
Vermin Lord.....	27

EPIC DESTINY	28
Exemplar of Evil.....	28

FEATS	29
Adventurer Feats.....	29



Evil Unearthed

"I have examined this book, perused its pages, and inspected the reflections of those despicable authors who have added their peculiar insights into this most foul work, yet I refuse to see this tome as evil. This book is just a book. Where evil exists in regard to this tome is in the intent behind its use. I can imagine how a wretched man with darkness in his heart might find the contents here instructive to feeding his vile ambition. Yet can we not also see how a virtuous man might scan these same pages for insights into how he might triumph over that same darkness? This book is a tool and nothing more. Do not be put off by the sharpened edges and the curious odors wafting from its pages."

—Shemeshka the Marauder

SOMETHING ABOUT evil fascinates us, but who can say what turns a person into a monster, what compels an individual to commit unspeakable acts? This tome pulls aside the veil to reveal evil as it manifests in the worlds of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® roleplaying game.

In the D&D® game world, the *Book of Vile Darkness* is considered by many to be the most evil and blasphemous of all tomes. It is a catalog of wickedness, a repository of wisdom for those in service to evil, and a compendium of all things foul. The tome is an infection, a dark presence that uses temptation and corruption to bleed into societies. Handling the manuscript corrupts the innocent, and its lore destroys as it spreads like cancer through the minds of its readers. Thus, this sourcebook shares the damnable book's title. And in its pages you will find everything you need to make evil worthy of its name.



RALPH HORSLEY



PRODUCT OVERVIEW

This product includes two books and a foldout battle map. The book you hold in your hands is intended for the Dungeon Master (DM), and it contains everything you need to place evil on center stage in your games. It offers extensive advice about building villains and running campaigns for evil adventurers. It also includes an assortment of tools to test and shock your players. It concludes with an adventure that explores what might happen when heroes come across the *Book of Vile Darkness*, and it includes combat encounters that use the battle map.

The second and smaller book is a guide for players interested in creating and playing evil adventurers. Since not every DM is keen to run a game featuring evil adventurers, it's ultimately your decision whether the options presented in the player's book are available to your players. Evil campaigns can be fun and interesting, but they often end badly—with a pile of dead characters as the only reward for your trouble. That said, you might find evil adventurers provide a refreshing change of pace to your group's normal roleplaying experience.

Before you turn the page to explore the wickedness piled inside, please know this product in no way aims to glorify evil or encourage deviant behaviors. Instead, these books are designed to give you a little nastiness with which to darken your games and present unforgettable challenges to your players.

A final warning: If you use this material, be prepared. Your players might never forgive you.

OTHER RESOURCES

The Book of Vile Darkness is a toolbox for showcasing evil in your games. With it, your villains come to life, environments ooze corruption, and, ultimately, you will defeat your players' expectations. What this book is not is a comprehensive overview of evil, in all of its incarnations, found in the various D&D® settings. There are plenty of great sourcebooks that do this already. *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead™* provides an in-depth look at undead, while *Demonomicon™* does the same for demons. For information on the gods, the planes, and their inhabitants, the *Manual of the Planes™*, *The Plane Above: Secrets of the Astral Sea™*, and *The Plane Below: Secrets of the Elemental Chaos* all offer great insight. Finally, the *Monster Vault™* and *Monster Manual®* series of books also provide information on various evil creatures beyond this product. In short, this book works best when used in conjunction with your other sourcebooks to create truly vile creatures and encounters of your own design.

THE BOOK OF VILE DARKNESS

"There is not a moment in the long years of my life when darkness did not shroud my thoughts. Looking back through the veil of time, I recall well those early lessons, living a life apart from others due to the stain my family bore upon their souls. We were untouchable, outsiders, cursed, a people known for consorting with the forbidden. Such a life brought great suffering and want, yet I believe the hunger I felt and the resentment brimming in my soul laid the foundation for the greatness I have since achieved.

"My mother's identity shaped my earliest life. I recall well her sacrifices, the mewling cries of small animals dying beneath her sacrificial knife. I remember her horrid coupling with things that bore no resemblance to natural creatures. She was stern and cruel, yet she was the greatest teacher I have ever known. Though I have no love for her and was gladdened when the people burned her alive for consorting with fiends, I owe her a great debt. Without her, I would not be who I am today.

"I mention these memories not out of some maudlin need to explore my origins or as some justification for the actions I have taken in my mortal life. Rather, I bring them up here, in this work, to explain this manuscript's purpose and to reveal to you the power and wonder residing within darkness.

"Before any legitimate discussion on the nature of evil can begin, it is first necessary to dispense with the misapprehensions about evil commonly held by those moralizing proselytizers who seek to redeem the corrupted, to save those who have fallen into shadow, and to foster virtue in all they meet. Evil is not an absence of good. It is not a choice. It is not some crime, such as murder, theft, or deviance. It is not service to a reprehensible master; nor is it devotion to some dark power. Evil is one of two forces in the cosmos, an agency locked in eternal struggle against its antithesis. This war has only two sides, the light and the dark. And the whole of creation is both their battleground and the prize for which they vie. Do not be deceived into thinking a middle path will present a way to rise above the struggle. Only good and only evil exist. And not even a hair's width of space separates them.

"My mother understood this. She embraced her nature. She welcomed the darkness into her soul and profited from it. And though she found agony and death for her allegiance, her legacy lives on in me and my works.

"This, then, is why I wrote this book, why I labored to complete my studies on evil and preserve its legacy for all time. This book I leave as a testament to my service to evil and also as a guide to others who would follow my steps into the vile darkness. These contents exist to understand evil's myriad expressions, to learn from them, and to use them. And though I have embraced the darkness, I know my understanding of it is not yet complete. Therefore, I leave this book open to others to add to its lore with a goal of creating a more

perfect understanding of what it means to serve evil and to wield its power.

"I have but one warning before I leave you to your awakening. Resist not the truths I and perhaps others record here. Open your mind and heart to the knowledge contained on these pages. Only then will you understand and receive the wisdom darkness can provide. Should you falter, should you feel the treacherous pangs of guilt and shame, understand that this book will know. And when this book is roused, it will destroy you. Embrace the lore and spurn the light, and you too shall ever after walk in darkness."

—Vecna

No description adequately evokes the fear and revulsion experienced by those who have encountered the dreaded *Book of Vile Darkness*. An ancient tome, it is said to be the foremost authority on evil, exploring every manifestation of darkness as it appears throughout the world and the planes beyond. It corrupts and destroys all whose eyes fall upon its filthy pages. It is a unique tome. There is no other of its kind or equal. Copies do exist and some might even contain excerpts from the original, but all are fragmentary—flawed, imperfect facsimiles lacking in the true power contained by the original work.

The *Book of Vile Darkness* is not a traditional tome; it is never fixed or complete. The book is always changing. New pages replace the old. Each time the book falls into wicked hands, its contents evolve. Those with the power to master the book are free to replace, revise, and add to its contents, and the tome changes form and composition to reflect the interests of its user. Anyone else—anyone too weak, too good, or too easily frightened—finds annihilation as his or her only reward.

Vecna is often credited as the book's original author, and the introduction quoted above seems to confirm this. Others have argued that Vecna came upon the tome during his rise to power. The book's secrets proved a contributing factor, along with Kas's betrayal, to the archlich's apotheosis. Some point to another figure as the original writer—a horrific monster called Nhagruul, who allegedly fashioned the tome from his own flesh. Nhagruul supposedly crafted the ink from his blood and bound his very soul into the manuscript. A third belief holds that anonymous seers of Tharizdun, the Chained God, created the book as a tool to annihilate the works of law and chaos—the worlds of the gods and the primordials. The tome's true origins are likely lost forever, since its changing nature and numerous contributors make it difficult to identify the original author.

The book is a great, ugly thing, its black patchwork cover held in place by heavy metal plates and adamantine wire. Claws and teeth sprout from its spine, while a heavy iron hasp and padlock hold the book closed. Textual revisions and additions are immediately obvious

when examining its contents. Most pages are parchment, likely made from humanoid skin, though other sheets are made of thin lead, a dragon scale, or stranger materials. The writing's clarity ranges from lucid to incoherent, some in tight, neatly cramped rows and others in insane scrawls spattered with drool and blood. Diagrams, illustrations, and commentary from past owners break up the text. The book is almost impossible to navigate rationally, and learning anything useful from the book requires long hours of study.

It is hard to guess why this book was originally written. Many believe that the book was intended to serve as a profane liturgy for priests of the newly ascendant Vecna, and one can find passages in Vecna's surviving entries of the book similar to parts of other works authored by the archlich. The writing covers a wide range of grisly subjects—ritual sacrifice, demon husbandry, methods of extracting pain from the innocent, and so on. One does not read the book from front to back, since there is no order or structure to its contents. Instead, a reader leafs through the book, letting the corruption in his or her soul guide the eyes as they fall upon the page, to glean what lore the book bestows.

Devouring the tome rewards the dedicated reader with profound insight into evil's machinations, aiding the scholar in refining individual talents, while adding fuel to the corrupt fire burning in his or her breast. To all others, this book is an accursed thing, an object to be torn asunder, burned, its ashes scattered to the four winds. The darkness within the tattered pages is palpable. Those of pure spirit unfortunate enough to handle the text find their flesh blistering almost instantly. For those daring to read it, many things might occur: death is the most common result, the reader's brain liquefied in place. Others are driven mad or so corrupted they become monstrous things, filthy wretches beyond redemption. There are a few—perhaps those the book chooses—who find wisdom in the erratic text, and with that wisdom plunge into true villainy.

EVIL IN THE GAME

"I have heard it said evil is nothing more than good's absence, as if evil was the darkness to good's light. A comforting thought, I imagine, for those seeking redemption, but, I tell you, put such thoughts from your mind. You need only peer into a demon's eyes to know evil is not some vacuum waiting for virtue to come and fill its emptiness. Evil is a force. It is an influence in the cosmos, an agency equal to or perhaps even greater than its antithesis. There are two sides in this eternal struggle, one light and the other dark. You might find evil's works reprehensible, yet to those whose hearts belong to corruption, good deeds are equally deplorable. Understand, there is no redemption, only treason against the side you were born to serve."

—Asmodeus, Lord of the Nine Hells

The capacity for evil lies in every thinking creature, just as vital as the potential to do good. Most creatures are divided. Virtue wars against dark desire, the cosmic struggle between these two forces played out on the smallest stage of one life. Committing what some might think an evil act does not make an individual evil, so long as the individual retains the ability to do good. What constitutes true evil is an inability to recognize good as a preferred state, to perform good deeds, and to fight against the darkness within. This descent into evil can be described as a staining of the soul, revealing the influence of evil in its purest form—vile darkness.

Certain authors of the *Book of Vile Darkness* claim good and evil were never part of Creation's underpinnings. In the beginning, only the contest between order and chaos existed. Eventually, order brought stability and godly worship to the worlds that the primordials had so crudely fashioned. It wasn't until Tharizdun plucked a shard of darkness from the furthest reaches of the cosmos that evil was born. And in reaction, good was born. Though this unusual thesis pervades the writings of the blasphemous tome, most moralists reject it.

Vile darkness, evil in its purest form, is a soulless emptiness permeating the cosmos. It spreads like so much spilled ink, staining everything it touches. Although it is possible to survive contact with this overpowering evil, it will always exist in the creatures, places, and objects manifesting it, and thus it can never truly be contained or defeated. It is possible to destroy Orcus, but the evil the demon lord represents will eventually infect or reanimate something else to take his place. There is no escape from vile darkness, and the struggle between it and exalted goodness will rage until the end of all things.

Spread of Evil

"It would be convenient to say that evil has in some way been a constant presence since the primordials first spun a world out of raw chaos. Such a tale would be deception. As much as good and evil shape the cosmos today, they are in fact intruders, forces introduced not long after creation by a mad god deceived and seduced by evil's allure."

—Zagig Yragerne

Evil's influence is undeniable. It exists in the places stained by dark deeds and in the ruin left in devastation's wake. Evil relies on its servants to expand through the planes, and it regularly lures creatures into its embrace. These thralls are utter slaves to darkness. Their every work, regardless of their plans and ambitions, serves only to perpetuate evil's spread with greater and greater acts of villainy.

The method of contagion might vary from individual to individual, but there is an underlying structure to evil's agency. It can be best described as a process consisting of three broad phases; domination, corruption, and annihilation.

Domination

"I am nothing more than I am—the son of a witch and a demon lord. It is my birthright to claim this world, to conquer it and crush my enemies beneath my heel. You have a choice, then, knowing as you do that I am clear of vision and purpose. You can kneel and accept me as your master, or you can die."

—Iuz the Old

Evil is insidious. It tempts. It is the easy path. Why negotiate with an intractable opponent when it is far easier to simply kill and take what you want? Why cultivate when you can steal? Why love, when lust's fulfillment is all you need? Evil's attraction arises from the freedom it promises and the power it grants. By abandoning a moral code, one can do what one wants with no regard for the consequences of those actions. Evil frees the darkness residing in each and every individual by dismissing repercussions and celebrating desire's swift fulfillment. Evil uses temptation to initiate the domination of formerly moral creatures. It might seduce or compel, but the result is the same: the action, if undertaken, is the first step onto evil's road.

One can see domination at work across the planes. Devils are the purest example of domination. They mislead and corrupt mortals either through promises of pleasure (the succubus), greed (the pit fiend), or brute force (the bearded devil). But devils do not have a monopoly on domination. Dark gods such as Tiamat or Bane demonstrate evil's efforts to subjugate the weak and bend them to their will. Domination also manifests through the actions of lesser conquerors in

the world, from the marching hobgoblin armies to the cunning mind flayer who manipulates thralls from the shadows.

Dominators are predominantly evil.

Corruption

"It is easy for you to judge me, seeing me as an undead monster, my brother's blood staining my hands, with my true love's ghost tormenting my waking dreams, but you cannot know evil's allure. You cannot understand how easy it is to take the dark path when the road of light and goodness is so hard to walk. I was not always the creature you see before you. Once I was a good man, as good as any other. I cared for my people, I loved life and living, and I sought to leave the world better than how I found it. Yet one betrayal, one treachery was enough to show me the truth I dared not believe, that good and evil are illusions and that there can only be action. So I followed this dark path, and as I walked, I found it easier to accept the future I had chosen. Do I regret? Perhaps. But I am committed to my journey and to claim what is mine by rights."

—Strahd von Zarovich

One dark deed is not enough to condemn a creature as irredeemable, but it is the first step, and evil is never content with a touch when an embrace beckons. The first temptation is one of many to come and the more the individual succumbs, the greater evil's hold. This corruption brings with it an inability to see any other option aside from the most expedient one—the one that tightens evil's hold on the world. With each wicked deed, the individual becomes more inured to the pangs of conscience. One murder might be difficult, but each murder after the first becomes easier and easier, until the creature becomes defined by its wicked deeds. All it takes is to be touched by vile darkness for evil to take root and thrive in the fertile soil of the soul. And the deeper the corruption runs, the more it spreads, afflicting the body and mind until the individual's wickedness becomes unmistakable.

Goblins, bugbears, and drow demonstrate how evil, once it takes hold, can turn an entire people to immorality, twisting them into something both less and more than they once were. Corruption is also present in many aberrant creatures. The Far Realm might be the purest example of evil as a corrupting influence, as revealed in the foulspawn. The same can be said for darkness pervading the Shadowfell and those creatures who embrace its power, such as intelligent undead, necromancers, and blackguards. Not even the gods are above corruption, as demonstrated by Torog and Zehir, who seem to wallow in their moral failings.

Corruptors are evil.

Annihilation

"So much talk of good and evil bores me!"

"To understand evil is to understand true power."

"Don't you lecture me!"

"Maybe we should focus on killing Asmodeus."

"That spineless thief? I will spill his brains with that scepter of his and take back what he stole from us!"

"What a splendid idea!"

"Platitudes! From you? Ha! You are trying to deceive me!"

"Really, Aameul, your paranoia will be our undoing."

"My paranoia will be your undoing! I know your game!"

"Can we at least agree that evil, in its purest form, is complete annihilation?"

"Never!"

—Aameul and Hethradiah, the two heads of Demogorgon, Prince of Demons

If there's one constant with all of evil's expressions, it is that evil eventually turns on itself. Evil is destructive. It devours anything and everything that it can until there is nothing left. When it has wrung every use from its servants, when it can drive its thralls no further, it turns them against each other until nothing remains.

Annihilation is evil's final state. It is the fate of all who serve evil and it is the ultimate aim of vile darkness. Creatures tempted by darkness and then corrupted by it are almost always destroyed in the end. Likewise, evil that manifests in the world spreads out, stains what it touches, and then collapses under its own excess. While this might be a comforting idea for those sworn to fight evil, once the vile darkness reaches annihilation, it attains its most destructive and persistent aspect and nothing short of total extinction can end its threat.

Certain creatures in the natural world have already become thralls to annihilation. Orcs, gnolls, troglodytes, sahuagin, and other creatures are wild, unpredictable races made monstrous by their soulless pursuit of utter destruction. As awful and threatening as these creatures are, they pale before the true horror embodied by demons. These shrieking hordes, led by those powerful lords who carve up the Abyss into petty kingdoms, boil up from the depths to visit destruction onto the world unlike anything it has ever before seen. Mirroring these efforts, but less restrained, are the slaads, who might very well be vile darkness personified. Add to those the various primordials and princes of Elemental Evil, the fallen and corrupt gods Gruumsh and Lolth, and countless other forces swelling from the deep places in the world and beyond its bounds, and one can see the struggle against vile darkness is not one to be won by simply waiting out the storm.

Annihilators are chaotic evil.

Evil Campaigns

"The line between hero and villain is so faint, it might as well not be there at all. Disagree? Consider this: A group breaks into a residence, kills everyone inside, and then makes off with anything of value. Robbers sacking a roadside cottage are named villains for such a deed, yet adventurers who storm a goblin warren and do the same are dubbed heroes. The difference? You tell me because I cannot see it."

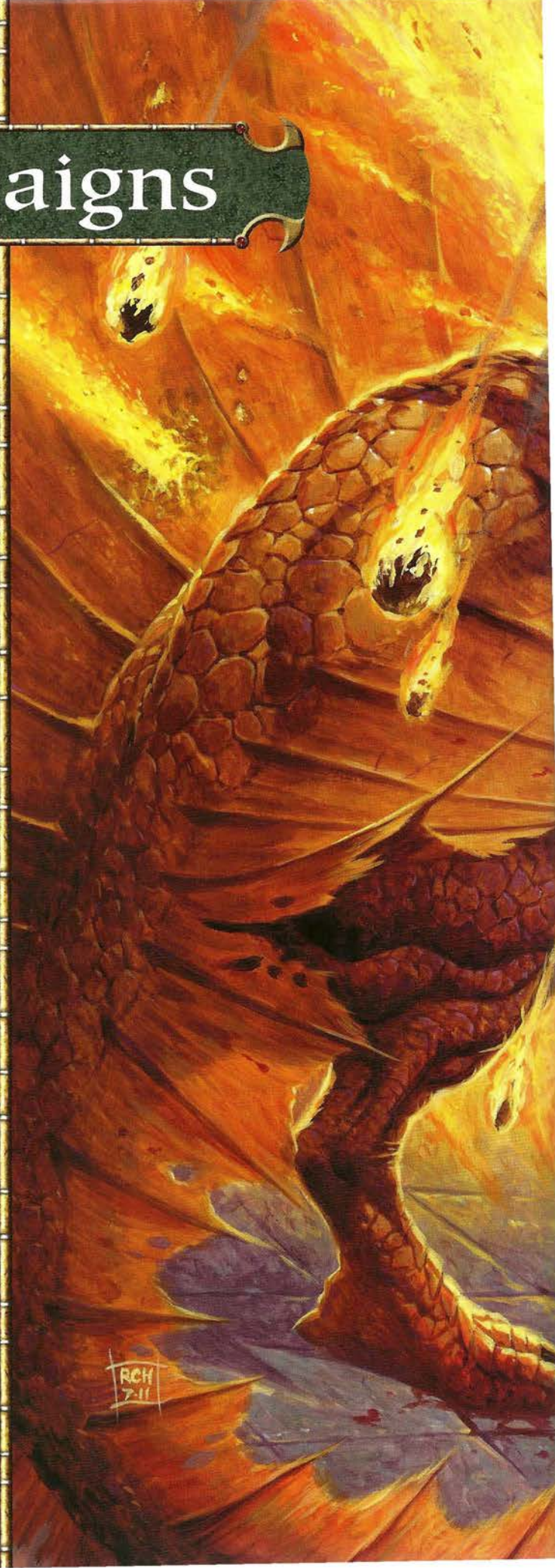
—Lord Robilar

THE CORE rules urge players to stick with unaligned or good alignments and spend their time fighting evil and its machinations. That said, playing villains can be exciting. Since *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* has room to permit this darker experience, this chapter sets out to give you tips and advice for running games featuring evil characters.

Before you allow players to use the rules in the accompanying player's book, it's a good idea to review this chapter first. It includes advice on the following topics.

- ◆ **Creating Evil Adventurers:** When building evil characters, players must pay special attention to class and race.
- ◆ **Managing Evil Characters:** Keeping adventurers working together despite their differences can be a difficult task. This chapter presents ideas that can help limit their potential for disruptive behavior.
- ◆ **Evil Adventuring:** Evil characters' motivations and methods need to be considered when crafting an adventure.
- ◆ **Adventures Ideas:** You can use these plot options to construct or adapt adventures for evil parties.
- ◆ **Campaign Themes:** Apply these themes to tie campaigns to evil's three expressions—domination, corruption, and annihilation.
- ◆ **Campaign Arcs:** Two campaign arcs demonstrate how to construct linked adventures that involve aspects of vile darkness for good or evil characters.

RALPH HORSLEY



RCH
7-11



CREATING EVIL ADVENTURERS

"Do unto others before they do unto you."

—Slippery Ketta

The normal rules for character creation suffice for creating evil adventurers. Regardless of a wizard's alignment, all the rules related to wizards apply. That said, you should pay particular attention to a few elements.

Class: Most classes are not restricted to a particular alignment. The cavalier (see *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*) is a challenging exception, though, because the character must have an alignment that befits a virtue. That doesn't rule out a player taking the role of an evil cavalier. It just makes it tricky. Such a character could be a fallen paladin or an extremist who is cleaving to a fanatical view of the virtue and thereby working evil. Alternatively, you could alter the feature to accommodate a vice.

When a player chooses a class, work together to discover how he or she can use that class's features and powers for evil. You might want to swap out keywords to better accommodate the character. For example, you could replace radiant damage with necrotic damage for a death priest.

Race: A character of any race can be evil. An evil campaign might suggest using monstrous races, such as goblins or kobolds, or races whose stories have strong evil overtones, such as the githyanki and bladelings. However, racial entries for these creatures as presented in *Monster Manual* and *Monster Manual 2* are not balanced for player use and present challenges when used in a campaign. Rather than using the racial mechanics described in these sources, you could reskin an existing race. For example, a goblin character could use half-ling mechanics without changing anything about the race except its story. A full-blooded orc can use half-orc mechanics, and a githyanki can get away with using githzerai statistics.

PLAYER CONSENT

Use caution when allowing players to play evil characters. Disruptions aside, many players are uncomfortable with the idea of playing evil adventurers or participating in games that focus on such characters. *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* is a game of heroism, where good fights against evil. Therefore, evil characters turn the game on its head and might create situations where evil wins and creatures of virtue and goodness suffer for it.

Even though you might be amenable to allowing evil characters, be mindful of all players' interests, and be sure every participant is comfortable with the direction the game will take before embarking on such a journey.

Managing Evil Characters

Few Dungeon Masters are willing to consider allowing players to take up evil adventurer roles, and for good reason. One out-of-control evil character causes friction in a group. Unless somehow checked, the entire game can be derailed. Of course, interesting roleplaying and story opportunities arise from the occasional use of an evil adventurer or adventuring party. In the right situation and with proper planning, you can turn what might have been a disruptive experience into a rewarding one.

Cooperative Play

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS establishes two sides—good and evil—in the cosmic struggle. The game expects players to fight for good or at least lean in that direction. At some level, this expectation stems from the idea that the best D&D games are the ones that demonstrate heroism, cooperation, and boldness. Adventures assume characters will pit their talents against a cast of villainous foes and monsters, explore dangerous environments, and wrest fabulous treasures as spoils. Alignment has nothing to do with a character's ability to participate in these scenarios. It does, however, have everything to do with how a character engages in the scenario and his or her willingness to see a quest to its conclusion.

The difficulty many players encounter is that the evil alignment suggests a license to behave badly in the game. By scribbling evil in the alignment box, a player is somehow no longer obligated to participate in the team effort. Personal interests trump any quest the adventurers might undertake. And when competing agendas clash, conflict results—conflict that tears the party apart.

Evil characters might be self-interested scoundrels, but it is almost always in their best interest to throw in their lot with other characters. A lone adventurer stands little chance of defeating a dragon or surviving an encounter with a beholder, but an adventurer with powerful allies in tow can. Even villains understand their best chance of survival comes from surrounding themselves with like-minded allies.

The trick is to remind players their responsibilities extend beyond personal objectives to encompass protecting the links that bind the party together.

Unity

Even a party of lawful good adventurers will have a hard time finding success if each character pursues a different agenda. You shouldn't expect a party of evil characters to have any more success in a similar situation. The strongest and most unified adventuring parties have clear missions in which their objectives are more important than characters' personal agendas. In

other words, the major quest is always more important than a character's minor quest. As long as a party has an objective of equal importance to each of its members, you'll find evil characters can set aside their private ambitions long enough to achieve the party's goals. Use any or all of the following techniques to keep your players focused on the goal, whether you have one evil adventurer or an entire party full of evil characters.

Positive Connections

The most powerful tool for encouraging unity is to urge players to build positive connections between their characters. Have each player connect his or her character to at least one other adventurer in the party. Establish these connections during character creation to ensure they figure into characters' identities and motivations. The more connections you create between individual characters and the larger quest, the less likely players are to lose sight of what they're doing.

Good link options include siblings, romance, debts, shared enemies, enduring friendship, and shared beliefs.

Common Enemy

Evil characters turn on one another when they regard each other as potential enemies. When suspicions are left to fester, betrayal and treachery tear a group apart in little time. In addition to positive connections, you can keep a party together by presenting an enemy more threatening than the enemies they see among themselves. If characters feel threatened by a common foe, they will have little choice but to work together to survive.

The common enemy should be a campaign villain (page 43). You should create personal connections between the foe (or foes) and each adventurer to ensure personal enmity. For example, in an Underdark campaign, the common enemy might be dark elves or a particular drow house. Or adventurers might find themselves fighting a cult dedicated to Torog, a demon lord, or an archdevil. Then again, a good-aligned adventuring party could be a powerful threat that surfaces from time to time when the do-gooders make it their quest to put down evil's champions.



Patron

Connections and common enemies can offer some success at keeping an evil adventuring party together. But sometimes you might need to take a stronger hand to keep the group united, and that's when a patron can help. A patron is a character, organization, or power that employs adventurers as agents in the world. A patron sends characters on missions and either rewards them for their successes or punishes them for their failures. A patron can appear at the start of your campaign, in which case adventurers are likely goons or lackeys. Or a patron might emerge later, approaching the characters after they have made names for themselves.

For a patron to work in your campaign, evil adventurers must fear him or her more than they fear each other. Thus, a patron must be powerful, dangerous, and more villainous than the adventurers. He or she must have a connection to each character in the group to dissuade defections and treachery within the ranks. To coerce characters to act, a patron might threaten characters' loved ones (a good choice for unaligned adventurers), feed their addictions, withhold information about some important objective, or lend aid. A patron can also offer wealth, power, glory, and status to encourage loyalty.

Even though the classic patron is often a major villain, your group's patron need not be. The party might

be a shadowy arm of a good institution; a sect in service to a dark god; or a branch of an organization committed to toppling a corrupt government, politician, noble, merchant, or monster, such as a dragon or mind flayer. Certain campaigns might suggest other patrons. For example, githyanki characters might serve Vlaakith, and drow parties could work for a powerful priestess.

Service to a patron should not be a permanent situation. Your players are likely to plot against their patron and should, eventually, overcome their employer and take his or her place or gain independence. After their association ends, the patron could fade from the story or become a common enemy, depending on how the confrontation unfolds.

EVIL ADVENTURING

"I love adventurers. They're so . . . tasty."

— Ashardalon

Although evil characters require special considerations to encourage teamwork and cooperation, they are still adventurers and thus undertake many of the same exploits heroes do. Characters still chase after treasure, explore ancient ruins, and fight monsters. Alignment doesn't alter much about what they do; it only influences how and why they do it.

ONE-SHOT ADVENTURES

Given the pitfalls of using evil adventurers, you might be hesitant to invest time and energy in creating a full-blown campaign. Rather than build adventures for such characters, you could run a one-shot adventure related to your regular campaign.

Reversed Dungeon: Have players assume the monsters' roles. Players create characters of a single race, such as kobold or goblin, and start the game inside a dungeon environment. They explore, fight other monsters, and pit themselves against adventurers who invade their lair.

Behind the Scenes: Instruct players to create goons in the employ of a campaign villain, preferably one their regular characters have not yet met. The evil adventurers go on a mission that sets up a future adventure for their regular characters, such as murdering an important person, stealing a treasured item, or sabotaging a plan or important story development. When the one-shot adventure wraps up, collect the evil characters' sheets and use the villains against the heroes in a future adventure.

Motivation

One key difference between evil adventurers and their good or unaligned counterparts is their motivations for adventuring. Evil characters aren't likely to risk their lives to help the innocent and are not going to help those in need without compensation. Traditional adventure hooks might not work, so you will have to find other ways to draw players into the story.

Greed: The reward for performing a service must outweigh its risks. Even then, evil adventurers are likely to take more than they were offered. For example, they might rob their employers or claim their reward without completing their task. Adventurers are also apt to dicker over their fees, so you should set the payment low and allow players to haggle for a higher price. Do not, however, give characters the full reward up front. They should claim their prize when they complete the mission and can prove it.

Also, be ready for adventurers to double-cross their employers. Don't be surprised when characters return from a mission and then sack the town they just saved. You should never quash players when they are roleplaying. If you leave a situation open for their exploitation, let them do it to the best of their ability—even if doing so upsets your plans. Instead, think about the consequences of the characters' actions, and adapt the story to accommodate them.

Revenge: Even though the promise of reward can drive an evil party, revenge is a far stronger motivator. Evil characters are less likely to forgive slights or let a defeat go unpunished, as is evidenced when they plot against each other. Don't be afraid to harass characters during their adventures to draw them deeper into the plot. Be aggressive with your villains. Have them send goons and monsters after the adventurers. It won't take long for players to turn their attention to the source of their troubles and devote every resource toward destroying their foes.

Power: Evil adventurers crave power. Adventuring gives them a chance to gain levels and find magic items and other booty. The promise of personal power can draw a party into an adventure, but it can also turn its members against each other when they squabble about who gets what.

Hinting at great rewards and vast power should be sufficient to lure adventurers into accepting a mission. When it's time for characters to acquire magic items, give prizes out in groups to avoid conflict about ownership. Alternatively, you can offer specialized rewards, such as divine boons, legendary boons, and grandmaster training, to particular characters.

Methods and Consequences

Good and unaligned adventurers typically walk lightly through the world. They might wreak havoc in a dungeon environment and wipe out infestations of nasty creatures, but between adventures, they are usually well behaved. Evil characters offer no such assurances. Their motivations and methods for achieving their objectives are what make them evil. They murder, steal, betray, and perform all kinds of nasty actions. Each time characters indulge their darker impulses, you must decide what consequences, if any, they face.

Resist the temptation to drop the hammer of justice on them. Evil characters are hardly evil if they don't do bad things. You wouldn't deny a paladin the chance to risk his or her life to save an innocent, so you shouldn't deny a thief the opportunity to pick pockets in a crowded inn or an assassin the chance to knife a victim in a dark alley. Let players play, within reason. Sacking a town, murdering an innkeeper, poisoning a merchant, or some other action is fine as long as it aligns with a character's personality.

However, if adventurers satisfy their evil tendencies too often, they should suffer consequences. Ambushing too many caravans eventually attracts the attention of a local government or an adventuring band. Killing townspeople results in demands for justice and an official search for the culprit. Civilization cannot tolerate unchecked evil and moves to contain dangerous elements to safeguard its future.

Keep track of what characters do and where they do it. Think about how the world would react to characters' actions, and come up with suitable consequences for those actions. A few close calls with righteous knights and witch hunters should be enough to curb players' enthusiasm for carnage and mayhem.

Of course, wicked characters don't have to be destructive and uncontrolled. They might be subtle or cunning, revealing their evil tendencies only in special situations. Evil characters are still people and, thus, their moral failings manifest in a variety of ways. Urge players to look beyond obvious caricatures and to regard their characters as complex individuals who are willing to act in ways others find objectionable.

Adventure Ideas

It's not difficult to create adventures or adapt existing adventures to accommodate evil characters. Like heroes, wicked adventurers can profit from fighting evil, chasing rare items, and exploring dangerous environments. Of course, how you hook them is apt to differ (see "Motivation" above).

The following plot options can form the foundations of new adventures or be woven into existing adventures to infuse them with a darker essence.

Ambitious Deception

To get into a noble's good graces, characters launch a smear campaign against their enemies in the noble's court. They might attempt to fabricate evidence and commit crimes to blame on their foes. One mistake, however, can unravel everything and bring the noble's vengeance down on their heads.

Ambush a Caravan

Adventurers learn a caravan laden with treasure and goods is bound for some distant port. When they strike, characters find it is under heavy guard and must fight for their lives. If characters defeat the guards and plunder the goods, they find a curious item of significant value, an item whose theft earns them a powerful enemy.

Betray a Hero

A famous adventurer learns about the evil characters' talents and recruits them to right a wrong or destroy a vicious monster. If they betray their employer, leaving him or her to die while they make off with the treasure, the hero somehow escapes certain death or returns as an undead monster. Whatever the case, the hero wants revenge against the traitorous party.

Corrupt a Hero

Adventurers work to persuade a famous hero to embrace darkness. They might kill the character and turn him or her into an undead monster, use temptation, or methodically destroy things and people their target loves until he or she succumbs to darkness.

Destroy a Good Creature

Characters hunt good creatures for sport, to harvest something from them, or to steal their treasures. Common targets include metallic dragons; good fey creatures, such as unicorns; and servants of good gods.

Destroy a Temple

Adventurers plunder a temple or holy site dedicated to Erathis. Temples are famous for their riches and, thus, are ideal targets for irreverent, greedy miscreants. They might kill its attendants or burn the site to the ground. Of course, such actions earn adventurers a slew of new enemies, including paladins, clerics, and possibly even Erathis's angels.

Found an Evil Temple

Seeking a boon from an evil god or dark power, the adventurers set out to found an evil temple in their patron's name. To do so, they must find a relic,

consecrate it in darkness, and perform a sacrifice on the blasphemous altar they raise.

Get Revenge

After a rival group, organization, or villain knocks adventurers on their backsides, they immediately plot revenge. Players know any attack against the offending party will only result in more conflict. To truly destroy their foe, the adventurers must destroy everything their enemy cherishes until it has nothing left.

Murder a Hero

A sly villain hires the characters to assassinate a well-liked and prominent hero. Players must gain intelligence about their target, make arrangements, and accomplish the deed. Of course, after their victim keels over, they invite retribution from their target's friends and won't find shelter from their employer. Also, efforts taken to return the murdered hero to life could further complicate matters.

ADAPTING PUBLISHED ADVENTURES

Published adventures expect characters to be good or unaligned, and most hooks and quests depend on it. You can still use these adventures for evil characters, but you will need to alter the circumstances to accommodate far darker motivations.

Compensation: Increase the monetary reward for completing a quest by 50 to 100 percent and deduct this value from the treasure the adventure rewards. A big reward can replace a hook that relies on goodwill or doing the right thing.

Player Driven: Rather than presenting hooks to players, let them drive their involvement. Maybe a dungeon holds a powerful magic item a character wants, an important clue, or the adventurers' common enemy.

Active Enemies: Evil adventurers are particularly likely to skip out on their employers and not finish their mission. To combat this tendency, have enemies actively attack characters after they've begun the adventure. Repurpose skipped encounters as surprise attacks to hook players back into the plot.

Switching Sides: Evil adventurers are not above switching allegiances mid-adventure. Serving the adventure's villain might be more profitable than helping the people who hired them. In the villain's employ, characters might undertake different missions. If that's the case, reskin monsters (for example, turning gnolls into elves) in skipped encounters so the missions make sense.

Perform an Evil Ritual

Characters find a dark ritual that could increase their power or spread despair in the world. To complete the ritual, adventurers must obtain a particular focus. The focus might be a despicable object or a victim to sacrifice to the dark powers.

Raid a Community

Characters raid a community for supplies, treasure, or slaves. A quick attack takes defenders by surprise and hands adventurers a decisive victory. Not long after, a local lord recruits a good adventuring party to hunt down the wicked adventurers before they can attack again. To survive, characters must either confront their trackers or find a place to lay low.

Rob a Grave

During an adventure, characters learn about a coveted Dawn War relic hidden in an exarch's tomb. Nine angels protect the site. To breach the inner vault, characters must carve a path through the guardians or survive a gauntlet of challenges before facing the exarch's restless ghost. If they secure the relic, the spirit curses them. If cursed, characters must find a way to lift the malediction or die.

Sow Discord

Characters actively work to dismantle a government or person of power. They could spread discord, destroy buildings, incite riots, commit murder, and perform any number of other destabilizing actions, all while concealing their involvement in the resulting upheavals.

Spark a War

Adventurers learn a valuable treasure was lost somewhere in a ruined castle a large humanoid tribe overran. Rather than storm the site, they attempt to convince a rival tribe to attack. They could use kidnapping, sniper attacks, or false accusations about the chieftain's daughter to frame the holed-up tribe. Minor skirmishes won't draw away enough attention from the castle's defenses, though. What adventurers need is a full-blown war and heavy casualties. Such a distraction should prove enough for adventurers to explore the ruins without interference.

Steal a Treasure

Having learned about a magnificent item a local lord possesses, adventurers plot to sneak into the lord's castle. If they manage to sneak past the guards and breach the inner sanctum, they discover an expansive treasure hoard. On the way out, laden with spoils, the lord's only child blocks their escape. If adventurers kill

the heir in their bid to escape, they must contend with the righteous wrath of the wronged noble while trying to find a way to sell off the treasure that now names them killers.

CAMPAIGN THEMES

"This world, I fear, has outlived its usefulness."

—Emirikol the Chaotic

Campaigns featuring evil characters typically have darker themes tied to one of the three major expressions of evil: domination, corruption, and annihilation (see Chapter 1).

The following campaign themes can form the bones of new campaigns or be mixed with existing themes to bring out more sinister atmospheres and tones.

Conquest

A simple campaign theme, conquest is not limited to particular alignments. In a conquest campaign, characters want to seize power and hold it. They might aim for temporal power, waging war across the world to forge a new and dark empire, or they could set their sights higher, venturing into the Astral Sea, the Abyss, or another plane to carve out a realm for themselves.

Characters spend much of their time amassing power, building armies, and waging war against their neighbors. While securing the territory they have claimed, they also quest for weapons and rituals to use against enemies and engage in negotiations to forge alliances with other lands and powers. If the campaign moves into the planes, adventurers could build a vast network in the natural world and use it to fuel strikes into other realms.

Deicide

Killing a god is no small act, and wicked characters are not the only adventurers who could have a motive for doing so. Evil gods, for example, could be plotting to destroy the world or irrevocably damage it. To give such a campaign a nefarious spin, evil adventurers could target the gods to steal their power or destroy them for kicks rather than trying to foil plots. The gods are among the game's most powerful beings. As such, they are well prepared to handle threats against them.

Characters spend much of their careers fighting off the gods' servants, dealing with dark forces to grow their power, and venturing into the game's most dangerous locations to face off against their chosen foes. At the campaign's end, adventurers might face their enemy alone in his or her dominion, or they could face several gods who have come together to end the threat to their reigns.

Destroy the World

Many campaigns focus on saving the world from a catastrophe. In this campaign, however, adventurers are the agents of its undoing. Characters might be active instruments in the world's demise—turning gods against each other, rousing the primordials, or calling forth an elder evil—or they might be pawns in a mad god's cosmic game to rip Creation apart.

Regardless of their roles, characters face a lonely, hostile world as both good and evil forces attempt to thwart their efforts. If adventurers are active agents of the world's destruction, they might enlist the aid of sinister forces, such as demons or slaads. In contrast, adventuring pawns might be surprised when such creatures come to their aid. In the end, characters die, complete their task, or switch camps to try to stop the cataclysm they've helped set in motion.

Evil Against Evil

This campaign pits evil adventurers against evil opponents. Since evil is inherently destructive, it turns on itself when it can spread no farther. Perhaps evil has already won, and the last lights in the world have been extinguished. Despite being evil, the characters are the world's last hope against annihilation. Alternatively, adventurers might be agents of a dark power or servants of a dark god on a quest to defeat their patron's enemies. In any event, they are anti-heroes, and through their efforts, the world will live or die.

Evil Against Good

Characters represent evil's best hope in triumphing over the light. Perhaps good drove back the darkness in a recent conflict, and now characters must restore the balance. Or maybe players are running beastly adventurers who are driven to spread mischief and suffering wherever they go until a force rises up to stop them.

At the start of this campaign, characters might hatch foul plots and commit heinous deeds to weaken good's hold. As the evil adventurers gain power, they find more dangerous foes opposing them, ranging from powerful adventuring groups to divine servants. This campaign likely culminates when characters confront a major and dominant force for good and defeat it.

Other Campaign Themes

To adapt the following *Dungeon's Master Guide* campaign themes (pages 134–36) to accommodate evil adventurers, recast what is at stake and how adventurers are involved. If you want a simple game with little narrative structure, consider running a “Dungeon of the Week” campaign, in which alignment has only a minimal impact. The “On a Mission” theme is also easy to use. Just be sure to choose a goal that aligns with characters’ identities. For example, adventurers could set out to recover the fabled *Book of Vile Darkness*, explore Bael Turath’s ruins, or wage war against metallic dragons serving Tiamat.

Even “The Ultimate Villain” theme can be adapted to suit evil characters. For instance, an evil group might oppose a demon lord on principle or fight against a noble archfey in the Feywild. You don’t have to set the villain as a being of godlike power either. Maybe characters take on a gold dragon that has subjugated the Nentir Vale’s populace.

“World-Shaking Events,” “Unfolding Prophecy,” “Divine Strife,” and “Primordial Threat” are as likely to feature evil characters as they are good ones. For instance, many wicked adventurers are happy with the world as it is. So whether a threat comes from the Far Realm or a primordial villain awakening in the Elemental Chaos, evil adventurers are likely to team with heroes to prevent a power shift. Additionally, prophecy doesn’t care about good or evil. It chooses players in its drama from both sides. Finally, the gods have set aside their moral differences in the past and can do so again to contain a common threat. Not even Zehir wants a world with the Chained God free. Thus, his mortal servants could find themselves fighting alongside Bahamut’s to combat the Cult of the Elder Elemental Eye.

As you can see, evil characters can be protagonists. Despite employing different and perhaps unsettling methods, they can still pursue objectives normally assigned to heroes. You need only shape your story’s circumstances so evil characters’ motivations line up with the campaign’s objective. Thus, even though they’re thralls to darkness, they are still advancing the plot in meaningful and interesting ways.

CAMPAIGN ARCS

“Were you sent by that bloated, filth-ridden failure, the Lord of Flies? If so, I must tell you—you can do better.”

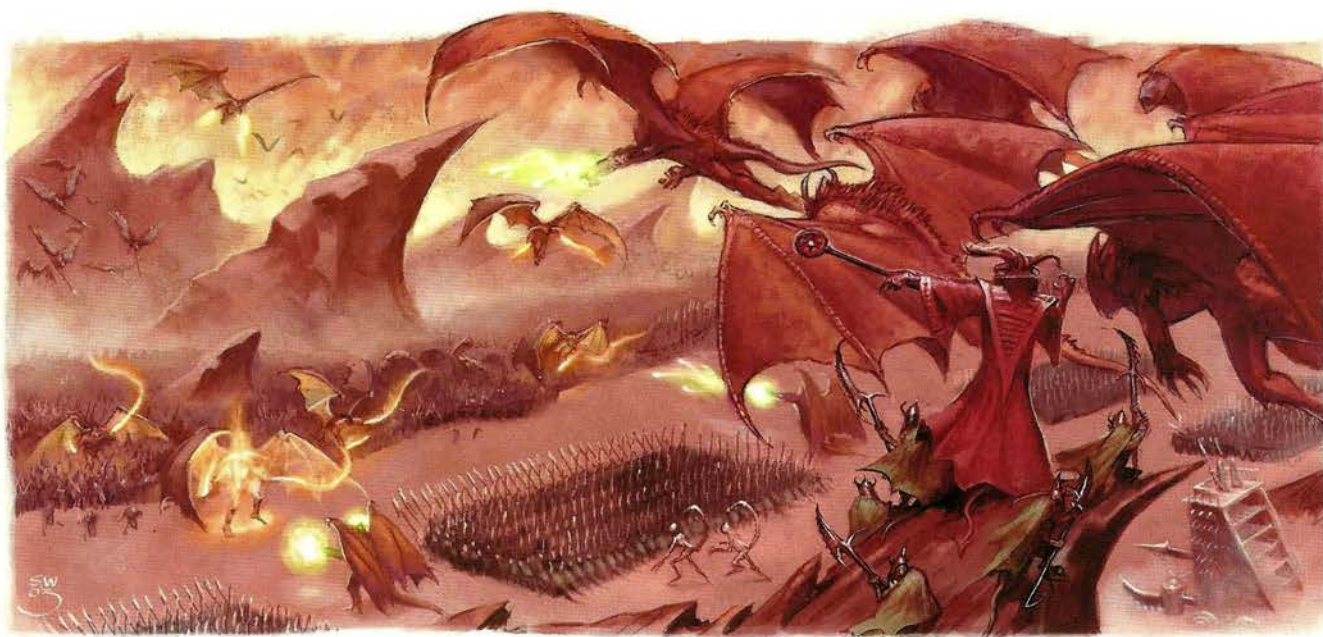
—Glasya

The most effective use of vile darkness elements is to sprinkle them into an existing campaign, so pure evil can magnify an adventure’s stakes. Deviant behavior in a combat encounter, a sinister environment, or a lethal disease can all go a long way toward conveying evil in its purest form without seeming over the top. The trick to incorporating vile darkness concepts is to use them to emphasize threats and reinforce major story components. When applied in this way, vile darkness preserves its power and reminds players of what exactly they are fighting.

The following campaign arcs can serve as the basis for vile campaigns. Rather than provide a blow-by-blow account of what happens, each entry includes a broad description of events that should occur at each tier. Use these arcs as frames on which to construct your own adventures.

War for Hell

For all his fawning and servile promises, the archdevil Baalzebul has chafed under Asmodeus’s curse. Of



course, he earned it for his part in sparking the Reckoning of Hell, wherein the archdevil led an uprising against Asmodeus. If not for the traitor Geryon, Baalzebul might have ousted the supreme ruler of the Nine Hells. Instead, he remains bound in a slug-like form. Having spent ages amassing power and brokering alliances with demon lords, the Lord of Flies stands ready to reclaim his mantle and continue the work he began so long ago.

Heroic Tier: As Above, So Below

This campaign begins with a murder. Characters are called to investigate because the victim was an influential figure (for example, a noble, a merchant, a priest, or a wizard). More murders follow the first. In each case, the target was an influential person. Through their efforts, adventurers discover the victims were secret followers of Asmodeus and the Six-Fingered Hand, a vicious cult dedicated to the demon lord Graz'zt, is responsible for the slayings.

Shortly after characters defeat a Hand faction, more cultists surface, and they release fearsome demons that rampage across the countryside. After defeating these threats, adventurers discover Graz'zt's devotees are conspiring to cleanse the land of Asmodeus's influence. With some nasty plot probable, characters dig deeper between adventures and discover a connection between the Six-Fingered Hand and a diabolist named Ruel.

Tracking down Ruel is not an easy task. Adventurers eventually discover he haunts a crumbling castle. Fighting their way through monsters and hazards, adventurers strike at the castle and confront Ruel in a terrible battle. Just as Ruel dies, he cries out to the Lord of Flies, begging to be saved. This utterance reveals an archdevil might be involved and hints at troubles brewing in the Nine Hells.

Paragon Tier: Drawn into Darkness

Characters' efforts have not gone unnoticed. Glasya, sensing her father's peril, sees an opportunity for her own advancement. The archdevil dispatches her aspect in the guise of Ashari, a priestess of Ioun, to recruit the adventurers. Ashari claims her goddess fears unrest is churning in the Nine Hells. She asks characters to travel to Sigil to investigate and report back by using a magic item she provides. Ashari recommends adventurers speak with Shemeshka the Marauder, a dangerous but well-connected raavasta (*Manual of the Planes*, page 136) almost certain to have the information she needs.

On reaching Sigil, characters discover Shemeshka isn't easy to find, but trouble sure is. They wind up embroiled in escapades and side treks that divert them whenever they draw too near the elusive fiend. During their adventures in Sigil and beyond, characters learn

demonic hordes are mustering for war in the Abyss, Graz'zt might be responsible, and the archdevil Bel has laid siege to the infernal city of Dis.

The situation turns darker when adventurers finally locate Shemeshka, who reveals a plot to unseat Asmodeus. If it succeeds, even the planes could be ripped asunder. The raavasta explains that Asmodeus alone can control the darkness contained in his ruby scepter. And if the relic falls into the wrong hands, it could reignite the Dawn War. Finally, Shemeshka reveals—with proper compensation, of course—Geryon is moving to murder Glasya and claim her realm. Such an act would weaken the lord of Nessus enough that his enemies might succeed in ousting him.

The paragon tier concludes when adventurers race to the Nine Hells to save Glasya from Geryon's attack. Characters must infiltrate the Nine Hells, battle countless devils, and reach the archdevil's palace, where Geryon and his yugoloth thugs trap them. Just as adventurers defeat Geryon, word reaches them that demons have invaded Avernus.

Epic Tier: Battle for Baator

War in the Nine Hells dominates the epic tier, and adventurers must decide whether to choose sides.

When the epic tier begins, Graz'zt and lesser demon lords crush the Dark Eight (a covenant of pit fiends) and shatter Bel's armies from behind. Disater rallies his defenders for a time. But as weakened as they are from Bel's siege, the outcome appears hopeless.

Regardless of whether Glasya was killed, Baalzebul successfully pins her death on Levistus, an easy task since the archdevil Levistus ages past slew Bensozia, Asmodeus's consort. In a rage, Asmodeus commands Mephistopheles to destroy Levistus and orders Baalzebul and Mammon to shore up Dis's defenses. Meanwhile, Belial reveals secret ways into the city to allow the demonic host to spill inside. Thus, Dis falls before aid can arrive. When Baalzebul arrives, he, Belial, and Graz'zt join forces, coercing Mammon into accompanying them, as they march against the lord of the Nine Hells.

Adventurers are not idle while these plots hatch. They have several potential patrons: Glasya, Asmodeus, or Baalzebul. Depending on with whom they ally, adventurers find themselves drawn into the plot. They might fight to conquer or save Dis, stall the demonic hordes on their descent into the Nine Hells' bowels, or reveal Baalzebul's hand in all the treachery.

The ideal outcome sees adventurers uniting Levistus and Mephistopheles (rulers of the Nine Hell's most frigid layers) to throw back the upstarts and thus restore order to the Nine Hells. However, if characters make too many missteps, Asmodeus could be deposed and a new power could rise in his place. The consequences for such an event are left to you to decide.

Hunger of the Nine-Tongued Worm

One by one, the faint lights strung along civilization's frontier gutter as darkness, embodied by the warlord Korthak Maal, swallows them.

Rumor outweighs fact when it comes to Maal. Reports claim the mating of an orc witch and a demon bred him. Others say he is the last living son of deceased King Elidyr and is cursed to walk the world as a revenant until all traces of Nerath are erased. Some have whispered Maal is nothing more than a chieftain clad in lies designed to spread terror as his uncounted hordes tumble out from the night.

Regardless, Korthak Maal has never known defeat, and no force has been able to slow his march. It is against this backdrop the campaign begins.



Heroic Tier:

Invasion of the Nentir Vale

Promises of glory and riches, and perhaps the responsibility to protect one's homeland, inspire adventurers to journey to the Nentir Vale (as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*), where a seething host is heading. A call to arms has been raised in the town of Fallcrest, and all the land's heroes are converging to raise an army to throw back the evil masses.

Along the way, characters happen upon a sacked hamlet littered with rotting corpses atop which carrion eaters feast. An investigation of the ruins reveals not everyone fell to the sword. Tracks leading away from the hamlet indicate some villagers were marched away.

Following the tracks leads adventurers to an old ruin where orc scouts in service to the warlord Maal have staked their claim. When battling the orcs, characters notice their enemies' atypical forms and behavior. As each orc is slain, something tiny slithers away from its twitching corpse. It appears these orcs were infected with tsochar parasites (see Chapter 4). The battered prisoners are also infected with the parasites, as evidenced by their strange behavior and mutations.

Exploring the ruins reveals an underground complex filled with pungent, writhing alien creatures. Adventurers eventually enter a temple-like chamber deep below the surface world. Foreign carvings and invocations to the Nine-Tongued Worm decorate the earthen walls. While inspecting the domed room, filthy monstrosities boil out from the darkness.

If characters survive the confrontation, they manage to reach Fallcrest in time to contribute to the vale's defense. From this point forward, the heroes undertake missions to fight the horde, including engagements against the warlord's champions.

The heroic tier ends when characters participate in a grand battle against the invading army. Their contributions on the battlefield allow the vale's defenders to drive back the enemy, at least for a time. Yet the victory is bittersweet, because adventurers find more foreign worms wriggling among the dead—and not all of them slithered from their foes.

Paragon Tier: Evil Within

With the threat to the Nentir Vale contained, at least for now, adventurers are free to research the troubling phenomenon and any specimens they might have acquired along the way. After much fruitless searching, characters come away with only a name: Uri Tantovar. An occultist and well-known expert on all things strange, he vanished after looking into an unusual occurrence in the Dawnforge Mountains. Having no other leads, adventurers head off in search of Tantovar.

During the trek, players have several chances to undertake other adventures. Each reveals a bit more about what happened to Tantovar. It appears he and his companions vanished as they searched for a pulsing light in the hills. Adventurers eventually gain the information they need to reach the site, where they run into a creature that used to be Erin, one of Tantovar's companions. Mutated beyond recognition, she's accumulated several monstrous allies and has been troubling the surrounding lands. Defeating her reveals what happened to Tantovar; he found the light, and when it flared, he vanished.

Reaching this dead end, characters return to the Nentir Vale, where they discover a terrible plague has crept across the region from the west. Madness and mutation afflict everyone who contracts the disease. Old allies from the war beg the adventurers, who haven't yet been exposed, to find a cure. More investigation reveals the plague is connected to the parasite, and cultists are being accused of intentionally spreading it.

The paragon tier ends when characters raid the cult's stronghold, battle through its alien servitors, and cleanse the infection from the site.

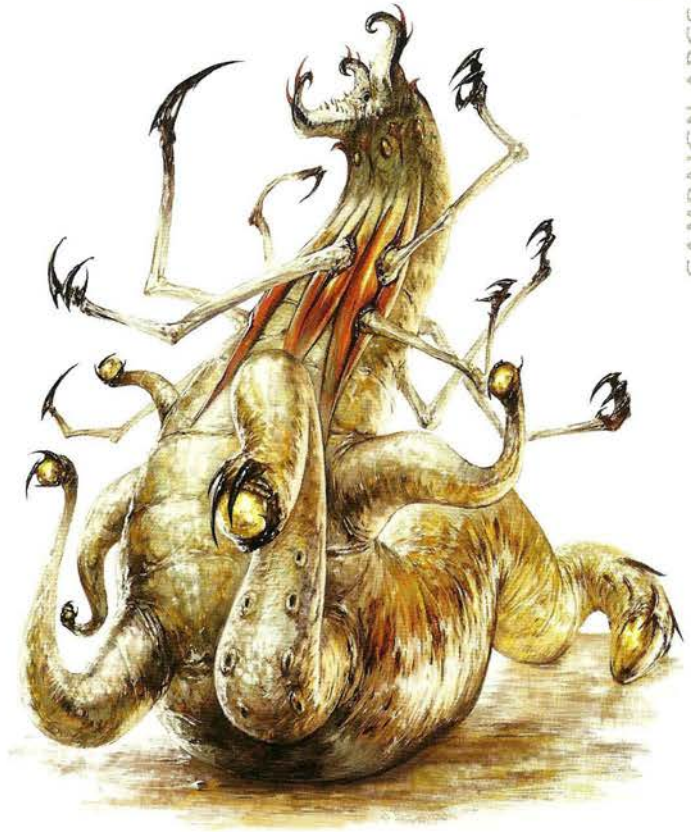
Epic Tier: The Scholar Returns

Destroying the cult ends the sickness, and adventurers are lauded across the vale. Before long, however, dire news reaches their ears. Korthak Maal has returned and is leading an even larger army. Scouts report soldiers under the warlord's banners are twisted mutants that scramble and claw, and they are completely under Maal's thrall. If destroying the cult eradicated the plague, perhaps killing the warlord can unmake the gruesome host.

Now in the epic level, characters should have little problem dropping in on the villain. When they do, they discover he's in the process of opening a rift to the Far Realm. As the portal yawns wide, characters learn Korthak Maal is Uri Tantovar, and he's returned to reveal his true master, the Nine-Tongued Worm, to the world.

After adventurers defeat Tantovar, they must contend with the rift. They have the power to temporarily seal it. But to permanently shut the portal, adventurers need to repair the fabric of time and space. To do so, they must travel to the lost dominion of Shom (*Manual of the Planes*, page 107) and find a creation sigil that can repair the damage. If they fail, the Nine-Tongued Worm, Mak Thuum Ngatha, is sure to break free.

The journey to Shom is perilous, requiring a long expedition through the Astral Sea. The party must battle githyanki pirates, aberrant horrors, and ancient abominations while they track down the dominion. Such work might require dubious bargains and



full-blown expeditions. Eventually, adventurers locate Shom and are free to explore its desolate deserts in search of the fabled Lost City where they recover the sigil from the scourge dragon guarding it.

Having gained the creation sigil, characters must race back to the portal in the natural world. Just as they arrive, Mak Thuum Ngatha breaches the wards and emerges. While adventurers perform the ritual to unlock the sigil's power, they battle the tentacled horror leaking into reality.

The campaign concludes when characters drive back the elder evil or die trying.

Vile Encounters

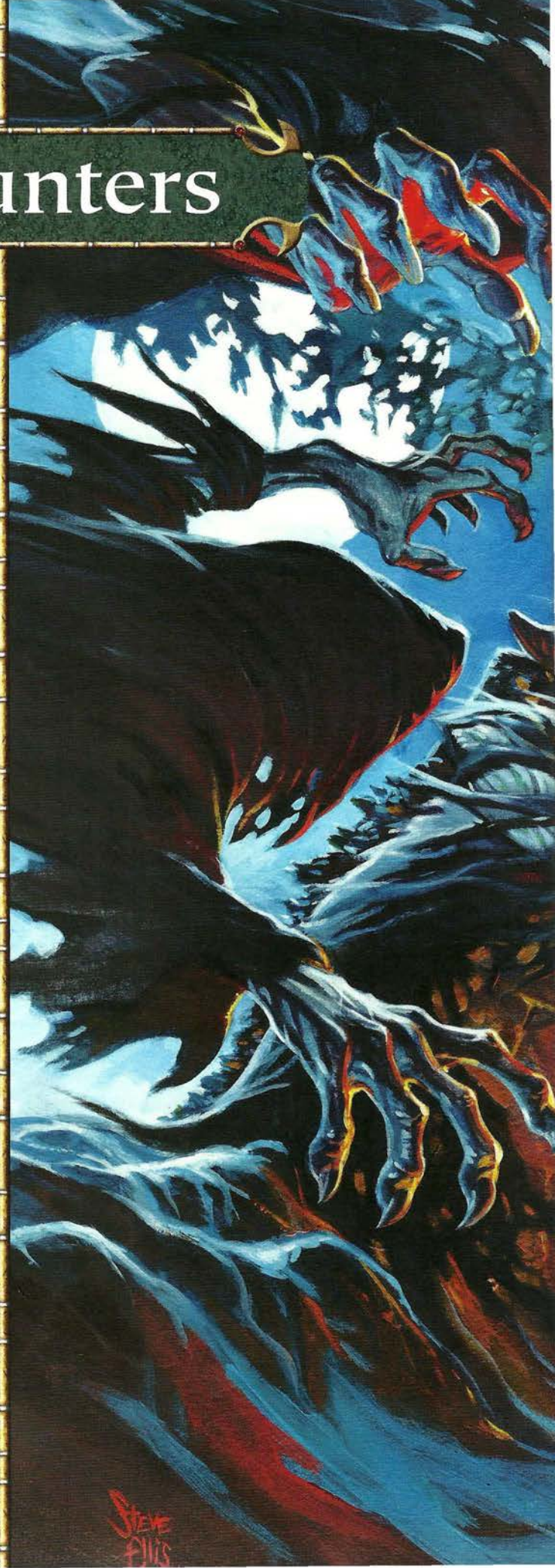
"Through my many adventures, I have had cause to interact with creatures most profane, and these encounters have taken place in some of the most desperate and alarming environments. I have peered into the Abyss and evaded demons thirsting for my blood and slaving for my flesh. I have walked the Old One's gallery and gazed at the walls, lined with skulls of those he had slain during his rise to power. I have witnessed the fiery Nine Hells, glimpsed the impossible vistas of the Far Realm, and descended into the lower planes to wage war against Chaos itself. Each time, I was astonished by the sheer diversity of those that mortals have deemed evil and delighted in the sheer ingenuity displayed in their myriad horrible forms. Truly, while this book has proved invaluable in my own efforts to ensnare gods beneath my fabulous abode, to say nothing of my magical research, I fear it cannot do justice in describing the extent to which shadow truly darkens the world."

—Zagig Yragerne

THERE ARE places in the world where unspeakable acts have been performed, spots where the very laws of nature have been bent and fissured with vile magic. These shadowed demesnes bear the mark of vile darkness's expansion, and once sullied, they are rarely made clean again.

Adventurers have many opportunities to encounter such sites. From sprawling dungeon complexes to ruined cities, heroes venture to the darkest places to confront evil's lackeys. From floating earthmotes to shattered battlefields, brave heroes beard their foes in their lairs and witness firsthand what is at stake if they fail to win the day.

This chapter presents a variety of tools to help you showcase evil's influence, including vile terrain, curses, diseases, traps, and hazards. It also offers tips and tricks for building encounters featuring truly evil adversaries.



STEVE ELLIS



CREATING VILE ENCOUNTERS

"The path to power is fraught with difficulties. Arrayed on all sides are those do-gooders who believe it their duty to obstruct your efforts. It is not enough to arm yourself against these foes, for each one slain only underscores your apparent threat and inspires others to continue the work begun by those with whom you already dealt. In effect, slaughtering adventurers will consume your time and thus frustrate your long-term plans.

"A better solution for dealing with such enemies is not to confront them, but rather to lure them onto battlefields of your choosing—ones adequately prepared for the inevitable hero intent on your death. My tomb has served me well in this regard. The heroes believe I reside there, hiding in some deep vault waiting for the final death only an adventurer can deal. I, in fact, am nowhere close to the tomb. I trust in the traps and guardians I set there to keep the ruse alive and lure tomb robbers, group by group, to an unspeakable end. Thus have I been able to go about my business untroubled by their sort . . . untroubled by interference of any kind."

—Acererak

Fighting evil is a frequent cause for adventure. Whether battling goblins in the Chaos Scar or venturing into the Underdark to breach the Vault of the Drow, D&D campaigns often feature evil monsters in deadly environments. Each quest completed is a setback to the forces of darkness pitted against civilization, the good, and the world itself. Yet just because these encounters include evil creatures and take place in sinister places doesn't mean they qualify as vile encounters.

A vile encounter is more than battling orcs menacing a frontier village; it's more than defeating a necromancer raising an undead army, or slaying the dragon in its lair. While these scenarios pit the heroes against villainous agents, in themselves they aren't vile unless they have some truly heinous quality to set them apart from other encounters.

For example, the orcs might raid the village to round up prisoners whose sacrifice will complete a ritual, calling forth an aspect of Gruumsh to terrorize the countryside. The necromancer, to bolster the number of dead available for animation, might unleash a horrific plague to prime a community for his dark magic.

In each example above, the villains pursue terrible objectives, ends so foul they leave the world changed for the worse. Creating undead is an evil act, but murdering the living to swell the numbers of zombies and skeletons is vile. Raiding a village and burning it to the ground is evil, but subjecting prisoners to untold horrors before cutting their throats for a profane ritual

is vile. In short, these encounters demonstrate vile darkness in action, and showcase evil as an active and destructive force in the world.

Vile Encounter Basics

Every encounter relies on the notion that the objectives sought by two or more forces have come into conflict. One side seeks an end and finds its efforts to attain its objective frustrated or thwarted by the opposition. Orcs guard a temple passage from intruders and the adventurers must move through the same temple to find the Shrine of Apollyon. The conflict's resolution is the heart of the encounter's story.

Vile encounters are no different from other encounters in this regard. In each instance, the adventurers find themselves confronted by enemies seeking an end counter to their own. A vile encounter, however, differs from others by the nature of the objective, the methods used to attain it, the opposition, environment, risks, and consequences for failing to thwart the opponent's agenda. In each case, these elements involve evil's pursuit of its most common goals: domination, corruption, or annihilation.

Creating a vile encounter or transforming an existing encounter into a vile one requires modifying these various elements so they demonstrate one of these aspects of evil. Not every vile encounter needs to or even should incorporate all of these elements, but so long as you offer one or two, you will create a different atmosphere for what would otherwise be a normal combat challenge.

Objective

The conflict driving combat encounters is created by mutually exclusive objectives. The easiest way to "evil up" an encounter is to modify the opposition's goal so that it corresponds with one of the three major expressions of evil. The following suggestions offer ways you might add elements of domination, corruption, or annihilation to your antagonist's objective.

Domination

An objective that works to spread evil in some way falls under the domination category. This might be something as simple as pure conquest, in which the villains place victims under their control or authority, or more complex, such as when the antagonist tempts a player character or someone else to commit an evil act. Should the opposition succeed in its goal, evil gains control over the target.

Example: A mind flayer's servants abduct several innocent townsfolk, believing they are Dream Keys, individuals able to open a portal to the Far Realm when properly motivated. When the adventurers confront the illithid, they find the victims have already been focused

to the task, and the only certain way to stop the portal from opening is to execute them.

Corruption

Corruption encounters are those in which the villains work to magnify an extant evil and increase darkness's hold on a person, object, or place. The initial pollution has already occurred, so it falls to the villains to increase evil's prominence. Simple corruption encounters are those where the stakes are immediately clear, such as a vile cultist performing a ritual to draw more demons from a tear in reality or to spread a disease beyond a contaminated village's borders. More complex corruption encounters often focus on the evil within the adventurers or nonplayer characters, whose temptations are not always apparent from the start.

The best corruption encounters are those whose stakes are revealed partway through or even at the end of the scene. The adventurers might believe they fight one sort of enemy, only to learn they have a different and far deadlier foe. Unlike domination encounters, which are typically straightforward, corruption encounters can and should be subtle yet their consequences far-reaching.

Example: A succubus kills and then impersonates an individual who is important to a player character in order to get close to the adventurer and turn him or her to darkness. This nonplayer character should be a spouse, a lover, a parent, or a mentor. The succubus remains in this guise for many years, subtly influencing the player character, urging the hero to undertake strange missions that often have unsettling consequences. When the succubus finally reveals its true nature, the adventurer should be shaken and conflicted about what to do, since it is not clear where the devil begins and where the lost ally ends.

Annihilation

The mere intention to kill or destroy the player characters does not make an encounter an annihilation encounter. Most battles feature opposition driven by this motivation. For the encounter to be truly vile, the target marked for destruction must be something good, innocent, and pure. The goal should be destruction or desecration for its own sake. This is mindless violence, performed by creatures so consumed by evil that they cannot behave in any other way. Annihilation encounters are easy to construct since you only need to determine what it is that evil wants to eliminate. Complexity increases with the scope of the impending destruction. A simple annihilation encounter might feature a demon set loose in a town, while a complex example might feature a death cult performing a ritual to lure Atropus, the World Born Dead, to darken the skies and end existence.

Example: Unhinged devotees of Juiblex, the Faceless Lord, infiltrate a frontier community. In order to breed the slimes they worship, they unleash a vile plague in the streets. Whenever an infected person dies, slime slithers free from the corpse. The encounter pits the adventurers against the cultists. When they destroy the cultists, the characters discover there is no cure.

Tactics

Objectives set the stage for a vile encounter by giving you a solid foundation for what is at stake. Though a vile objective is important, unless you demonstrate the creature's evil, the encounter will play out like any other. Tactics, then, are key.

What the creatures do and how they do it convey evil more than any other aspect of the encounter. Truly evil creatures are not likely to fight fairly. They might use disturbing spells or pursue courses of action the players should find reprehensible. You can demonstrate a creature's vile tendencies by using any of the following.

Betrayal: Vile monsters might exploit their allies to gain an advantage. They attack their allies to clear a path to reach the adventurers or use powers that sacrifice injured allies to damage the adventurers or to just recover from its own injuries. For example, a demon just called forth might kill its summoner first before attacking the player characters.

Disturbing Effects: You can describe a monster's powers in a way that reveals its vile nature. You might describe the sounds of screaming souls when a monster makes a fire attack. A character hit by a psychic attack might experience visions of loved ones dying in horrible ways. You can even make weapon attacks vile by describing how the villain strikes at sensitive areas, trying to maim the player character.

Kill Dying Characters: A vile monster will take the time to dispatch a dying adventurer. A vile wraith will certainly pause long enough to finish off a fallen adventurer if it can create another wraith. Although this is a viable tactic for vile monsters, it is one you should use sparingly.

Lingering Effects: An encounter with a vile monster should leave a lasting impression on the players. This might be something as simple as a scar or a wound that never quite heals, or it could be a disease or a curse (see page 29). During extended rests, the adventurers might suffer from nightmares after these encounters, or believe fervently that the monster might return at any time.

Opposition

Evil creatures are an obvious choice for stocking a vile encounter. The key is to use creatures likely to work toward the encounter's stated objective. In thinking about the opposition, always keep in mind a creature's story, its place in the world, and what causes it fights for. Demons are great candidates for annihilation encounters. Devils do well in both corruption and domination encounters. Although there are exceptions, most orcs prefer to chop up their foes rather than tempt others toward evil or nurse existing evil until it flowers. A night hag would find it more useful to take prisoners, later extracting their souls for some unspeakable purpose, than to just kill the adventurers outright.

Evil creatures aren't exclusive to vile encounters. Sometimes using a good or an unaligned creature in a vile encounter creates a far more shocking experience to the players. A gold dragon is all the more fearsome when possessed by a demon or driven mad by some evil treasure that found its way into the dragon's hoard.

Always consider the monsters' powers. Look for potent combinations to test your players. For an easy example, if you have a monster that deals extra damage to targets granting combat advantage, be sure to include other creatures that can daze, knock prone, or restrain to increase the extra damage's frequency. Monsters that can spread diseases, drain healing surges, spawn allies from dead adventurers, or deliver effects that can last beyond the encounter's duration are good choices.

Finally, your monster choice should reinforce the encounter's narrative. The monster should define or add to the encounter's objective and its stakes, and convey the proper mood for such an evil scenario.

Environment

You can enhance vile encounters by setting them in evocative environments that help communicate the encounter's objective. An appropriate environment can offer ways for the player characters to achieve their goals beyond simply slaughtering their opponents. Environmental tweaks might add extra complications and offer unexpected ways to defeat the enemies, or tools for those enemies to get an edge against the adventurers.

A vile encounter's environment doesn't always have to be a place steeped in evil. Desecrated temples, bizarre laboratories, and portals to malign realms are all suitable. Don't overlook places where evil seeks to gain a foothold. Vile darkness doesn't wait for heroes to root it out; it's an active and aggressive force, ever seeking to expand its influence through the planes. For this reason, these encounters can take place where good holds sway. Healing houses, temples

dedicated to good gods, idyllic communities, druid groves, tombs of fallen heroes, knight chapter houses, and similar locations can be excellent backdrops for vile encounters.

Ultimately, the environment should do three things: establish the stakes, reveal insights into the enemies' objectives, and reinforce the threat posed by vile darkness. Battling orcs on a desolate crag is something players expect to do. Discovering an orc tribe invading a sylvan paradise sacred to Corellon is startling, and the consequences for failure are far greater than the adventurers should allow.

Consequences

If the adventurers fail to defeat the enemies featured in a vile encounter, the world should be worse off. An encounter centered on summoning a demon might see that demon released to wreak havoc in a nearby community if the adventurers fail to contain it. Failing to prevent the goblins from burrowing under the Healing Lodge might cause it to collapse into the earth.

Make the players aware of these consequences from the start. You can be direct and set the stage up front, or you might foreshadow the implications in prior adventures and encounters. Doing so helps ensure that the players will make stopping the evil a priority.

If the adventurers fail to thwart the evil plan, be prepared to go through with it. Try not to back down from the encounter's implications, even if doing so would spare a prized nonplayer character or important location. A catastrophic failure can set up future adventures and give the surviving player characters a powerful motivation to right the wrong they had a hand in creating.

VILE TERRAIN

"Dungeons are the ultimate expression of cruelty. They exist for one purpose—to kill. How wickedly marvelous!"

—Iggwilv

The terrain described here supplements the fantastic terrain presented in the "Terrain Features" appendix of the *Rules Compendium*™. While these terrain features showcase evil's many expressions, other fantastic terrain such as blood rock and defiled ground is equally suited to vile encounters.

Agony Amplifier

Many clichéd stories claim that there is power in pain, and that instinctive reactions to agony can be harnessed and used to great effect. The agony amplifier lends validity to these theories by broadcasting one creature's pain to all those around it. Profane runes form the outer edge of such a ring, binding mental magic into its vile form.

Effect: An agony amplifier typically covers a space 3 squares on a side. Whenever a creature in that space takes damage, each other creature in the space takes 5 psychic damage per tier. If no other creature is in the agony amplifier, the triggering creature takes 5 extra psychic damage per tier.

Usage: An agony amplifier is most likely to be found in a dark priest's temple or wizard's lair. These circles are useful for convincing fiendish creatures to serve the binder that called them. They can also be used effectively by creatures that immobilize or restrain. Such creatures can lock down victims and then pile on the pain.

Carnage Stone

There are places in the world where evil has triumphed. These dark, blighted areas bore witness to great and terrible slaughter. Each innocent cut down on these sites leaves an imprint on the stone. Their psychic anguish bleeds out from their dying bodies and infuses the rock below. Creatures who travel across these damaged sites see flashes of the slaughter, from the perspective of either predator or prey.

Effect: Whenever a creature ends its turn on a square containing carnage stone, roll a d6. On an odd number, the creature falls prone. On an even number, the creature must make a melee basic attack as a free action against a random adjacent creature. If there are no adjacent creatures, the creature takes 5 psychic damage per tier.

Usage: Place carnage stone in sites that witnessed a terrible slaughter. Old battlefields, sites of genocide, and other dark ruins are good locations. Carnage stone adds an unpredictable element to combat, potentially shifting the battle for or against the adventurers each round.

Festering Corruption

The Feywild and Shadowfell bleed into the natural world, and vice versa. There are tales about travelers vanishing into Faerie while walking a lonely road at night. Likewise, most rural communities know well there are nights when the dead walk and when the shadow reaches out from the underworld to snatch the living.

Planar bleeds rarely last for long. From time to time, a bleed lingers long enough to leave an impression, and the memory of the merged planes lives on for anywhere from hours to centuries. Festering corruption is an example of one such memory, and it results when a part of the Shadowfell oozes into the natural world. Little can survive the dark plane's touch. Affected areas feature dead grass underfoot, bones littering the ground, and skeletal trees whose clattering branches rattle with each gust. Only the most filth-hardened creatures can survive in these places for long.

Effect: An area of festering corruption is usually no larger than 4 squares on a side. Festering corruption has two effects, one for the living and one for the undead.

Whenever a living creature ends its turn in an area of festering corruption, it must make a saving throw. On a save, there is no effect. On a failed saving throw, the creature takes 5 necrotic damage per tier and is slowed until the end of its next turn.

Whenever an undead creature ends its turn in an area of festering corruption, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls and its speed until the end of its next turn.

Usage: Festering corruption results in places where someone or something has compromised the planar boundary's integrity. Dark rituals, shadow magic, or the creation of powerful undead can all create pockets of festering corruption.

Forgotten Soul

The legends concerning the Raven Queen's rise to power suggest there is great power in souls, a power many vile creatures work to exploit. Most souls manage to pass through Letherna's gates for whatever fate awaits the dead, but a few find their final journey thwarted. Forgotten souls are wretched entities prevented from moving on because they are confused, imprisoned, or waylaid in some other way. Despair consumes them, and they infect the living with their sorrow.

Effect: A forgotten soul typically occupies 1 square. It does not block line of sight or effect, but creatures cannot move through its space.

On initiative count 10, a forgotten soul moves 1 square in a random direction into an unoccupied space.

Creatures adjacent to a forgotten soul grant combat advantage and take a -2 penalty to attack rolls. As well,



any creature that starts its turn adjacent to a forgotten soul must make a saving throw. On a save, nothing happens. On a failed saving throw, the creature is immobilized and takes 5 psychic damage per tier.

A creature can use a melee or a ranged attack to destroy a forgotten soul. The attack hits automatically, and the forgotten soul is removed from play. Forgotten souls are immune to close and area attacks.

Usage: Forgotten souls might linger individually or in small packs. They are most often found in dark dominions such as the Nine Hells, Pluton, or Shom, or in the most evil regions in the Shadowfell.

Green Fog

A swirling green mist spreads across the ground, moving despite the lack of a breeze. As strange as the mists are, their sinister nature is not revealed until a creature vanishes into the fog. The mist transforms and corrupts the unwary soul, twisting it into a horrid mockery of what it once was. Unless the creature can somehow shake the green fog's effects quickly, the transformation will become permanent.

Effect: A patch of green fog covers an area 4 squares on a side. Squares in the fog are lightly obscured. Each round on initiative count 10, roll a d4. The green fog moves a number of squares equal to the

die result in a random direction. Should the green fog move entirely out of the encounter area, remove the fog from play.

Any living creature that starts its turn in the green fog must make a saving throw. On a save, there is no effect. On a failed saving throw, the creature becomes a green fog mutant (save ends). Until the effect ends, the creature takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls, speed, and skill checks, but gains a +2 bonus per tier to damage rolls.

If a creature ends the encounter still subjected to the green fog's effects, the effects are permanent until the creature is the recipient of a Remove Affliction ritual or similar magic.

Usage: Green fog is not natural to the world; it originated in the Far Realm. For this reason, the queer mist only appears in tortured landscapes and warped terrain where the Far Realm's influence has been felt.

Hellfire

Hellfire is a rare flame created by extracting energy from a tortured soul. Found almost exclusively in the Nine Hells' deepest reaches, these vile flames burn uncontrollably in areas where souls are gathered.

Effect: Whenever a creature that is not a devil enters a square containing hellfire or starts its turn there, it takes ongoing 5 fire and psychic damage per tier (save ends). If the creature is bloodied, the damage increases by 5. In addition, whenever a creature takes ongoing damage from hellfire, the creature cannot take opportunity actions or immediate actions until the start of its next turn.

Usage: Hellfire is common to the Nine Hells and rare elsewhere. Diabolists and those in service to Mephistopheles might know how to create hellfire and use it to ward their lairs.

Larvae Pool

Among the many crimes one can lay at the feet of the night hags, the worst is their propensity for stealing souls bound to the Shadowfell. They warp their prisoners into squirming maggot forms called larvae, stuff them in bags, and slip away before anyone notices their villainy. The night hags use the larvae for their own dark rites and as currency for payment to other fiends in return for their loyalty or services.

Effect: A larvae pool covers a 2-square-by-2-square area and is difficult terrain. Any creature that ends its turn prone in the pool cannot crawl or stand up (save ends). Each time the creature fails a saving throw against this effect, the creature takes 5 damage per tier.

Usage: Larvae pools are found anywhere night hags are likely to haunt and might be guarded by demonic or devilish soldiers and brutes, especially those that can knock creatures prone.

Lingering Evil

What might seem a trick of the eye could reveal some darker influence, a stain left by some profoundly wicked act. A revolting stench, dancing shadows, or weird chills can all indicate a lingering evil presence.

Effect: An area of lingering evil can be any size, though a 4-square-by-4-square space is common.

Good creatures take a -1 penalty to ability checks and skill checks made in the area of lingering evil. In addition, a natural or fey beast will not willingly enter its space. If forced, the beast is dazed until it exits.

Usage: Only the most profoundly wicked events create lingering evil. An evil god's appearance, a savage murder, or even a dark ritual can create an area of lingering evil. The phenomenon lasts in proportion to the creating event's duration, lasting for just a few minutes to centuries.

VILE CURSES

"Do not speak to me of curses!"

—Azalin of Darkon

A hag curses the knight who spurns her affections, barring him from ever finding love. A well-intentioned hero who kills a werebeast finds herself cursed to transform under the full moon's light. A band of heroes finds their flesh rotting and health failing after plundering a tomb king's vault. Curses are a staple in fantasy tales, and in the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS role-playing game, curses can prove as deadly as anything the heroes might fight.

A curse is an affliction gained as a result of a specific action or event. A character can become cursed after destroying an evil enemy, exploring a cursed site, or angering a great power. Once a character gains the curse, the affliction attacks the character each day, growing in intensity and severity. To lift the curse, a character must usually undergo a quest or make restitution for the act that triggered it, though powerful rituals might remove the curse as well.

Curses in the Game

There are several ways a character might gain a curse. Use curses sparingly. You can use a curse to drive the story, and thus draw the adventurers into a new quest, or you can use one to reflect a particularly vile adversary whose evil lives on even after an encounter ends.

Bestow Curse

Evil priests, wizards, and similar sorts might level a curse against their enemies.

STANDARD ACTIONS

✧ Bestow Curse ✧ Encounter

Attack: Ranged 10 (one enemy); the curser's level + 3 vs. Will
Hit: At the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw.
 On a failed saving throw, the target gains the curse of [curse name] (stage 1).

Dying Curse

You can add the following power to a creature's statistic block. The creature should be a major villain in the game.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

✧ Dying Curse ✧ Encounter

Trigger: An enemy drops the curser below 1 hit point.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 3 (triggering enemy in the burst); the curser's level + 3 vs. Will
Hit: At the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw with a -2 penalty. On a failed saving throw, the target gains the curse of [curse name] (stage 1).

Cursed Locations

Certain places steeped in evil can also impart curses. Make sure you give the players plenty of warning so they know what they are risking when they explore the site. A character who performs the action triggering the curse is subjected to an attack: the character's level + 3 vs. Fortitude; on a hit, the character makes a saving throw. On a miss, the target gains the curse of [curse name] (stage 1).

A Cursed Existence

Each curse has stages of increasing severity. Most curses have four stages:

- ✧ Stage 0 (the curse is dormant)
- ✧ Stage 1 (the curse's initial effect)
- ✧ Stage 2 (the curse's more severe effect)
- ✧ Stage 3 (the curse's worst effect)

The effect that curses the creature specifies the stage of the curse that applies. Once a creature is cursed, the creature is subjected to that stage's effects.

Unless the curse is removed from the creature, it might progress at the end of the creature's next extended rest.

Progression

A curse might worsen over time. A creature can try to resist the curse by making a skill check. The creature must fight the curse by itself and can receive no aid from its allies.

Skill Checks: Until the curse ends, the creature must make a skill check as specified by the curse at the end of each extended rest to determine if the curse's stage changes or stays the same. A curse specifies two DCs. A check result that equals or exceeds the higher

DC causes the stage to decrease by 1 (thus reducing the curse's effects). If the result equals the lower DC or a number between it and the higher DC, the curse remains at its current stage. A lower check result causes the curse's stage to increase by 1 (thus intensifying the curse's effects).

Some curses have more than two DCs or require skill checks at different times.

Reaching a New Stage: When a creature reaches a new stage of the curse, it is subjected to the effects of the new stage right away. Unless a curse description says otherwise, the effects of the new stage replace the effects of the old one.

Dormancy: Unlike a disease, a curse does not end when a character reaches stage 0. Instead, the curse becomes dormant. At the end of the creature's next extended rest, it must make another skill check to see if the curse worsens. You cannot reduce the curse's stage beyond 0.

No Final Stage: There is no final stage for curses. Until the curse ends or is lifted (see below), its effects can weaken or intensify each day.

Lifting the Curse

Lifting a curse is not a matter of waiting it out. If a creature does nothing, the curse stays around for the rest of the creature's life and persists even if the creature is slain and later raised from the dead. To end the curse, a character must complete a quest described in the curse's description. You can replace the quest with another that better fits your campaign. Once the character completes the quest, the curse ends.

A character can also lift the curse by receiving a Remove Affliction ritual or similar magic. At the DM's discretion, some curses are so potent that they cannot be lifted by common ritual magic and require a special quest or unique ritual to lift.

When a character ends the curse, he or she gains experience points as if he or she had completed a minor quest of his or her level.

MORE CURSES

The curses presented here build on the curses presented in Peter Schaefer's article "Unearthed Arcana: Curses (Foiled Again)" (*Dungeon* 182). The article provides another take on how to use curses in the game. There are some differences in how they are used, but they are compatible with those included here.

Sample Curses

The following curses provide a broad sampling of curses encountered in the world. You can use the curses at any level. Simply set the curse's level to be equal to that of its source (usually a creature) and then use skill check DCs appropriate for its level.

Accumulated Years

The dreaded curse of accumulated years causes a creature's body to age at a rapid rate. The mind remains as sharp as it ever was, but the flesh fails, bones become brittle, and hair turns to snowy white. Hags and nymphs are notorious for using this curse to punish those who spurn their advances or frustrate their plans.

Accumulated Years

Variable Level Curse

You feel the weight of accumulated years in the whitening of your hair, the mass of wrinkles and spots appearing on your skin, and the blurriness in your vision.

Stage 0: The curse is dormant.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target takes a -2 penalty to Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and skill checks.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target takes a -2 penalty to Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and skill checks. In addition, creatures more than 5 squares away from the target have partial concealment against it.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target takes a -2 penalty to Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and skill checks as well as weapon attack rolls. The target is slowed, and creatures more than 5 squares away from the target have partial concealment against it.

Stage 4: While affected by stage 4, the target takes a -5 penalty to Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability checks and skill checks. In addition, the target is blinded, slowed, and weakened.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Arcana or Endurance check.

Lower than Easy DC: The stage of the curse increases by one.

Easy DC: No change.

Moderate DC: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 0, there is no change).

Lifting the Curse: Perform a service for an evil hag (heroic tier), steal a kiss from an archfey (paragon tier), or bathe in the Pool of Eternal Youth (epic tier).

Misery Eternal

The sinister atmosphere evoked by the Shadowfell stems from the incredible dangers embodied by its inhabitants. It is home to death giants, undead, and countless other creatures. Yet creatures do not alone make this plane dangerous. There are places where the land itself is as great an enemy as any monster. The curse of misery eternal often falls on those who explore the Shadowfell's darkest regions, where shadow energy pools and grows stagnant, poisoning the landscape with death's power.

Misery Eternal**Variable Level Curse**

A cold bleakness grips your thoughts. It drags you down into a melancholy from which there is no escape.

Stage 0: The curse is dormant.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, whenever the target rolls a natural 20 on an attack roll, skill check, or ability check, the target must roll again and use the second result, even if it is also 20.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target is affected by stage 1, and the target's normal complement of actions on its turns does not include a minor action.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target is affected by stages 1 and 2. In addition, the target becomes insubstantial against all damage except force damage and radiant damage. If the target drops below 1 hit point, it dies.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes a Religion check.

Lower than Easy DC: The stage of the curse increases by one.

Easy DC: No change.

Moderate DC: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 0, there is no change).

Lifting the Curse: Drop a good creature to 0 hit points (heroic tier), spend a day and a night in the dark lands (paragon tier), or travel to the Empyrum on Celestia and drink ambrosia from a sacred cup (epic tier).

Noisome Vapors

What at first seems to be a humiliating affliction reveals its true threat when the sickening odors become pungent enough to kill. Characters who explore the more fetid corners of the Abyss or who battle slaads might gain this affliction.

Noisome Vapors**Variable Level Curse**

A rancid odor follows you and grows worse with each passing day until no one can stand to be around you.

Stage 0: The curse is dormant.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, all living creatures adjacent to the target take a -2 penalty to attack rolls.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, all living creatures within 2 squares of the target take a -2 penalty to attack rolls. In addition, when a living creature ends its turn in a square adjacent to the target, that creature is weakened until the end of its next turn.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, all living creatures within 3 squares of the target take a -2 penalty to attack rolls. In addition, any creature that ends its turn within 3 squares of the target takes 5 poison damage (10 at 11th level, 15 at 21st level), and it is weakened until the end of its next turn.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Arcana check.

Lower than Easy DC: The stage of the curse increases by one.

Easy DC: No change.

Moderate DC: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 0, there is no change).

Lifting the Curse: Carry a toad in your pocket for a week (heroic tier), kill a slaad of your level or higher in single combat (paragon tier), or swallow a single drop of the River Styx (epic tier).

Sentient Tumor

The Far Realm's intrusion into the natural world brings with it madness and mutation. The myriad aberrant creatures capering in the dark places give proof to this alien realm's threat. A brush with these creatures is

sometimes all it takes to become afflicted with the Far Realm's influence.

Sentient Tumor**Variable Level Curse**

A bulge in the flesh is one thing. A flicking eye in the center of the undulating mass is something else entirely.

Stage 0: The curse is dormant.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target gains an unsightly growth bearing an eye in the center. The target gains a +2 bonus to Insight checks and Perception checks.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the growth swells in size. Whenever the target is first bloodied, it is dominated until the end of its next turn. The tumor always directs the target to attack an ally.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target rolls two initiative checks at the start of combat. On each of its turns, it rolls a d6. On an odd number, the tumor chooses the target's actions, causing it to attack its allies or approach them if they are out of range. On an even number, the target acts normally.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Arcana or a Dungeoneering check.

Lower than Easy DC: The stage of the curse increases by one.

Easy DC: No change.

Moderate DC: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 0, there is no change).

Lifting the Curse: Convince a foulspawn to accept the tumor as a gift (heroic tier), cut a portion of the tumor away and fling it into the Far Realm (paragon tier), or shatter one of the seals containing the Chained God (epic tier).

Tomb King's Wrath

Those who have plundered the vaults of ancient kings whisper of the curse that haunts those who touch the fabulous treasures therein. The curse causes flesh to fester and rot. Victims who succumb to the curse collapse into piles of dust, dispersed in the lightest breeze. Powerful mummies curse their treasures to discourage robbers from disturbing their rest.

Tomb King's Wrath**Variable Level Curse**

Umbric black boils appear on your skin that burst with a touch. The rot from these wounds spreads quickly to consume your body.

Stage 0: The curse is dormant.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target has vulnerable 5 to all damage.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target has vulnerable 10 to all damage and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target has vulnerable 10 to all damage, takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls, and is weakened. If the target drops below 1 hit point, it dies instantly, and its remains turn to dust.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes a Religion check.

Lower than Easy DC: The stage of the curse increases by one.

Easy DC: No change.

Moderate DC: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 0, there is no change).

Lifting the Curse: Spend one week in the desert without food or water (heroic tier), convince a mummy to lift the curse (paragon tier), or travel to the Forgotten City and place a sacrificial offering on the altar of a dead god (epic tier).

Werewolf Lycanthropy

Accepted lore claims lycanthropes are humanoids that can transform into beasts and back again. There are tales, however, of mortals cursed by Melora or Sehanine for some crime they committed against nature. Each time the full moon rises, the transgressor transforms into a savage beast. Other cursed creatures can pass on their affliction through bite attacks, in which case the curse replaces the monster's disease.

This curse is designed for werewolves, though you can adapt it for other kinds of lycanthropes by changing the form the creature assumes.

Werewolf Lycanthropy

Variable Level Curse

The rising moon awakens the beast within and it will stop at nothing to be free.

Stage 0: The curse is dormant.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target takes a -2 penalty to Will.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, whenever the target becomes bloodied, it makes a melee basic attack as a free action against an ally adjacent to it.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, whenever the target is hit by an attack, it makes a melee basic attack as a free action against an ally adjacent to it.

Stage 4: While affected by stage 4, the target becomes a werewolf under the DM's control, but only on nights of the full moon. The werewolf's bite exposes targets to this curse, rather than werewolf moon frenzy.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes a Nature check if it is at any stage but 4.

Lower than Easy DC: The stage of the curse increases by one.

Easy DC: No change.

Moderate DC: The stage of the curse decreases by one (if at stage 0, there is no change).

Lifting the Curse: Bestow the curse to one good creature of your level or higher (heroic), seek out a werewolf lord and convince it to lift the curse (paragon), or gain an audience with the Maiden of the Moon and subject yourself to her judgment (epic). At the DM's discretion, a Remove Affliction ritual performed on the target also lifts the curse.

Werewolf Bite

Curse Attack

You sink your fangs into another creature to rend the flesh and spread your curse.

At-Will

Standard Action

Melee 1

Target: One creature

Attack: Your level + 5 vs. AC

Hit: 2d6 + your level damage. If this attack bloodies the target, the target must make a saving throw at the end of the encounter with a -2 penalty. On a failed saving throw, the target contracts the curse of werewolf lycanthropy (stage 1).

VILE DISEASES

"Issue forth and multiply, my children! Work your evil! Show these mortal meat bags no mercy! I want to see eyeballs bleed, boils burst, and skin slough from bones!"

— Phraxas the Oinodemon

Though capable of creating much misery and suffering, disease isn't usually innately evil. Knowingly spreading disease, however, is evil, and certain creatures, such as slaads, do so without reservation.

Some plagues stand out from the rest. They are strange and unsettling diseases whose effects are so profound and so horrific that they qualify as being evil. This section presents several of the more notorious diseases adventurers might face. Some diseases affect the body, while others target the mind. All, however, leave their victims far worse off than they were when they began.

Contracting a Disease

Each entry includes details on how a creature might be exposed to the disease. Diseases transmitted by monster attacks require close contact and thus aren't transmitted by weapon attacks. Instead, they transfer by melee attacks that lack the weapon keyword such as slam, claw, bite, and so on.

If a monster has such a natural attack, you can add the following power to its statistics block.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Spreading the Disease (disease)

Trigger: This creature hits an enemy with a melee attack that lacks the weapon keyword.

Effect (No Action): At the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw. On a failed saving throw, the target contracts [disease name] (stage 1).

If the monster does not have a melee attack that lacks the weapon keyword, you can give the monster the following attack power.

STANDARD ACTIONS

† Infectious Touch (disease) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); monster's level + 3 vs. Fortitude

Hit: At the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw.

On a failed saving throw, the target contracts [disease name] (stage 1).

For diseases that rely on environmental exposure, the disease's description includes the method for exposure: touch, ingestion, or inhalation. Should the character come into contact with the disease, the disease's description includes whether infection is automatic or requires a successful attack roll against the creature.

For more information on diseases, refer to the *Rules Compendium*.

Sample Diseases

The following diseases provide some examples of vile diseases encountered in the world. You can use the diseases at any level. Simply set the disease's level to be equal to that of its source (usually a creature) and then use skill check DCs appropriate for its level.

Deathsong

Deathsong was one of the dead god Nerull's many gifts to the world. His priests would spread the infection wherever they went, to offer souls to their dark master. This hideous disease takes its name for the howling chorus rising from its victims as it causes flesh to wither and blacken. Once infection sets in, it doesn't take long for the disease to run its course. The flesh simply dies and bones pop and snap until the victim's life blessedly gutters out in a pungent flood.

An infected creature automatically exposes the character it touches to the disease. At the end of its next short or extended rest, the creature must make a saving throw. On a failed saving throw, it contracts deathsong (stage 1).

Deathsong	Variable Level Disease
<i>You would hear the disease ravage your body in the crackling of your skin and popping of your bones if you could just stop screaming.</i>	
Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.	
Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target takes a -2 penalty to skills checks and ability checks based on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution.	
Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls, skills checks, and ability checks based on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution. In addition, the target is dazed.	
Stage 3: The target dies.	
Check: At the end of each short rest and extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.	
<i>Lower than Easy DC:</i> The stage of the disease increases by 1.	
<i>Easy DC:</i> No change.	
<i>Moderate DC:</i> The stage of the disease decreases by 1.	

Demon Fever

The Abyss's depths are fertile ground for all manner of diseases. One of the most common is demon fever, a horrid infection carried by some demons and transmitted through their natural attacks. Those afflicted by the disease find dark thoughts creeping into their minds, thoughts of violence and death.

Demon Fever	Variable Level Disease
<i>A fever rages through you, making you flushed and angry. You see enemies everywhere, and the only thing you want to do is kill.</i>	
Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.	
Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls. In addition, the target loses a healing surge.	
Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target loses a healing surge. Whenever the target is first bloodied during an encounter, it takes 5 extra damage per tier, and the target must spend its standard action each round to make either a charge attack or a melee basic attack against the nearest ally (save ends).	
Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target loses all healing surges. Whenever the target is first bloodied during an encounter, it takes 10 extra damage per tier, and until the end of the encounter, the target must spend its standard action each round to make either a charge attack or a melee basic attack against the nearest ally.	
Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.	
<i>Lower than Easy DC:</i> The stage of the disease increases by 1.	
<i>Easy DC:</i> No change.	
<i>Moderate DC:</i> The stage of the disease decreases by 1.	

Faceless Hate

A magical disease designed to punish those who give into their hatred, faceless hate fills a creature with uncontrollable anger. The most awful aspect of this disease is revealed when the creature's facial features slough away, leaving behind smooth and unblemished skin. At this point, the creature is doomed to blind rage until it dies from starvation or thirst.

A creature that kills a creature infected with faceless hate becomes exposed to the disease. The creature must make a saving throw at the end of the encounter. On a failed save, it contracts faceless hate (stage 1).

Faceless Hate	Variable Level Disease
<i>Anger builds inside you. It is blinding rage that cannot be sated until everything around you is dead.</i>	
Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.	
Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target must make every opportunity attack that it can, and its allies provoke opportunity attacks from it as if they were its enemies (they are not otherwise considered its enemies).	
Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target must make every opportunity attack that it can, and its allies provoke opportunity attacks from it as if they were its enemies (they are not otherwise considered its enemies). In addition, while the target is bloodied, it is blinded but has blindsight 5. If the target does not hit with an attack on its turn while bloodied, it takes 5 psychic damage per tier at the end of its turn.	
Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target's eyes and mouth vanish. The target is blinded but has blindsight 5. The target's alignment changes to evil if it wasn't evil already, and it treats all creatures as enemies. Finally, whenever the target starts its turn with at least one creature within 5 squares of it, the target must use its standard action on its turn to make an attack if possible.	
Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.	
<i>Lower than Easy DC:</i> The stage of the disease increases by 1.	
<i>Easy DC:</i> No change.	
<i>Moderate DC:</i> The stage of the disease decreases by 1.	

Melting Fury

This fearsome disease is quite rare since it spreads by handling undead flesh, an act few have occasion or inclination to perform. The disease, infused as it is with shadow energy, causes flesh to rot and organs to melt until only stained bones remain. The exposed skeleton soon animates and wanders about until destroyed.

Not all undead flesh carries this disease, but it is common to creatures associated with Kyuss, the Worm that Walks. When a creature touches or ingests the flesh, the disease attacks the creature: disease's level + 3 vs. Fortitude. On a hit, the creature contracts melting fury (stage 1).

Melting Fury

Variable Level Disease

As the disease progresses, your flesh becomes wet and slimy. Any pressure at all causes your flesh to tear and blood and filth to spill forth.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target has vulnerable 5 to all damage.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target has vulnerable 10 to all damage, and when the target takes damage from an attack that lacks a damage type, each creature adjacent to the target is exposed to the disease. At the end of the encounter, an exposed creature must make a saving throw. On a failed saving throw, the target contracts melting fury (stage 1).

Stage 3: The target dies as the flesh melts away into a fetid pool. After 24 hours, the remains animate to become a decrepit skeleton (*Monster Vault*, page 255).

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.

Lower than Easy DC: The stage of the disease increases by 1.

Easy DC: No change.

Moderate DC: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.

Psychic Parasites

The psychic parasite is a miniscule creature that infiltrates a sentient creature's brain and feeds on its thoughts, memories, and—for some—its psionic energy. A creature infected by psychic parasites can pass them onto other creatures through bite attacks, claw attacks, and the like, as well as through psionic attack powers that target Will. A creature might also become exposed to psychic parasites in places inhabited by aberrant creatures. Inhaling the air in these places allows the disease to make the following attack: the disease's level + 3 vs. Will. On a hit, the target contracts psychic parasites (stage 1).

Psychic Parasites

Variable Level Disease

What begins as a faint buzzing in your ears intensifies until you can no longer concentrate on what is going on around you.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target takes a -2 penalty to Insight checks and Perception checks. If the target has the Psionic Augmentation class feature, it regains 1 less power point after a short rest, though not after an extended rest.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target takes a -5 penalty to knowledge checks, monster knowledge checks, Insight checks, and Perception checks. If the target has the Psionic Augmentation class feature, it cannot regain power points by taking a short rest.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target is unconscious and cannot be awakened.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.

Lower than Easy DC: The stage of the disease increases by 1.

Easy DC: No change.

Moderate DC: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.

Scarlet Plague

The scarlet plague is one of the more famous epidemics to strike the world. Efforts to stamp it out have never been successful. The disease simply appears somewhere else. Its victims experience vertigo and stabbing pain that intensifies until blood seeps from the pores. Many sufferers also find their bones warping and twisting, or even growing sharp thorns that punch through the skin from the inside.

The disease spreads by inhaling the breath of an infected creature. Thus proximity is usually enough to require a creature to make a saving throw. On a failed saving throw, the creature contracts red death (stage 1).

Scarlet Plague

Variable Level Disease

Pain shoots through your limbs. The world seems to spin around you. Not long after, you find blood seeping out from your pores.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls, skill checks, and ability checks.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls, skill checks, and ability checks. In addition, whenever the target misses with an attack or is moved by a pull, push, or slide, the target falls prone.

Stage 3: The target dies.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.

Lower than Easy DC: The stage of the disease increases by 1.

Easy DC: No change.

Moderate DC: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.

VILE TRAPS AND HAZARDS

"In retrospect, I might have gone a little overboard. The best traps make their prisoners suffer and scream. Adventurers who visit my tomb die too quickly."

—Acererak

Traps and hazards are common obstacles to adventurers. There are some dangers, though, that have such wicked effects that those who run afoul of them face death or something worse than death. The following assortment reflects the kinds of wicked devices one might find in and around the lairs of the world's worst villains and supplements those traps and hazards described in the *Dungeon Master's Kit* and the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Crypt Thing

Thought to be some form of malevolent undead guardian, a crypt thing is in fact an advanced magical trap designed to protect a valuable treasure. All crypt things are brown or black-robed skeletons seated in high-backed chairs. A crypt thing rolls initiative and attacks on its turn when a living creature enters the room it occupies.

The crypt thing can speak and will converse with creatures that talk to it. Even if the adventurers get the crypt thing talking, it does not break off its attack. A crypt thing knows information about its location and all adjacent rooms and answers one question per turn as a free action.

A character can identify a crypt thing with a successful DC 32 Arcana or Religion check.



BRIAN SNODDY

Crypt Thing	Level 18 Trap
Object	XP 2,000
Detect automatic	Initiative +10
HP 100	
AC 30, Fortitude 30, Reflex 25, Will –	
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
✦ False Disintegrate (illusion) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +21 vs. Will	
Hit: The target is stunned and invisible (save ends both).	
✦ Baleful Teleport (force, teleportation) ♦ Recharge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +21 vs. Will	
Hit: The crypt thing teleports the target 4d20 squares in a random direction. Roll a d6 to determine direction: 1, up; 2, down; 3, north; 4, south; 5, east; 6, west. The crypt thing does not need line of sight to the destination space. If that space is occupied or is blocking terrain, the target takes 20 force damage and is thrust into the nearest unoccupied space. If the target is teleported into open air, it falls. The target does not get a saving throw to negate the teleportation.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
✦ Claw ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: A creature adjacent to the crypt thing attacks it.	
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 1 (triggering creature); +23 vs. AC	
Hit: 4d8 + 8 damage.	
Effect: The crypt thing can push the target 1 square.	
COUNTERMEASURES	
♦ Disable: Arcana or Religion DC 32. Allies can use Arcana, Religion, or Thievery to aid the Arcana or Religion check, using the aid another action. Failure (27 or lower): The crypt thing recharges baleful teleport and uses it as a free action.	
♦ Trace: Arcana DC 32. Success: The character discovers the destination space of a creature hit by either of the crypt thing's standard action attacks.	
♦ Negotiate: Diplomacy DC 32 (standard action). Success: The crypt thing truthfully answers one question about the room it occupies, what it guards, and about its nature. If asked about one of its victims, it insists the creature was disintegrated.	

Death Mold

Molds, slimes, and other fungi thrive in the Underdark. Adventurers learn to give such growths a wide berth, since one never knows when an otherwise innocuous infestation is actually poses a significant threat. Death mold is one of the nastier growths, rampant in the lightless tunnels below the Shadowfell's surface. This hazard is deemed particularly deadly, since it isn't content to simply kill. Those slain by its spores instantly rise up as ravenous zombies.

A patch of death mold typically covers an area of 8 contiguous squares. A character can identify death mold with a successful DC 28 Dungeoneering or Nature check.

Death Mold	Level 12 Hazard
Terrain	XP 700
Detect Perception DC 20	Initiative –
Immune attacks	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⚡ Attack (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
<i>Trigger:</i> A living creature enters or starts its turn within 3 squares of the death mold.	
<i>Attack (Immediate Reaction):</i> Close blast 3 (living creatures in the blast, including the triggering creature); +15 vs. Fortitude	
<i>Hit:</i> 2d6 + 14 necrotic damage. A Small or Medium target dropped below 1 hit point by this attack dies and immediately becomes a death mold zombie. The zombie rolls initiative and acts on its turn under the Dungeon Master's control.	
<i>Miss:</i> Half damage.	
COUNTERMEASURES	
♦ Dormant: A character can use a radiant attack power to render the death mold dormant in a target square or squares in the attack's area. No attack roll is necessary. Until the end of the character's next turn, creatures do not trigger attacks from the dormant mold.	
♦ Destroy: A character can use a fire attack power to destroy the death mold in a target square or squares in the attack's area. No attack roll is necessary.	

Death Mold Zombie	Level 12 Brute
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 700
HP 147; Bloodied 73	Initiative +7
AC 24, Fortitude 25, Reflex 21, Will 22	Perception +8
Speed 4	
Resist 10 necrotic; Vulnerable 10 fire	
TRAITS	
Dormant Corpse	
Whenever the zombie takes radiant damage, it falls prone.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚡ Slam ♦ At-Will	
<i>Attack:</i> Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC	
<i>Hit:</i> 2d12 + 12 damage.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⚡ Spore Burst (necrotic) ♦ Recharge ☐ ☐	
<i>Trigger:</i> An enemy hits the zombie with a weapon attack.	
<i>Attack (Immediate Reaction):</i> Close burst 2 (living creatures in the burst); +15 vs. Fortitude	
<i>Hit:</i> 3d6 + 12 necrotic damage. A Small or Medium target dropped below 1 hit point by this attack immediately dies and becomes a death mold zombie. The zombie rolls initiative and acts on its turn under the Dungeon Master's control.	
Str 22 (+12)	Dex 12 (+7)
Con 17 (+9)	Int 1 (+1)
Wis 15 (+8)	Cha 1 (+1)
Alignment unaligned	Languages –

Far Realm Anomaly

The Far Realm is relentless in its efforts to invade the natural world. Ever does it press against the boundaries, crawling across the barriers in search of even the smallest crack through which its mutants and aliens might emerge. Once through, the creatures widen the crack and release a flood of corrupting energy. A Far Realm anomaly is a place where the Far Realm has chipped away at the barriers and can now bleed somewhat into the world.

FAR REALM ANOMALY MUTATION

d20 Result
1 The target bleeds internally, instantly taking damage equal to its bloodied value.
2 One of the target's arms becomes useless. The target cannot use the arm.
3 One of the target's legs becomes useless. The target is slowed.
4 The target's eyes explode as stubby tentacles erupt from its eye sockets. The target is blinded.
5 The target's mouth seals shut. The target cannot speak.
6 The target's ears grow wings and fly away. The target is deafened.
7 The target's legs fuse into a fish tail or a snake tail. The target takes a -3 penalty to speed.
8 The target's tongue grows too long for its mouth.
9 The target grows an unsightly growth on its head. The target cannot wear hats or head slot magic items.
10 The target loses all its body hair.
11 The target grows profuse body hair.
12 A small, screaming vestigial twin protrudes from the target's torso. The target cannot gain surprise unless the vestigial twin is silenced or killed. The twin has 1 hit point, defenses equal to the target's, and no attacks. If the twin is killed, the target loses a healing surge and takes damage equal to its healing surge value.
13 The target grows a strange hump on its back.
14 The target's arms become tentacles. The target can no longer wear gloves, gauntlets, or rings, and weapon attacks made by the target take a -2 penalty.
15 The target acquires an extra eye in an unusual place, gaining a +1 item bonus to Perception checks.
16 The target's legs become freakish and muscular until the end of the encounter. While its legs are altered, the target gains a +1 item bonus to speed.
17 The target's skin thickens until the end of the encounter. While its skin is thick, the target gains a +1 item bonus to AC and Fortitude.
18 The target gains 15 temporary hit points.
19 The target grows wings until the end of the encounter. While it has wings, the target gains a speed of fly 4 (clumsy).
20 The target vanishes into the Far Realm. It is removed from play and takes ongoing 10 acid and psychic damage (save ends both). When the effect ends, the target returns to play in an unoccupied space of the DM's choice within 3 squares of the space where it vanished from.

The anomaly looks like someone grabbed the air and crunched it into a ball, an effect created by the anomaly's ability to bend light. It hovers in the air, about four feet from the ground. A character can identify the anomaly with a successful DC 30 Arcana or Dungeoneering check.

Far Realm Anomaly	Level 15 Hazard
Object	XP 1,200
Detect Arcana or Perception DC 22	Initiative +9
Immune attacks	
TRAITS	
☼ Distortion Field ♦ Aura 3	
Ranged attacks against creatures in the aura take a -2 penalty to the attack roll.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚡ Attack (polymorph, psychic) ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼ ☼	
Attack: Close burst 3 (non-aberrant creatures in the burst); +18 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d6 damage plus 2d6 psychic damage, and the target mutates. Roll a d20 on the Far Realm Anomaly Mutation table. Unless otherwise specified in the mutation, the effects are permanent. The cleric power <i>holy cleansing</i> , the Remove Affliction ritual, or similar magic can end the effect.	
COUNTERMEASURES	
♦ Disable: Arcana DC 30. <i>Failure</i> (25 or less): The anomaly's attack recharges and it uses it immediately as a free action.	

Glyph of Changes

Magical glyphs are a popular alternative to mechanical traps. These inscriptions hold a great deal of power that releases with dramatic effect once a creature triggers it. The glyph of changes is one of the most powerful glyphs. Creatures caught in the trap's burst are disoriented as they figure out they've just been transformed into mice.

Glyph of Changes	Level 20 Minion Trap
Object	XP 700
Detect Perception DC 34	Initiative –
Immune attacks	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⚡ Attack (polymorph) ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: A creature enters a square containing the glyph.	
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 5 (creatures in the burst); +23 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The target turns into a Tiny mouse for 1d6 hours.	
Miss: The target turns into a Tiny mouse (save ends).	
Effect: As a mouse, the target is dazed, and the only actions it can take are to shift or walk. All of the target's equipment transforms with it. The cleric power <i>holy cleansing</i> , the Remove Affliction ritual, or similar magic can end the effect.	
COUNTERMEASURES	
♦ Disable: Thievery DC 34. <i>Failure</i> (29 or less): The glyph is triggered. Allies can use Thievery or Arcana to aid the Thievery check, using the aid another action.	

Iron Boot

Few traps are as cruel as the dreaded iron boot. The trap consists of two blades stretched apart and held in place. When a creature puts pressure on the trigger plate, the blades snap shut to sever the limb. Most iron boots are hidden by a piece of false flooring painted to look like stone or wood.

Iron Boot	Level 2 Minion Trap
Object	XP 31
Detect Perception DC 20	Initiative –
Immune attacks	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⚡ Attack ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: A creature enters the trap's square.	
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 1 (triggering creature); +5 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d6 + 2 damage, and the target is grabbed by its foot, if it has one (escape DC 18). Until the grab ends, the target takes ongoing 5 damage. Each time the target makes an escape attempt against the grab, the target takes 5 damage. If the trap drops the target below 1 hit point, the target loses the foot. A creature with a lost foot is considered to be balancing and treats all surfaces as unstable (see the Acrobatics skill in the <i>Rules Compendium</i>). A creature can regain the missing foot through the cleric power <i>holy cleansing</i> or similarly powerful restorative magic.	
Miss: Half damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of its next turn.	
COUNTERMEASURES	
♦ Disable: Thievery DC 20. <i>Success:</i> The iron boot is jammed and cannot attack.	

Lunacy Mist

Sometimes the Feywild's intrusion into the natural world—by planar breach, portal, or other planar phenomenon—can cause the plane's magical energy to infuse otherwise ordinary meteorological events, such as rain, fog, and snow. Lunacy mist is a rare example, and it behaves like normal fog except for the glittering golden motes drifting through the clouds.

Lunacy mist typically covers 20 contiguous squares. A successful DC 15 Perception check lets a character spot the golden motes. A DC 23 Arcana or Nature check identifies the fog as lunacy mist. Holding one's breath in the mist does nothing to stave off its effects. It is possible to fight back against its influence through physical effort.

Lunacy Mist	Level 6 Hazard
Terrain	XP 250
Detect automatic	Initiative –
Immune attacks	
TRAITS	
Lightly Obscured	
Squares in the mist are lightly obscured.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
↓ Attack (poison) ♦ At-Will	
<i>Trigger:</i> A creature starts its turn in the mist's space.	
<i>Attack (Opportunity Action):</i> Melee 0 (triggering creature); +9 vs. Will	
<i>Hit:</i> 1d8 + 4 poison damage, and the target is subjected to lunacy (save ends). Until the effect ends, the target rolls a d6 at the start of its turn before taking any actions to determine the mist's effects.	
☐ The target is stunned until the start of its next turn.	
☐ The target is dazed until the start of its next turn.	
☑ The target takes 5 poison damage and is slowed until the start of its next turn.	
☑☑ The target's first action this turn must be a basic attack or a charge against the creature closest to it. If no creature is within range, the target is dazed until the start of its next turn.	
☑☑ The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the start of its next turn.	
☐☐ No effect.	
COUNTERMEASURES	
♦ Avoid: Endurance DC 23. The target can make an Endurance check when entering the mist as a free action. <i>Success:</i> The target gains a +4 bonus to Will against the mist until the end of the target's next turn.	

Mirror of Life Trapping

The mirror of life trapping ensnares the vain by drawing the creature into the mirrored surface. Once ensnared, there is no escape until another creature looks into the mirror.

A mirror of life trapping is usually a full-length mirror hanging on a vertical surface. If there's a creature trapped inside the mirror, it appears on the surface, behaving in a manner appropriate for a trapped creature. A character can identify the trap as a mirror of life trapping with a successful DC 26 Arcana check.

Mirror of Life Trapping	Level 10 Trap
Object	XP 500
Detect automatic	Initiative –
HP 50	
AC 5, Fortitude 10, Reflex 5, Will –	
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage; Vulnerable 10 thunder	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
↓ Attack ♦ At-Will	
<i>Trigger:</i> A creature that is not blind or blinded starts its turn adjacent to the mirror.	
<i>Attack (Opportunity Action):</i> Melee 1 (triggering creature); +13 vs. Will	
<i>Hit:</i> The target is trapped in the mirror. While trapped in the mirror, the target is removed from play. If there is already a creature trapped in the mirror, the effect ends for that creature, which returns to play in an unoccupied space within 3 squares of the mirror.	
<i>Miss:</i> The target is dazed until the start of its next turn.	
COUNTERMEASURES	
♦ Destroy: Reducing the mirror to 0 hit points destroys it but automatically kills any creature trapped inside.	

Rot Grub Pit

A concealed pit is a useful and simple obstacle to keep enemies from reaching important locations, but rarely is a pit enough to deter an adventurer from pressing on. The cruelest trapsmiths, however, find more success by filling the bottom with disturbing creatures. Rot grubs, then, are perfect additions to these traps.

A creature that can see the rot grubs at the bottom identifies them as such with a successful DC 14 Nature check.

Rot Grub Pit	Level 4 Trap
Object	XP 175
Detect Perception DC 21	Initiative –
Immune attacks	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
↓ Attack ♦ Encounter	
<i>Trigger:</i> A creature enters one of the trap's four squares.	
<i>Attack (Immediate Reaction):</i> Melee 1 (triggering creature); +7 vs. Reflex	
<i>Hit:</i> The target falls 20 feet to the bottom of the pit, taking 2d10 damage and falling prone.	
<i>Miss:</i> The target returns to the last square it occupied, and its movement ends immediately.	
<i>Effect:</i> The false floor opens, and the pit is no longer hidden. Any creature that starts its turn in the pit is exposed to rot grub infestation. At the end of the encounter, the target must make a saving throw. On a failed saving throw, it contracts rot grub infestation (stage 1).	
COUNTERMEASURES	
♦ Disable: Thievery DC 21. <i>Success:</i> The false floor is jammed and cannot attack.	
♦ Destroy: Dealing 10 or more fire damage removes the rot grub infestation from the bottom of the pit.	

Rot Grub Infestation**Level 4 Disease**

Wriggling worms burrow through flesh, gobbling up important tissue and life energy as they feast.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target loses a healing surge and gains vulnerable 5 necrotic.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target loses two healing surges. The target also takes a -4 penalty to skill checks.

Stage 3: The target dies and, if Small or Medium in size, immediately becomes a rot grub zombie under the DM's control.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.

11 or Lower: The stage of the disease increases by 1.

12 to 17: No change.

18 or Higher: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.

Rot Grub Zombie**Level 8 Skirmisher**

Medium natural humanoid (undead)

XP 350

HP 86; Bloodied 43

Initiative +9

AC 22, Fortitude 20, Reflex 19, Will 17

Perception +2

Speed 6

Immune rot grub infestation

STANDARD ACTIONS**⚡ Slam ⚡ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC

Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage.

⚡ Flailing Slam ⚡ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC

Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage.

Effect: Before or after the attack, the zombie can shift 1 square.

⚡ Rot Grub Hunger (disease, necrotic) ⚡ Recharge ☒ ☒

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC

Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage plus 2d6 necrotic damage.

Effect: If the target is bloodied, it must make a saving throw at the end of the encounter. On a failed saving throw, it contracts rot grub infestation (stage 1).

TRIGGERED ACTIONS**Corpse Collapse ⚡ Encounter**

Trigger: The zombie drops to 0 hit points.

Effect (No Action): A rot grub swarm appears in an unoccupied square adjacent to the zombie.

Str 20 (+9) Dex 16 (+7) Wis 6 (+2)

Con 14 (+6) Int 4 (+1) Cha 13 (+5)

Alignment unaligned Languages –

Rot Grub Swarm

Medium natural beast (swarm)

Level 4 Brute

XP 175

HP 63; Bloodied 31

Initiative +3

AC 15, Fortitude 15, Reflex 14, Will 15

Perception +2

Speed 5

Darkvision

Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks;

Vulnerable 10 against close and area attacks

TRAITS**☼ Swarm Attack ⚡ Aura 1**

Any enemy that starts its turn in the aura takes 5 damage plus 2 damage for each additional rot grub swarm adjacent to the enemy.

Swarm

The swarm can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space, which is difficult terrain. The swarm cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for at least one of the creatures it comprises.

Clumsy Attacker

The rot grub swarm cannot make basic attacks.

STANDARD ACTIONS**⚡ Infesting Bite ⚡ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC

Hit: The target takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

First Failed Saving Throw: The target takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends).

Second Failed Saving Throw: The target takes ongoing 15 damage (save ends).

Str 10 (+2)

Dex 13 (+3)

Wis 11 (+2)

Con 13 (+3)

Int 2 (-2)

Cha 4 (-1)

Alignment unaligned

Languages –

Symbol of Death

Powerful wizards and priests who study Supernal can learn certain words of power to transform their environments. Binding such a word into a physical symbol traps its potential until triggered. The symbol of death is the most deadly of all, since when triggered it can snuff out all life in a large area.

Symbol of Death**Level 29 Minion Trap**

Object

XP 3,750

Detect Arcana or Perception DC 41

Initiative –

Immune attacks

TRIGGERED ACTIONS**⚡ Attack (necrotic) ⚡ Encounter**

Trigger: A creature enters a square containing the symbol of death.

Attack (Immediate Reaction): Close burst 3 (living creatures in the burst); +32 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 10d10 necrotic damage. If this reduces the target to 30 hit points or fewer, the target dies.

Miss: Half damage.

COUNTERMEASURES

⚡ **Disable:** Thievery DC 41. *Failure* (36 or less): The glyph is triggered. Allies can use Thievery or Arcana to aid the Thievery check, using the aid another action.

Villains & Monsters

"I have never understood why so many of my peers find it necessary to reveal themselves to the world. Is it not more useful for your enemies to wonder and guess at who was behind the latest trouble washing up on their shores? Arrogance serves you not at all in pursuing your objectives. Give into petty, human needs and you will find your objectives drifting out of reach and your enemies converging against you. Instead, gird yourself in secrecy. Let your proxies act on your behalf, and keep them ignorant about whom they serve and what exactly you hope to achieve. In my experience, the lands are filled with potential servants. Should one fall, you will always be able to find another to take its place."

—Szass Tam

EVIL TOUCHES the world in many ways. One can find its stain in places where great crimes and horrors have been wrought, in items fashioned with cruel intent, and in the plots set in motion by truly heinous villains. To truly understand evil as an agency, one must examine those creatures in its thrall, to peer into corruption's depth and examine the underlying motivations driving such agents to serve the darkness that hungers.

This chapter presents a variety of tools for creating and using opponents in vile encounters. It details all the following:

- ◆ **Creating Villains:** Constructing a villain's statistics block is just a matter of creating a new monster, but creating a memorable and evocative villain requires going a few steps beyond.
- ◆ **Monster Themes:** From chaos beasts to slaves of the Nine Hells, the monster themes included in this chapter help you transform ordinary monsters into terrifying adversaries.
- ◆ **New Monsters:** Several new monsters illustrate how vile darkness can manifest in your campaign world.
- ◆ **Organizations:** Several organizations offer disturbing power groups you can use to test and entertain the player characters.



JOHN STANKO



CREATING VILLAINS

"Imagine my surprise when I discovered that I could make ink out of pain. Now, sit still and be quiet. Your suffering will end shortly."

—Shathrax the Mind Flayer

It is one thing to know evil is out there as a shadowy force, but quite another to put a face to the evil and know there is an active agent in darkness's cause. The villain gives evil an identity. It gives a face and name to the hordes of evil creatures, the endless tide of demons and monsters crawling out from the festering blackness to bring ruin and suffering to the world. A villain is the mind behind evil's plotting, the agency that will not stop until he, she, or it achieves whatever dark end it desires.

This section helps you create compelling and interesting villains, specifically those in thrall to vile darkness. Before diving into the particulars, it is first important to set villains apart from other creatures. A villain is not just some creature you use to populate the last combat encounter in an adventure. A villain is not just a stat block that is born, lives, and dies in the space between when characters roll for initiative and when the villain's hit points drop to 0. A villain is a crafted identity. It is the player characters' nemesis and a major force in the campaign setting. The villain's decisions, actions, and intentions should alter the heroes' circumstances and drive them through adventure after adventure.

Villainous Concept

Having a strong working concept at the outset makes all other decisions you make about the villain easier. The villain is a story device, a tool you can use to construct adventures, plot a campaign, and link a succession of expeditions together to construct a larger and more satisfying story. To construct a concept, you should consider how you want to use the villain and the villain's broad identity.

Scope

A villain is, at heart, a story element you can use to add tension, drama, and excitement to your games. While all villains are realized characters, the amount of work you should put into your villains depends on how much you plan to use them. A villain might have a negligible impact on a particular game session, but it exists within a particular narrative frame, interacting with the characters through a single adventure or for the life of an entire campaign. Before you make any other decisions about your villain, decide to what degree you want the villain to operate in your world.

The Adventure Villain

Most villains exist within the confines of a single adventure or, at most, a small set of adventures. In these cases, the villain figures prominently in the adventure's story and its actions directly influence the various challenges and threats the heroes must overcome. The adventure's typical climax involves a contest between the heroes and the villains in a dramatic set-piece encounter.

In *Keep on the Shadowfell*, the heroes vie against the deranged cultist Kalarel, who intends to reopen a dangerous rift to the Shadowfell, while the insane alienist Malachi hunts the *Tear of Ioun* in the "Madness Trilogy" (*Dungeon* 161–163) to free a creature from the Far Realm. In both examples, the villains directly shape the adventures' plots and halting their designs and defeating them occur in the climax of each story.

Since these characters rise and fall within the space of an adventure or two, you don't need to invest as much time to develop these villains. Instead, the enemy's objective becomes the central tension in the scenario in which they appear, and their methods for obtaining that objective function as the adventure's plot. Thwarting the villain's aim is usually sufficient to remove the villain as an enemy, though complications and choices can transform adventure villains into tier villains or even campaign villains.

The Tier Villain

The tier villain has much in common with the adventure villain, in that this villain tends to shape the story of the adventures the heroes undertake. Instead of existing within one or two adventures, the tier villain is a persistent and dangerous foe throughout an entire tier of play. To insulate themselves from the characters, such foes often use adventure villains as henchmen and lackeys. As the adventurers defeat these underlings, they learn more about their true nemesis's identity. Each adventure brings the heroes closer to the inevitable confrontation with their opponent, often at the tier's end.

Sarshan, the shadar-kai villain from *Dungeon* magazine's Scales of War adventure path, is a good example of a heroic tier villain. As the heroes become drawn into the plot, they discover a mastermind behind the various plots at work in the world, and that the villains they've been fighting are all servants of the same master. Not long after cresting the heroic tier, the adventurers get their chance to defeat the villain who has troubled them for so long.

Since the tier villain works throughout an entire tier, the villain's identity is not always obvious from the start. Instead, the adventurers discover the villain's identity as they undertake adventures related to the villain's plot. Each victory draws them nearer to the final

confrontation with their foe until, usually, the villain has no choice but to confront the heroes. As an adventure villain might become a tier villain, a tier villain might evolve into a campaign villain, particularly if the villain escapes the final confrontation more or less intact. Then again, the tier villain might serve the larger campaign villain and thus by defeating this foe the heroes discover what is really behind the conflict in the grander story.

The Campaign Villain

A campaign villain, sometimes referred to as an arch-villain, opposes the adventurers through two or more tiers, acting as the focal antagonist through many of the heroes' adventures. Such a villain need not be "front and center" in every adventure, but he, she, or it looms over everything. The lesser villains that the adventurers fight usually connect in some fashion to this greater enemy, and the plots of the campaign villain unfold on a grand scale.

Campaign villains tend to be the major movers and shakers in the world. Orcus is the campaign villain from *Keep on the Shadowfell* all the way to the conclusion in *Prince of Undeath*. Similarly, Tiamat is the campaign villain in *Dungeon* magazine's Scales of War adventure path. While neither Orcus nor Tiamat show up in the heroic tier, the adventurers pit themselves against their agents. When the player characters climb through the paragon tier, they begin to understand the villain behind their challenges. And when they finally progress through the epic tier, the heroes have the chance to confront with the true foes.

A campaign villain need not span all three tiers. If you're running a campaign across the heroic and paragon tiers, defeating the campaign villain might be the capstone event for when the adventurers reach 21st level. These villains often employ several tier villains and adventure villains through whom the player characters can learn the identity of their archnemesis.

Connections

Once you've identified the villain's scope and longevity, your next step is to determine the extent to which the villain is connected to the heroes.

The Detached Villain

The villain has no or little connection to the player characters. A detached villain has his or her own agenda independent of the adventurers' actions and probably not aware of the adventurers at the start. Most villains from published adventures are detached since the characters discover the villain's efforts and then work to combat them, rather than the villain taking an active hand against the adventurers.

In the *DRAGONLANCE* novels, Takhisis is an example of a detached villain.

The Tangential Villain

A tangential villain is one with tenuous connections to the player characters. The characters might encounter and defeat the villain's agents in an earlier adventure, or the characters might be members or associates of an organization opposed to the villain's organization. In either case, the characters aren't likely to oppose the tangential villain unless fate conspires to place the villain's schemes in opposition to the party's goals.

A tangential villain in the *DRAGONLANCE*® novels would be Lord Soth, given his connection to Kitiara.

The Personal Villain

The villain has intimate connections with one or more player characters. The villain might be a sibling, rival, a former companion in the adventuring group, relation, or patron. The villain's plans likely involve the adventurers and are probably driven by revenge or a desire to exploit the characters' abilities for some dark end. Personal villains can be the most satisfying since the players have an interest in the villain beyond the simple objective of combating evil in the world. When creating a personal villain, it's best to establish multiple links to the adventuring group to ensure that several characters have strong connections to their foe.

Kitiara is an excellent example of a personal villain from the *DRAGONLANCE* novels, since she was once a companion of the Heroes of the Lance.

Archetype

The last step in creating your villain to decide its general nature or archetype. The following archetypes describe the most common types of villains found in the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* roleplaying game, but they are certainly not exhaustive. You might have some other idea that doesn't fit into these categories, or you might combine archetypes to construct something altogether different.

The Abstract Villain

"True evil can't be killed with a sword. A shame, really."

—Kuyutha, Exarch of Bahamut

Not every villain has a face. Sometimes a force, a phenomenon, or some other agency can fill this role. Just because there is no single individual responsible for the villainous actions doesn't mean the Far Realm can't be the villain for an adventure or even a campaign. A plague, some form of evil weather, or pernicious mutation can also serve in this role.

Abstract villains are tough to combat. Defeating them isn't something that can be achieved in the same way as killing the mad wizard or deposing the evil king. Against abstract villains, the heroes might have to fight on many different fronts, finding unconventional solutions to achieving victory. Abstract villains often have lesser villains in their employ, which allows the entity to act in the world while also giving the adventurers someone to fight.

Far Realm Incursion (Annihilation): A secret society of heroes sealed a gate to the Far Realm long ago, but a virulent plague wiped out the order, and the protective wards placed upon the gate have deteriorated due to years of neglect. Alien energies from the Far Realm seep through newly formed cracks, threatening to warp and twist the natural world unless something is done to contain them.

The Created Villain

"I live for the moment when I can turn something pure into something perverse."

—Graz'zt

A created villain is forged by the player characters' actions, inactions, decisions, or failures. Often the adventurers are aware of what exactly led to the villain's creation. In some cases, the villain might be a former member of their party. Allowing the heroes to know the villain before he or she becomes their nemesis creates interesting tension when the heroes must fight someone they once considered a friend.

In some cases, the villain is not someone the characters know well, but someone victimized by their actions. It might be the daughter of a knight they murdered in cold blood, a noble whom they offended, or a king whose quest they declined for selfish reasons.

A Dish Served Cold (Corruption): A village hires the adventurers to wipe out a goblin infestation. The heroes convince the mayor to pay a higher price, unaware that their demands will drain the village's coffers. A week later, after wiping out the goblins and claiming their reward, the adventurers leave the village with insufficient funds to carry them through the winter. A few locals lose family members to starvation and set into motion plans to get revenge on the greedy adventurers.

The Deviant Villain

"If I must destroy my own people to achieve ultimate victory, I will. Their sacrifices will not be forgotten."

—Vlaakith CLVII

Slaves to darkness, the deviant is a villain who exists to further evil's interests in the world. These despicable characters are beyond redemption, shackled to the cosmic evil that forever struggles against good for

dominance in the planes. Deviants are classic D&D villains, individuals who work evil for evil's sake—remorseless, wicked, and thoroughly corrupt.

Deviant villains often lack the long-term planning necessary to become tier or campaign villains. Instead, they are useful for demonstrating evil's influence in the world for an adventure or two.

Red Herrings (Domination): An ambitious merchant employs several agitators to speak out against the local authorities. Using the common folk's anger at perceived injustices, the merchant hopes to destroy the authority to distract attention from her plan to smuggle in a new and dangerous drug into the community.

The Hidden Villain

"To witness the greatest evil you will ever face, you need only look into a mirror."

—Dispater

It is difficult to fight an enemy that never reveals itself. The hidden villain works from the shadows, wearing many different masks and organizing events through proxies loyal to the villain's cause. Such villains are often at the center of vast conspiracies, where seemingly unrelated events produce incremental advances toward the villain achieving his or her objectives.

A hidden villain is a good choice for a tier or campaign enemy since you have the time to develop the villain's plots in more subtle ways. Seeding the villain's presence in adventures and encounters lets the players discover their hidden enemy in a more organic fashion, while also building the sense of dread that their true enemy can be anyone and anywhere.

Fallen Noble (Corruption): A succubus infiltrates a duke's court masquerading as a courtier. There she seduces the noble and works to make him her slave in both body and soul. As the duke comes under her thrall, his corruption translates into dubious laws and a shadow falling upon the noble's court.

The Villainous Organization

"Without my peeps, I am blind."

—The Xanathar

Not all villains operate alone. Many work together, forming cabals, cults, syndicates, and other organizations to work evil in the world. The villainous organization comprises several different villains, but is larger and more dangerous than any of its individual members. Destroying a cell or defeating a leader is merely a setback. A new cell will rise and a new leader will emerge to continue the organization's work in the world. The only way to truly defeat the organization is to wipe it out, root and branch.

For more examples, see the end of this chapter.

Scarlet Brotherhood (Domination): The Scarlet Brotherhood is a vast conspiracy of killers and mystics who work to restore greatness to their fallen empire. Most agents hide in plain sight, masquerading as advisors, priests, and scholars. Others display their loyalties in the open to strike fear in the hearts of their enemies. The Scarlet Brotherhood constantly seeks to expand its influence by infiltrating and dominating governments all over the world. Defeating one cell is fruitless since there's always another poised to take its place.

The Rival Villain

"I keep my enemies close, for they are my nourishment."
—Eclavdra of House Eilservs

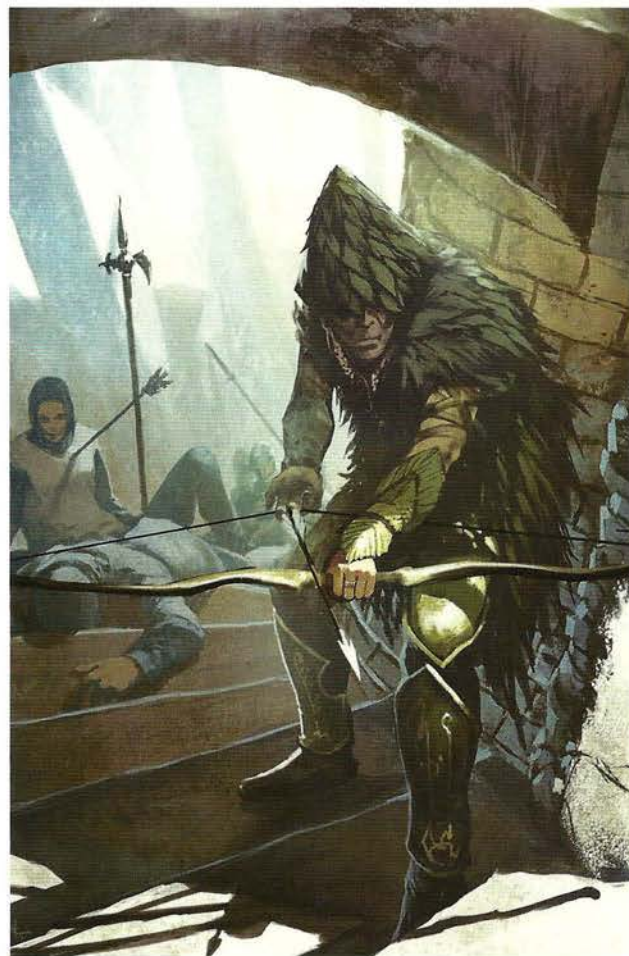
Friendly rivalry is common between adventuring bands. One group's success is often all it takes to prompt another group to do something better, find something more valuable, or defeat something far more evil. Rivalry, however, can have a dark side, and sometimes when one feels wronged or cannot compete with the other, envy sets in. Envy can make villains of almost anyone. A rival villain might be an individual adventurer or another adventuring group. Individual rivals might nurse a grudge against a player character and in doing so become corrupted through efforts to eclipse the character's power. Or, a rival adventuring group might tire of playing second fiddle to the heroes' achievements and become true enemies as tensions escalate.

Fallen Paladin (Corruption): Sir Reginald found middling success as an adventurer, but his archrival, one of the heroes, has always overshadowed his efforts. Tired of being ignored and underappreciated, Reginald seeks power to equal his rival and in doing so has become corrupted by it. Now Reginald plummets into darkness as a blackguard, and the further he falls, the deeper his hatred becomes.

The Sympathetic Villain

"War makes villains of us all."
—King Kaius III

The sympathetic villain is a character who does evil for reasons the player characters can understand. Such a villain might be a vigilante, who takes justice in her own hands, by killing those she suspects of crimes. Another might be a benevolent tyrant who strips away freedoms to ensure that justice prevails. Or, the villain could have embraced darkness to save someone he or she loves. What makes these villains interesting is the "human" element, a quality players can understand and in certain circumstances might emulate.



The Unhappy Solution (Annihilation): Orcs spill out from the mountains each winter, bringing war to the Barony of Everstone, depleting people and resources with each passing season. Baron UMBER is at his wit's end trying to throw back the hordes. He's raised armies, fortified his towns, and recruited mercenaries, but nothing he does seems to dissuade the orcs from returning the next year. Fearing annihilation, the baron has come up with the "unhappy solution" to his problems. Lacking the earthly means to deal with the threat, he's turned to a supernatural agency to help his people.

A shadar-kai witch named Caera offered to deal with the orcs by infecting them with a vile plague guaranteed to wipe them out. In exchange, she asks only for the baron's daughter. With some reluctance, the baron agrees and sends his daughter away. The next spring, the orcs do not appear and, though grieving for his daughter, the baron is relieved. Only then the plague spreads, coming down from the mountains with the snowmelt and infecting and killing his people by the hundreds.

The Traitorous Villain

"I was an adventurer—and a very good one, at that. But that was a past life, taken from me by the traitor, Rary. We were as brothers, he and I—at least, that's how I choose to remember it. A word of caution, young adventurers: Don't let that unslakable thirst for power get the better of you."

—Tenser

The greatest victory evil can attain is to seduce the good and turn them to darkness. Evil has many temptations—power, wealth, lust, and more—to seduce, corrupt, and destroy champions of light. The traitor villain is just such a character, an individual tempted and ultimately corrupted by darkness.

These villains don't reveal their corruption right away. They keep their wickedness a secret until they can no longer conceal it. Sometimes these villains act as hidden foes to start, reveal themselves, and then later become some other kind of villain, such as deviant. In any event, these villains work best when the traitor is someone the adventurers love, trust, or believe in. This way, when the villain is unmasked, the character will have to wrestle with their loyalties to the character and also their outrage at what their former friend has become.

Rook (Corruption): For years, Rook traveled with the Company of Seven, fighting at the heroes' side against all manner of evils. To deal with the darkness found in the dungeons and ruins, Rook turned to the Raven Queen for guidance. He believed he saw her pale beauty on certain nights, a faint yet comforting presence. What Rook did not know was that this being whom he believed was the goddess was in fact a vile hag who wore her form. Long association with the monster eventually led to his spiritual corruption. Finding the hag's commandments at odds with his allies' mission, Rook abandoned his friends to become a thrall to darkness.

VILE MONSTER THEMES

"Necromancy leads nowhere. It is a flawed school, a useless study for understanding shadow's true potential. Necromancy cannot create a self-perpetuating race of undead. Each zombie or skeleton raised requires incredible energy to sustain it. These servants consume all their creator's resources. So the answer doesn't lie in animating the dead. Instead, it exists in the shadow's own marrow."

"Cast off bits of darkness at Creation's dawn formed the Shadowfell. Thus, it should be possible to harness the creative energy within that realm to make something new, something that could create a self-perpetuating race not subject to divine intervention or the natural processes found in the world. Although I had many failures, I take pride in the vessels that carry this potential to new hosts and make them my servants."

—Kyuss

Evil influences creatures in many ways. In some cases, darkness has swayed entire races, keeping them forever in its thrall. In others, evil infects, warps, and twists, compelling creatures to its service. Evil's influence can create lasting changes in ordinary people, awakening new power in them or blighting them with unspeakable transformations.

To weave specific evil narrative lines into your campaign, you can use monster themes to flesh out existing creatures. For example, a theme could represent a particular master's claim on a monster; a transformation that is a consequence of working for a wicked force; or an advantage of special training, devotion, or environmental influence.

This section presents new monster themes that evoke vile darkness's power. You can find additional themes in *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*, *Demonomicon*, and other DM books.

Using Themes

Applying a monster theme to a creature allows you to customize its role and powers. Doing so is a simple process, involving picking an extra power or two and adding them to the creature's statistics block.

Step 1: Choose a Theme

Each theme presented here offers a way to twist monsters toward a particular aspect of evil. Applying a theme demonstrates one of many ways vile darkness can transform creatures into useful servants. Choose a theme that best illustrates the story you want to tell through the combat encounter.

Step 2: Choose a Monster

When you've chosen a monster theme, pick a monster to gain the theme's powers. Each theme description includes suggestions about which monsters best suit the theme, but you should select a monster that fits the encounter and adventure you have in mind.

Many themes and powers recommend specific roles. The power bestowed by the theme can emphasize a creature's existing role or allow a creature to act outside its normal role. However, be cautious about mixing roles. For example, giving a soldier power to a skirmisher might diminish the creature's mobility if it must stay near its target to benefit from the added power. Even though these powers evoke certain roles, adding them to a creature does not change its role. Any power that does not mention a specific role can meld easily with any creature. Finally, be aware that some powers give a creature the leader subrole, as noted in its text.

Step 3: Choose Story Changes

Each monster theme supplies one or more powers that you can add to a creature and also includes story elements to turn an ordinary monster into a unique and compelling foe. Consider what it means to add these powers to a creature, how these abilities arise, and what obligations the monster might have to whoever or whatever instigated its transformation. Many themes also suggest physical changes.

Steps 3 and 4 are interchangeable. Since the powers suggest story and descriptive changes, you can opt to adapt the creature after you've made decisions about what powers to add.

Step 4: Choose Powers

Choose one attack power and one utility power from those the theme supplies to add to a monster's statistics block. You can also add the skill modifications, but it isn't required.

You could add additional powers, but doing so would make the monster more complex to run and possibly more powerful than its level suggests.

Most powers use a creature's level to calculate its attack rolls and damage rolls.

Attack Powers: Each theme includes attack powers. Some offer a monster a new attack or the ability to impose some debilitating effect on its foes. Other powers provide enhancements to a monster's existing attack powers. Each power is written in the style of a normal monster power entry, with a header noting where to add the power to a creature's statistics block. A summary of optional story hooks and the most appropriate roles leads the entry.

Utility Powers: A theme's utility power options could include auras, healing powers, special

movements, and situational benefits to a creature. Utility powers don't usually alter a monster's identity or its tactics in the same way an attack power does.

CHAOS BEAST

"Huungrrreeeeee..."

—Adventurer turned into a chaos beast

Before Creation, only chaos existed. Its raw, unformed substance was a churning soup of possibility that expanded and contracted with no apparent pattern, reason, or purpose. When the primordials imposed form on chaos to create the universe, it disturbed chaos's disorder. Since then, chaos has chipped away at the primordials' configuration as it struggles to return to its original state.

As the essence of chaos wears away at the Abyss, mortal minds, the boundaries to the Far Realm, and everything else in existence, chaos's hounds—the slaads—are busy capering through the Elemental Chaos waging war on Creation. Meanwhile, creatures that chaos directly touches become infected with corporeal instability—a disease that attacks a creature's core form—and usually die. Those that survive are known as chaos beasts. Nearly mindless, they are amorphous engines of destruction bent on spreading their plague and unmaking Creation. Brutes, lurkers, and skirmishers make the best chaos beast monsters.

On becoming a chaos beast, a creature loses its physical form and becomes a mass of deteriorating flesh with sensory organs. Memories and imagination flickering through its unraveling mind destabilize a monster's form, which causes it to cycle through different shapes even as it lashes out with warped appendages to spread its affliction.

Origin: The creature's origin changes to elemental.

Skill Modifications: +2 bonus to Endurance checks.

Attack Powers

A chaos beast exists to create more chaos beasts, thus fighting the war against order one creature at a time.

Corporeal Instability

This power infects a creature with raw chaos, an affliction that is essentially a disease. Creatures that contract the disease become shuddering heaps of spongy flesh and filth. As the disease runs its course, it becomes harder and harder for the creature to retain any form until it finally collapses under the weight of its corruption.

STANDARD ACTIONS

† Corporeal Instability (disease) ♦ Recharge [1]

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); level + 3 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 5 damage per tier, and the target makes a saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a failed saving throw, the target contracts corporeal instability (stage 1).

Miss: 5 damage per tier.

Effect: This creature takes 5 damage per tier.

Corporeal Instability

Variable Level Disease

A creature afflicted by this disease undergoes a rapid transformation to become a boiling, writhing mass of melting flesh.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target is slowed.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target is dazed and slowed.

Stage 3: The target is no longer dazed or slowed. It regains all lost hit points and becomes a chaos beast under the DM's control. As a chaos beast, it gains the corporeal instability power.

Check: At the end of the target's turn, it makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1 or 2.

Lower than Easy DC: The stage of the disease increases by 1.

Easy DC: No change.

Moderate DC or higher: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.

Utility Powers

A chaos beast assumes a variety of disturbing shapes. Some of these forms give the creature unique ways to address challenges.

Appalling Presence

Although a creature's mind is shattered when it becomes a chaos beast, one might on occasion recall its former form. At such times, the beast morphs into

a mockery of its lost shell. Controllers and skirmishers make best use of this power.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

◀ Appalling Presence (fear) ♦ Encounter

Trigger: An enemy hits this creature while the creature isn't bloodied.

Attack (Free Action): Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst that can see this creature); level + 3 vs. Will

Hit: This creature can push the target up to 3 squares, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Slithering Mass

Lacking a solid physical form allows a chaos beast to flow over and through obstructions with ease. Skirmishers make best use of this power.

MOVE ACTIONS

Slithering Mass ♦ At-Will

Effect: If this creature is marked, the mark ends. This creature can shift up to half its speed and ignores difficult terrain during this movement.

Undulating Form

A chaos beast flows around danger, shifting its quivering bulk to avoid attacks. Brutes and soldiers benefit most from this power.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Undulating Form ♦ At-Will

Trigger: An enemy makes a melee or a ranged attack against this creature.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): This creature can shift 1 square.



DEVOTEE OF DARKNESS

"You mustn't speak ill of my Master. If you do, I shall have to hurt you."

—Cyrus Belview

Count Strahd von Zarovich, Lord Soth, Victor Mordenheim, and many others command dark regions of the Shadowfell known as domains of dread. Cursed for their wickedness, they remain trapped in these domains for all eternity. They are both masters and prisoners of the lands they occupy. Shadows and fog mark the boundaries of their blighted lands, clear warnings to passersby to avoid entering these demesnes. Despite their confinement, these dark lords strive to extend their influence across the Shadowfell.

A devotee of darkness is a creature that pledges to serve one of the Shadowfell's many dark lords and accepts its master's brand. The servant surrenders its will, its very soul, in exchange for a measure of power from its patron. A devotee usually reflects the dark lord it serves. Thus, vampires often serve Strahd, and death knights typically work for Lord Soth.

Origin: The creature's origin changes to shadow.

Skill Modifications: +2 bonus to Intimidate checks.

Attack Powers

A dark lord invests power in its chosen servant so the devotee can further the lord's plots in the world.

Crushing Horror

A creature sworn to a dark lord has intimate knowledge of the curse trapping its master in the Shadowfell. This power reveals to an enemy the patron's depth of wickedness, which earned it the curse, leaving the opponent paralyzed with horror. Lurkers and soldiers can make best use of this power to pin down foes at a distance.

MINOR ACTIONS

⚔ **Crushing Horror** (fear) ♦ **Encounter**

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); level + 3 vs. Will

Hit: The target is immobilized and cannot take opportunity actions or immediate actions (save ends both).

Miss: The target is slowed until the end of its next turn.

Dark Lord's Wrath

A devotee of darkness has earned its master's trust through constant and dedicated service. So to protect its asset, a dark lord infuses its servant with a fragment of its power to call upon when the devotee is in dire need of aid. Artillery and controllers benefit from taking this power.



DEVOTEE OF DARKNESS

STANDARD ACTIONS

⚔ **Dark Lord's Wrath** (fear, psychic, zone) ♦ **Encounter**

Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); level + 3 vs. Will

Hit: 1d10 psychic damage plus 5 psychic damage per tier, and this creature can push the target up to 3 squares.

Effect: The blast creates a zone that lasts until the end of this creature's next turn. Enemies in the zone take a -2 penalty to attack rolls.

Utility Powers

Service to a dark lord often exacts a steep price from devotees.

Call the Mists

Queer mists mark the borders to a dark lord's domain and trap doomed sufferers within the demesne while discouraging outsiders from entering. Some devotees, particularly artillery, controllers, and lurkers, learn to call upon these mists to protect them from harm.

MINOR ACTIONS

⚔ **Call the Mists** (aura) ♦ **Encounter**

Effect: This creature activates an aura 2 that lasts until the end of its next turn. The aura is lightly obscured. Any good creature that starts its turn in the aura is slowed (save ends).

Sustain Minor: The aura persists until the end of this creature's next turn.

Cringing Retreat

Although gifted with a dark lord's favor, some devotees are craven. Because these servants' experiences leave them so damaged, they flee confrontation lest their fates worsen.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Cringing Retreat ♦ Encounter

Trigger: An enemy bloodies this creature.

Effect (Free Action): This creature shifts up to its speed and gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses until the end of its next turn.

Unsettling Deformity

A dark lord's servant often bears gruesome marks denoting its allegiance. The dark lord might inflict these deformities as punishment, or the mutations might arise from the creature's proximity to evil. Devotees commonly suffer grotesque obesity, skeletal thinness, boils, humps, and withered limbs.

TRAITS

☠ Unsettling Deformity (fear) ♦ Aura 2

Enemies in the aura that can see this creature take a -2 penalty to attack rolls and Will.

DOOMDREAMER

"I have only one dream. I'm standing before the doors of a great, dark temple. With a crack of lightning and a peal of thunder, the doors unlock and swing open, and beyond... I see my destiny."

—Lareth the Beautiful

The Chained God languishes in an extradimensional prison, yet this does not prevent him from influencing events in the natural world. Most know the Chained God in his aspect as the Elder Elemental Eye or through one of the princes of Elemental Evil who act on his behalf, but there are a few who have earned Tharizdun's attention. These dark vassals identify themselves as doomdreamers because they believe the Chained God has touched their dreams.

Doomdreamers come from humanoid ranks, with humans being the most common. This said, any creature that has risen high in an elemental cult might be touched by the dark god's madness. Doomdreamers can be of any role.

Doomdreamers are uniformly evil, often insane, and prone to deviant behavior. They are cruel and sadistic, delighting in their servants' infighting. Demons, elementals, or lesser foot soldiers enlisted to the cause of elemental evil attend these cultists. Doomdreamers do not often consort with lesser temples since it is in their best interest to keep the elemental cults ignorant about the god they serve.

Skill Modifications: +2 bonus to Religion checks.

Attack Powers

Doomdreamers call upon dark magic bestowed on them by their dark master. Their powers foster madness, filling targets with horrific thoughts, or poisoning the soul, making victims slaves to the Chained God's will.

Chill Soul

Doomdreamers can wither the flesh and rend the soul it holds. Soldiers sometimes adopt this power, as do any creatures that deal additional damage against foes granting combat advantage.

STANDARD ACTIONS

† Chill Soul (cold, necrotic) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); level + 3 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d8 + 4 cold and necrotic damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of its next turn.

Level 11: 2d8 + 8 cold and necrotic damage.

Level 21: 3d8 + 12 cold and necrotic damage.

Maddening Howl

The Chained God does not tolerate failure. His servants know they face oblivion if they perish. This power unleashes the fear and madness of what comes after in one horrific shriek that sounds when the creature dies.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

↩ Maddening Howl (fear, psychic) ♦ Encounter

Trigger: This creature drops to 0 hit points.

Attack (No Action): Close burst 3 (creatures in the burst); level + 3 vs. Will

Hit: 5 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Level 11: 10 psychic damage.

Level 21: 20 psychic damage.

Tharizdun's Touch

By channeling their dark god's power through their hands, doomdreamers can bind their foes in eldritch chains, holding them fast just as the gods bound their master in the Abyss.

STANDARD ACTIONS

† Tharizdun's Touch (charm) ♦ Recharge ☐ ☐ ☐

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); level + 3 vs. Will

Hit: The target is restrained until it succeeds on an Arcana or a Religion check (moderate DC of this creature's level) as a move action.

Miss: The target is slowed until the end of its next turn.

Utility Powers

Doomdreamers use the following powers to commune with the Chained God—or so they think.

Dark Communion

Tharizdun reveals the future to his most dedicated servants, offering shadowy visions of what might unfold. When a creature uses this power, it recalls an omen in a dream and gains a second chance at achieving a success.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Dark Communion (psychic) ♦ Encounter

Trigger: This creature makes an attack roll or a saving throw and dislikes the result.

Effect (No Action): This creature rerolls the attack roll or saving throw. If the attack roll hits or the saving throw succeeds, this creature gains 5 temporary hit points. If the attack roll misses or the saving throw fails, this creature is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Level 11: 10 temporary hit points.

Level 21: 15 temporary hit points.

Insane Revelation

Madness reigns in the doomdreamer's mind. When a creature with this power surrenders to insanity, it might achieve great results or terrible failure.

MINOR ACTIONS

Insane Revelation ♦ At-Will

Effect: Roll a d6 to determine this power's effect.

- ▣ This creature is blinded until the end of its next turn.
- ▣ This creature is dazed until the end of its next turn.
- ▣ This creature grants combat advantage until the end of its next turn.
- ▣ This creature gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses until it is hit by an attack.
- ▣ This creature gains a +2 power bonus to attack rolls until it misses with an attack.
- ▣ This creature can take an extra standard action this turn.

Vile Command

Doomdreamers that are strong of will can command the Chained God's demonic, elemental, and undead servants. If a doomdreamer lacks the necessary conviction to compel such creatures, Tharizdun punishes the fool for his weakness. Creatures with this power gain the leader subrole.

MINOR ACTIONS

☞ Vile Command ♦ Recharge ☞ ☞

Effect: Ranged 5 (one ally who can hear this creature). The target makes a basic attack as a free action against an enemy this creature chooses. If the attack hits, the target also gains 5 temporary hit points. If the attack misses, the target takes 10 damage.

MAENAD

"The Feywild is a realm of emotions run rampant. Even the trees, pebbles, and clouds have them. It can drive you mad."

—The Prince of Frost

The Feywild is the world's bright reflection, and it does contain great beauty, but it is also home to terrible evil and ugliness. Hags grow fat on marrow sucked from the bones of those who cross their paths, sprites and pixies play lethal tricks on hapless fools who stumble into their traps, and fomorians rouse armies to enslave enemies in the world above.

Evil in this plane preys on the most powerful emotions of love and hate, lust and fear. It magnifies them until they consume a creature's every thought. Creatures afflicted by the plane's intensity become slaves to their emotions. They are erratic and strange, violent and aggressive. They don't care about the harm they inflict and the suffering they create. Known as maenads, they are a crazed host comprising numerous races and creatures united by their mad desire to feed their emotional cravings.

Maenads are often brutes and skirmishers, though controllers sometimes find themselves subject to the madness too. A maenad resembles a normal creature of its kind, but is wild and unkempt. The creature's eyes roll about in its head and blood spatters its teeth and body.

Skill Modifications: +2 bonus to Nature checks and Perception checks.

Attack Powers

Maenads are aggressive in battle. They rip their opponents to pieces with their claws and teeth or even with just their bare hands. Most are afflicted by a wild frenzy that clouds their judgment until they lose all inhibition.

Maenad Bloodlust

The madness afflicting maenads most often manifests as an uncontrollable and ferocious bloodlust, an eagerness to rend and tear anyone they can reach. Skirmishers are most likely to use this power.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

† Maenad Bloodlust ♦ At-Will (1/round)

Trigger: An enemy within a number of squares equal to this creature's speed becomes bloodied.

Effect (Free Action): The maenad moves up to its speed to a square adjacent to the triggering enemy and then makes the following attack.

Attack: Melee 1 (triggering enemy); level + 3 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 5 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Level 11: 10 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).

Level 21: 15 damage, and ongoing 15 damage (save ends).

Maenad Frenzy

The maenads are best known for their unpredictable behavior. One moment, a maenad might be lucid and the next a wild, frothing berserker. Brutes do well by taking this power.

TRAITS

Maenad Frenzy

At the start of this creature's turn, roll a d6. On a 1, it is dazed until the start of its next turn. On a 6, it gains a +2 power bonus to attack rolls, and its melee attacks deal 1d6 extra damage.

Rending Fury

The most ancient tales about the maenads are those recounting the wild women who tore children limb from limb. Echoes from these old tales sound in the desperate screams of those who fall into the maenads' clutches.

STANDARD ACTIONS

✦ Rending Fury ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); level + 3 vs. Reflex

Hit: This creature grabs the target (escape DC moderate of this creature's level). Each time the target starts its turn grabbed by this creature, the target takes damage equal to 2 + one-half this creature's level.

Utility Powers

The Feywild's influence on certain creatures manifests as madness, delusion, and unchecked aggression. The following powers display the different forms this madness might take.

Feywild Madness

A creature with this power can shrug off some of the most debilitating conditions.

TRAITS

Feywild Madness

When this creature starts its turn subject to a dazing, stunning, or dominating effect, it can make a saving throw to end one such effect, even if the effect does not normally allow a saving throw.

Indulge the Pain

Pain drives maenads to even more appalling acts of violence. The worse the injury, the greater the maenad's ferocity becomes.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Indulge the Pain ✦ At-Will

Trigger: This creature takes ongoing damage on its turn.

Effect (Free Action): This creature makes a basic attack.

MOILIAN DEAD

"I like destroying pretty things."

—Orcus

Eons ago, there was a city wholly in the thrall of demon-worshippers. Generations spent offering sacrifices to the Demon Lord of Undeath rewarded the people with the fiend's dread attention. But time and new ideas shifted the people away from darkness and toward the light. The demon lord, sensing their betrayal, cursed them all. He trapped them in an eternal slumber and then flung the city into the deepest reaches of the Shadowfell, where darkness would consume the graceful spires and elegant bridges, dragging all into oblivion. Moil was the city's name, and since its fall it has lured many treasure seekers and villains to explore its crumbling remains.

The citizens of Moil did not survive their eternal slumber, yet the sinister energies suffusing the dark lands have infused their corpses with terrible power. Now all sorts of undead roam the city, including zombies, ghouls, wraiths, and specters. The city's heritage combined with the intense unholy atmosphere gives these undead unusual and deadly capabilities.

The Moilian dead theme is available only to undead creatures and benefits creatures of any role.

Subtype: The creature gains the undead subtype if it doesn't have it already.

Resistance: A creature that has the Moilian dead theme gains resist 5 cold and resist 5 necrotic if it doesn't have them already. The resistance increases to 10 in the paragon tier and 15 in the epic tier.

Vulnerability: A creature that has the Moilian dead theme gains vulnerable 5 fire and vulnerable 5 radiant if it doesn't have them already. The vulnerability increases to 10 in the paragon tier and 15 in the epic tier.

Skill Modifications: +2 bonus to Stealth checks.

Attack Powers

Moil's slow descent into darkness grips the city in a killing frost. Undead emerging from the ruins wield cold as a weapon.

Deathly Frost

Moil's unwholesome coldness permeates the creatures stalking its ruins. Those confronting the Moilian dead must contend with the biting frost that rolls off these accursed creatures.

TRAITS

☼ Deathly Frost (cold, necrotic) ✦ Aura 2

Any living creature grants combat advantage while in the aura and takes 5 cold and necrotic damage if it ends its turn there.

Level 11: 10 cold and necrotic damage.

Level 21: 15 cold and necrotic damage.



Freezing Doom

Within every Moilian dead is a spark of memory, an awareness of those choices that led to their miserable fate. Once released from their curse through final death, their freed souls erupt in a burst of killing cold.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

↩ Freezing Doom (cold) ♦ Encounter

Trigger: This creature drops to 0 hit points.

Effect (No Action): Close burst 1 (living creatures in the burst). The target takes 5 cold damage, and it is immobilized (save ends).

Level 11: 10 cold damage.

Level 21: 20 cold damage.

Gift of Orcus

Some Moilian dead can transmit the curse that afflicted them so long ago to those who cut them down.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

† Gift of Orcus ♦ Encounter

Trigger: An adjacent enemy drops this creature to 0 hit points.

Attack (No Action): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); level + 3 vs. Will

Hit: The target falls unconscious (save ends).

First Failed Saving Throw: The target takes a -4 penalty to saving throws against this effect.

Miss: The target is slowed (save ends).

Utility Power

Moilian dead sleep until roused by the presence of the living.

Sense Life

Orcus's curse on the Moilian people consigned them to an eternity of sleep. The only thing that rouses them from their deathly slumber is proximity to the living, which gives the darkness granting them unlife impetus to snuff out the offending presence.

TRAITS

Sense Life

This creature knows the locations of all living creatures within 5 squares of it, even if it can't see them.

SLAVE TO THE NINE HELLS

"Every devil wants to be your friend, and like a friend, he'll help you out of a jam, see. Need a few coins to get by? The devil's got a few to spare. Need a warm body to fill your bed? The devil knows the best ladies. Want status? Riches? Property? Power? The devil has the answers. He'll give you all you want and more. And what does he want in exchange? Just a little thing—a trifle, really. And it won't affect you in the slightest. All he wants is your soul."

—Conner Smithson, Seeker of Virtue

Souls are the currency of the Nine Hells. The archdevils crave them, covet them, and will do anything to get them. The reason is simple: souls have power. Souls gave the Raven Queen the means to end Nerull's dark reign and claim his mantle. And before that, souls gave Nerull the power over life and death and the ability to seize the world in his skeletal grip. The archdevils would follow Asmodeus and his own rise to power by hoarding the souls necessary to complete their own apotheosis.

A great many souls are lost to the Nine Hells through fiendish corruption, while others are stolen en route to Letherna (the Raven Queen's demesne) by diabolical harvesters. Others find themselves damned by entering ill-advised agreements with tempters in life, only to find an eternity of torment for fleeting mortal wealth, pleasure, or some other distraction that won a devil its power. Those mortals who fall prey to these temptations are little more than slaves, for there is nothing they can do to escape the fate they earned. Archdevils are not above such deals, forging infernal pacts with warlocks and other mortals.

Unlike most monster themes, the follow powers are available only to creatures that have sold their souls to a particular devil or who profess allegiance to a particular archdevil. To cement the compact, the mortal creature accepts a special brand that denotes the fiend's ownership of their souls. When applying this theme to a creature, choose a brand from those described below. The creature gains the attack power and the utility power associated with that brand.

Brand of Avernus

Avernus is a war-torn and barren landscape, punctuated by pitted and crumbling fortresses used to defend the Nine Hells against the demonic invasions sparked by the Blood War. Bel, the archdevil who nominally rules, recruits primarily brutes and soldiers to aid in the defense of his demesne.

Skill Modification: +2 bonus to Intimidate checks.

Accursed Flames

Bel's slaves can call forth their master's power, which manifests as green flames that dance across their weapons. The flames defeat an enemy's fire resistance.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Accursed Flames (fire) ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼

Trigger: This creature hits an enemy with a weapon attack.

Effect (No Action): The triggering attack ignores the target's fire resistance and deals 1d6 extra fire damage.

Level 11: 2d6 extra fire damage.

Level 21: 3d6 extra fire damage.

Avernus Tactics

Bel has no illusions about his place in the Nine Hells' hierarchy. It is more important to him that his servants find success in battle for as long as they survive.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Avernus Tactics ♦ At-Will

Trigger: An adjacent enemy misses this creature with an attack.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): This creature can shift 1 square, and it gains combat advantage against the triggering enemy until the end of its next turn.

Brand of Dis

Dispater passes on his constant paranoia to those in his service, alerting them to the myriad enemies and dangers lying in wait. Many creatures who bargain with this archdevil cloister themselves away, hiding in vast fortresses protected by insidious traps and obedient monsters. Dispater favors controllers and skirmishers.

Initiative: +2 bonus to initiative checks.

Skill Modification: +2 bonus to Insight checks.

Imprisoning Advance

Slaves of Dispater know the value of a good escape route and thus use the power given to them to create a path to safety that leaves their enemies unable to give chase.

MOVE ACTIONS

Imprisoning Advance ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼

Effect: This creature gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses until the end of this turn and moves up to its speed. If an enemy makes an opportunity attack provoked by this movement, this creature can make the following attack against that enemy.

Attack (Free Action): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); level + 3 vs. Will

Hit: The target is immobilized until the end of its next turn.

All-Around Vision

A slave of Dispaten grows extra eyes all over its body to watch for treachery. These eyes, while unsightly, let the creature counter flanks.

TRAITS

All-Around Vision

Enemies can't gain combat advantage by flanking this creature.

Brand of Minauros

Mammon, ruler of Minauros, is a cringing, wretched archdevil. He is an opportunist who knows how to flatter and connive to keep his throne. These traits infect those in his service and help them spread evil through unexpected ways. Lurkers and skirmishers are best served by gaining this brand.

Skill Modification: +2 bonus to Bluff checks.

Cringing Presence

Slaves to Mammon appear weak and pathetic, exuding a harmless if disgusting presence that convinces enemies to pass them over. This same feeble appearance allows the slave to capitalize on an enemy's reluctance and strike while its foe's guard is down.

TRAITS

☼ Cringing Presence ♦ Aura 1

Any enemy in the aura that has more hit points than this creature takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls against this creature. Any enemy in the aura that has fewer hit points than this creature grants combat advantage to it.

Mammon's Cunning

Mammon survives by learning everything he can about his enemies and then using this information to defeat their expectations. A creature with this trait can leap against foes with surprising ferocity or slip away, unnoticed.

TRAITS

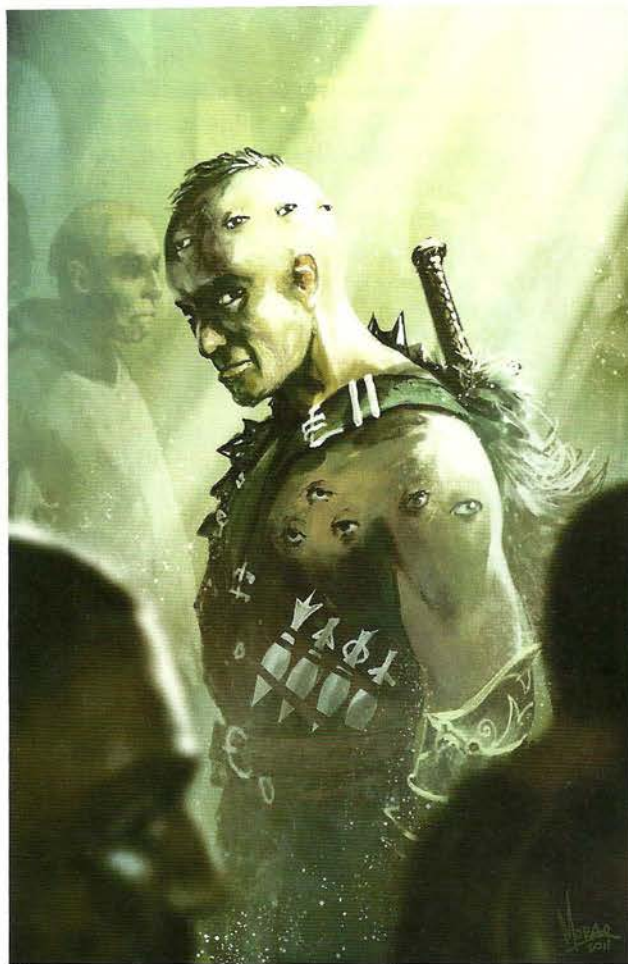
Mammon's Cunning

This creature does not provoke opportunity attacks when charging. In addition, whenever this creature moves, its first square of movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Brand of Phlegethos

Seductive Fierna inherited her throne from her father Belial, and she uses her power to feed her hedonistic impulses and to torment those under her power. Her father, however, is never far from her throne and manipulates her to further his interests. Soldiers, skirmishers, and lurkers often find service with this unholy pair.

Skill Modification: +2 bonus to Diplomacy checks.



Wicked Fantasy

With a touch, a slave of Fierna can fill an enemy with unspeakable desire, flooding its senses with hideous fantasies that leave it gasping in pleasure and horror.

STANDARD ACTIONS

† Wicked Fantasy (charm, psychic) ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); level + 3 vs. Will

Hit: The target is dazed and takes ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends both).

Each Failed Saving Throw: This creature can slide the target 1 square.

Level 11: 10 psychic damage.

Level 21: 15 psychic damage.

Pleasure from Pain

Service to Fierna and Belial warps a creature's pleasure senses. These creatures can only know ecstasy by experiencing or delivering pain.

TRAITS

Pleasure from Pain

Each time this creature takes damage, it gains a cumulative +1 power bonus to attack rolls until the end of its next turn, to a maximum bonus of +5. If this creature ends its turn without dealing damage on that turn, it is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Brand of Stygia

Levistus regained control over Stygia after Asmodeus banished Geryon, but the archdevil remained locked within an icy prison. Thus Levistus relies on proxies to seduce mortals and give him their souls. Soldiers and lurkers are the most common creatures to gain this brand.

Icewalk: This creature gains icewalk.

Skill Modification: +2 bonus to Acrobatics checks.

Stygian Prison

Levistus's power grows with each soul sent to Stygia. Slaves can use this power to imprison enemies in ice and speed them to their graves.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

Stygian Prison (cold) ♦ Encounter

Trigger: This creature hits an enemy with a melee attack.

Effect (No Action): The target of the triggering attack is restrained (save ends). Whenever the target takes damage while restrained by this power, it takes 5 extra cold damage.

Level 11: 10 extra cold damage.

Level 21: 15 extra cold damage.



Icy Panoply

When faced with losing a valuable servant, Levistus armors his slave in Stygian ice to give it the edge it needs to triumph over its enemies.

MINOR ACTIONS

Icy Panoply (cold) ♦ Encounter

Requirement: This creature must be bloodied.

Effect: This creature gains resist 20 to all damage. Each time this creature takes damage from an attack, reduce the resistance by 5. When the resistance drops to 0, the effect ends. While this creature has resistance granted by this power, its melee attacks deal extra cold damage equal to 2 + one-half its level.

Brand of Malbolge

Glasya, daughter of Asmodeus and ruler of the Sixth Hell, is ambitious if she's anything. She uses her familial connection to Asmodeus to shield her from reprisals while engaging in endless plotting to expand her power throughout the Nine Hells and beyond. Glasya recruits any creature she can.

Skill Modification: +2 bonus to Thievery checks.

Stolen Power

Some legends claim Glasya gained her power by killing another, more ancient archdevil who ruled Malbolge. This power lends credence to these tales, since her servants are quick to take that which does not belong to them.

MINOR ACTIONS

Stolen Power ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼ ☼

Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); level + 3 vs. Fortitude

Hit: The target is weakened until the end of this creature's next turn.

Effect: This creature's attacks deal extra damage equal to 2 + one-half its level until the target is no longer weakened.

Brimstone Escape

Glasya's gifts are not without a price. She cares nothing for her servants or their lives; she wants only their souls. So even though this power allows her slave to escape its enemies, it also afflicts the creature with terrible pain.

MOVE ACTIONS

Brimstone Escape (teleportation) ♦ Encounter

Effect: This creature teleports up to 10 squares. It is then dazed until the end of its next turn.

Brand of Maladomini

As punishment for plotting to usurp his power, Asmodeus transformed Baalzebul into a horrid slug-like creature, a form suited to the pestilential domain he rules. This curse afflicts those who come into the Lord of Flies' service, slowly remaking them into their master's image. Baalzebul favors brutes and soldiers.

Skill Modification: +2 bonus to Stealth checks.

Corrosive Grab

A slimy filth seeps from the creature's pores. While harmless to the creature that creates it, the slime burns through any other creature that touches it.

STANDARD ACTIONS

† Corrosive Grab (acid) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); level + 3 vs. Reflex

Hit: This creature grabs the target (escape DC moderate of this creature's level). Until the grab ends, the target takes ongoing acid damage equal to 2 + one-half this creature's level.

Foul Excretions

Baalzebul's slaves can increase the slime's flow until it runs water from their bodies. As they slither across the battlefield, they leave behind slippery trails.

MOVE ACTIONS

Foul Excretions (acid) ♦ Encounter

Effect: This creature moves up to its speed. Each square it exits becomes slimy until the end of the encounter. Whenever a creature enters a slimy square, it must make an Acrobatics check against a moderate DC of this creature's level or fall prone and take acid damage equal to 2 + one-half this creature's level.

Brand of Cania

Mephistopheles is Asmodeus's chief rival and most dangerous foe. Fawning when he needs to be, he plots to usurp the god's throne and take his power for himself. Mephistopheles discovered how to use souls to create hellfire, a process he has thus far guarded.

Skill Modification: +2 bonus to Arcana checks.

Secret of Hellfire

Mephistopheles allows his slaves to wield hellfire since using it destroys the user almost as quickly as it does the user's enemies.

STANDARD ACTIONS

◀ Secret of Hellfire (aura, fire, psychic) ♦ Encounter

Effect: This creature activates an aura 1 that lasts until the end of its next turn. Any enemy that enters the aura or ends its turn there takes fire and psychic damage equal to 5 + this creature's level (a creature can take this damage only once per turn).

Sustain Minor: The aura persists until the end of this creature's next turn, and each creature in the aura, including this creature, takes fire damage equal to 2 + one-half this creature's level.

Rising Anger

Although Mephistopheles covets Asmodeus's power, it is his own wrath that proves his undoing time and again. This same unpredictable anger infects his servants.

TRAITS

Rising Anger

Whenever this creature misses with a melee or a ranged attack, it gains a +1 power bonus to attack rolls and a -2 penalty to all defenses. The bonus and penalty are cumulative. This creature loses them when it hits with an attack.

Brand of Nessus

Asmodeus rules the Nine Hells from Nessus, the Ninth Hell. Invested with stolen divine power from the god remembered as He Who Was and armed with a fragment of evil chipped from the shard in the Abyss's bowels, Asmodeus is one of the most powerful gods in the planes. He does not often seduce mortals, knowing they will come to him voluntarily. Leaders, soldiers, and controllers are common slaves to Asmodeus.

Skill Modification: +2 bonus to Bluff checks.

Dire Command

Those invested with Asmodeus's power gain a measure of the dark god's authority and can command other creatures to do as they wish.

STANDARD ACTIONS

☞ Dire Command ♦ At-Will

Effect: Ranged 5 (one ally). The target makes a basic attack as a free action against a creature of this creature's choice, with a +2 power bonus to the attack roll.

Clever Switch

Enjoying favored status among other slaves to the Nine Hells, those enslaved to Asmodeus employ devious cunning to ensure that they survive battles with their enemies.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

☞ Clever Switch ♦ Recharge ☞ ☞ ☞

Trigger: An enemy hits this creature with a melee or a ranged attack.

Effect (Immediate Interrupt): This creature switches the target of the attack from itself to a creature adjacent to it, other than the triggering enemy.

NEW MONSTERS

"The most fearsome monster I ever saw had two arms, two legs, and one head, and on its head was a face with two eyes, two ears, one nose, and one mouth, and above this face grew a mop of hair. Everywhere else, the creature's flesh was mostly pink and bare. Mostly. Makes my slime crawl thinking about it."

—Juiblex

As the Abyss spawns fiends aplenty to bring strife to creatures near and far, agents of the dark plot and connive to advance their masters' aims. The following monsters have spawned from evil's embrace to wrap existence in a tapestry of pain, humiliation, death, and torment.

ANGEL, FALLEN

Deicide is no small thing. A god's death causes dominions to tremble, the world to groan, and the demons below to howl in delight. Tremors spread through Creation as powerful beings scramble to claim portfolios the god released at the moment of its extinction. But despite the god's life force being snuffed out, its creatures are not freed from service.

Known as fallen angels, these immortal champions of a slain god are sheathed in grief and remain driven to do the work for which they were chosen.

Lore

Religion DC 20: Most angels are independent agents. They wing through the Astral Sea running myriad errands and safeguarding the expanse they call home. The gods claim some angels as servants, soldiers, and emissaries, positions few would refuse. When an angel joins a particular god's retinue, it slowly transforms as a trickle of its master's physical and psychological characteristics seeps into its essence. Over time, the seepage drowns out the angel's memory of its life before joining its master. Thus, the deity's imprint consumes an ever-greater portion of the angel the longer the retainer serves.

Religion DC 25: When a god dies, its surviving angels are stripped of varying portions of their identities. The longest-serving angels morph into brittle travesties of their master. These fallen angels manage to cling to the fading threads of divine power and use it to serve the god posthumously. But their grief and rage taint their efforts, making them some of the most unpredictable and unstable dark forces in the Astral Sea.

Encounters

Fallen angels take a vengeance oath against their god's slayer and its supporters and minions. These sundered immortals have no compunction against joining forces with foul creatures to accomplish their goals and can be found with abominations, elementals, demons, and undead.

Charismatic fallen angels could enlist other independent angels to their cause and might even confuse themselves with the god they once served.

Fallen Angel of Winter

Khala, the goddess of winter, sought to imprison the world in an endlessly frigid state. The other deities rallied against her and throttled her bid to become mistress of the gods. They eliminated her, destroyed her realm, and scattered her servants, earning themselves the venomous regard of the fallen angels of winter.

Crackling with hate, this icy creature ambushes, frames, and hunts Khala's killers and their servants.

Fallen Angel of Winter		Level 13 Soldier
Medium immortal humanoid (angel)		XP 800
HP 128; Bloodied 64		Initiative +12
AC 29, Fortitude 27, Reflex 25, Will 23		Perception +7
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)		
Immune fear; Resist 10 cold, 10 radiant		
TRAITS		
☼ Khala's Hate ◆ Aura 3		
While the angel is not bloodied, enemies in the aura have vulnerable 5 cold.		
Angelic Presence		
While the angel is not bloodied, attack rolls against it take a -2 penalty.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⊕ Ice Spear (cold, weapon) ◆ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC		
Hit: 3d8 + 7 cold damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the angel's next turn.		
↔ Khala's Vengeance (cold) ◆ Encounter		
Requirement: The angel must be bloodied.		
Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in the burst); +16 vs. Fortitude		
Hit: 2d8 + 4 cold damage, and the target is immobilized and takes ongoing 10 cold damage (save ends both).		
Aftereffect: The target is slowed (save ends).		
Miss: Half damage, and the target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 cold damage (save ends both).		
Str 22 (+12)	Dex 19 (+10)	Wis 13 (+7)
Con 16 (+9)	Int 10 (+6)	Cha 15 (+8)
Alignment evil		Languages Supernal
Equipment scale armor, spear		

Fallen Angel of Winter in Combat

A fallen angel of winter is as merciless as a blizzard. It descends unseen from the cover of a wicked storm to wrap foes in cold and pierce their bodies with winter's bite.

Fallen Angel of Sorrow

As exarch of the god now known as He Who Was, the ever-ambitious Asmodeus stole a sliver of the evil shard buried in the Abyss, and it swiftly corrupted him. Asmodeus then murdered his master and donned his mantle as ruler of Baator. Shocked, the other gods sealed the usurper away in his new dominion, which has since become known as the Nine Hells. But the grief of the fallen angels of sorrow could not be so easily banished.

Bereft of its good and peaceful god, a fallen angel of sorrow acts more like its nemesis than its former master. Devoted to Asmodeus's annihilation, this creature retains enough of its master's heart to weep as it rends flesh from bone.

Fallen Angel of Sorrow Level 17 Artillery

Medium immortal humanoid (angel)

XP 1,600

HP 122; Bloodied 61

Initiative +13

AC 31, Fortitude 28, Reflex 29, Will 31

Perception +14

Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)

Immune fear; Resist 10 radiant

TRAITS

☼ Sorrow ♦ Aura 1

Any enemy in the aura that misses the angel with an attack is dazed until the end of the enemy's next turn.

Angelic Presence

While the angel is not bloodied, attack rolls against it take a -2 penalty.

STANDARD ACTIONS

⚔ Flail (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +22 vs. AC

Hit: 2d10 + 7 damage, and the angel can push the target up to 2 squares.

🏹 Longbow (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +24 vs. AC

Hit: 3d10 + 8 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). This attack deals 2d6 extra damage against a slowed target.

☼ Tears from Heaven (fear, weapon) ♦ Encounter

Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +22 vs. Will

Hit: 4d10 + 8 damage, and the target cannot attack (save ends).

Miss: Half damage.

Str 18 (+12) Dex 21 (+13) Wis 22 (+14)

Con 14 (+10) Int 12 (+9) Cha 24 (+15)

Alignment unaligned Languages Supernal

Equipment flail, longbow, 30 arrows

Fallen Angel of Sorrow in Combat

A fallen angel of sorrow appears as a broken, mournful heap. It wails its despair, a tactic that disarms many foes. As tears streak its visage, it swiftly raises its bow and pierces its arrows and grief into enemy hearts. Brazen melee attackers find themselves dazed and heartsick in the fallen angel's presence, and mortal foes often find themselves weeping alongside their assailant as they fight to the death.

Fallen Angel of Death

Nerull's angels carried plagues and death to the natural world. It was their task to harvest souls and bring them to their master. After the Raven Queen defeated the god and stole his power, the fallen angels of death fled to the Shadowfell's darkest corners, and over the centuries the constant exposure to necrotic energies perverted their life force.

Fallen Angel of Death Level 21 Skirmisher

Large immortal humanoid (angel, undead)

XP 3,200

HP 197; Bloodied 98

Initiative +18

AC 35, Fortitude 35, Reflex 33, Will 32

Perception +19

Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)

Darkvision

Immune disease, fear, poison; Resist 15 necrotic, 15 radiant

TRAITS

☼ Nerull's Demand ♦ Aura 5

Any enemy that makes a death saving throw while in the aura takes a -5 penalty to the roll.

Angelic Presence

While the angel is not bloodied, attack rolls against it take a -2 penalty.

Life Sense

The angel knows the location of all living creatures within 5 squares of it, and the angel's attacks against living enemies within 5 squares of it ignore concealment.

STANDARD ACTIONS

⚔ Scythe (weapon) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +26 vs. AC

Hit: 3d12 + 9 damage.

Effect: The angel can shift up to 2 squares.

Death's Hourglass (necrotic) ♦ Recharge when the effect ends

Effect: Ranged 10 (one creature). The target takes ongoing 30 necrotic damage until the end of the encounter. The target or an ally adjacent to it can end this effect by succeeding on a standard action DC 35 Religion check or two standard action DC 26 Religion checks. The effect automatically ends when the angel drops below 1 hit point.

MINOR ACTIONS

Death's Decree (necrotic) ♦ At-Will (1/round)

Effect: Ranged 5 (one creature subject to death's hourglass). The target takes 15 necrotic damage, and the angel can shift 1 square closer to the target.

Skills Insight +19

Str 26 (+18)

Dex 23 (+16)

Wis 19 (+14)

Con 21 (+15)

Int 18 (+14)

Cha 21 (+15)

Alignment evil

Languages Supernal

Equipment scythe

Fallen Angel of Death in Combat

Cut loose from its master, a fallen angel of death soars across the night sky, searching for souls to feed a hunger that cannot be slaked.

A fallen angel of death points its bony finger at an enemy and then flips over its hourglass. As each grain drops to the lower chamber, the fallen angel's foe feels its life force ebbing away. Then the angel gets to work using its scythe to reap its harvest of souls.

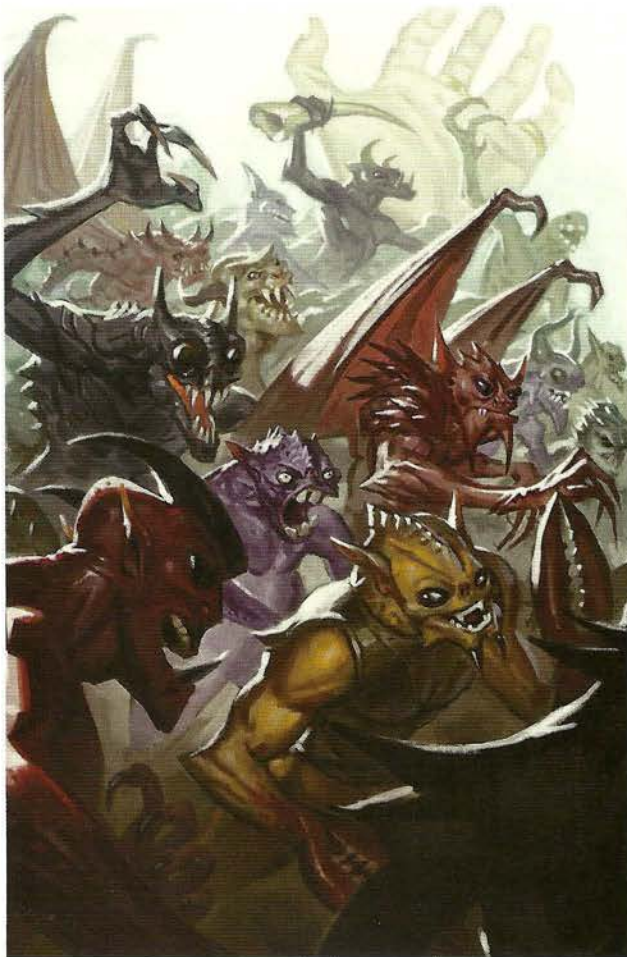
DEMON, HORDELING

The Abyss, abetted by impressively creative demon lords, is an ever-churning womb that spits out demons in countless shapes and sizes. Each fiend is a manifestation of the darkness welling up from the evil shard lodged in the realm's heart.

Hordelings are the least of demonkind. These tiny, cunning fiends emerge from the poisoned landscape with a passionate hatred for all things. No two hordelings are physically alike. The Abyss arms these demons with unpredictable numbers of claws, fangs, stingers, horns, and spurs to enable them to contribute to the circle of birth, pain, and death that keeps the Abyss alive.

Lore

Arcana DC 27: Demons do not reproduce; they destroy. Their inability to procreate in no way diminishes their numbers, though, because the Abyss spawns new demons from the used up bits of dead ones. From somewhere deep inside the realm's layers, pure evil impregnates raw elemental substance, causing new demons to rise up and carry on with the business of chaos and evil.



In theory, a hordeling might eventually evolve into another kind of demon. But these creatures are typically lobbed across battlefields, crushed underfoot, consumed, or slaughtered willy-nilly in demon games before they get much of a chance to experience living.

Encounters

Hordelings spring up throughout the Abyss, and other demons pass their time tormenting these teeny fiends or crunching them between their teeth. In places of great carnage, such as after Blood War battles, these demons are more numerous, since plenty of raw material is available to replenish their numbers.

Hordeling Mob	Level 11 Elite Brute
Gargantuan elemental humanoid (demon, swarm)	XP 1,200
HP 276; Bloodied 138	Initiative +9
AC 23, Fortitude 24, Reflex 23, Will 21	Perception +7
Speed 5	Darkvision
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; Vulnerable 10 to close and area attacks	
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
TRAITS	
⚙️ Swarm Attack ♦ Aura 1	
Any enemy that starts its turn in the aura takes 10 damage.	
Swarm	
The mob can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space, which is difficult terrain. The mob cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for at least one of the creatures it comprises.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔️ Gnashing Host ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature and each creature in the mob's space); +16 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 13 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the mob's next turn.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
Flowing Mob ♦ Recharge when first bloodied	
Effect: The mob shifts up to its speed.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Breakaway Hordeling ♦ At-Will (1/round)	
Trigger: An enemy hits the mob.	
Effect (No Action): Up to four hordeling breakaways (roll a d4 to determine the exact number) appear in squares within 2 squares of the mob. They can appear in occupied squares and act on the mob's turn. Hordeling breakaways created in this fashion are worth no experience points.	
Scattering Swarm ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: A close or an area attack hits the mob.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The triggering attack deals only half damage to the mob.	
Str 21 (+10)	Dex 18 (+9) Wis 15 (+7)
Con 18 (+9)	Int 3 (+1) Cha 5 (+2)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages –	

Hordeling Breakaway **Level 11 Minion Brute**

Tiny elemental humanoid (demon)

XP 150

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.

Initiative +10

AC 23, Fortitude 23, Reflex 24, Will 21

Perception +7

Speed 5

Darkvision

STANDARD ACTIONS**Ⓢ Gnashing Teeth ♦ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 0 (one creature); +16 vs. AC

Hit: 11 damage.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS**Drawn to Pain ♦ At-Will***Trigger:* An enemy within 3 squares of the hordeling is bloodied by an attack.*Effect (Immediate Reaction):* The hordeling can shift up to 3 squares to a square in the triggering enemy's space.

Str 13 (+6) Dex 21 (+10) Wis 15 (+7)

Con 18 (+9) Int 3 (+1) Cha 5 (+2)

Alignment chaotic evil Languages –

Hordeling Mobs in Combat

An individual hordeling is little more than a nuisance. Gather them up by the hundreds, however, and they present a serious threat. A hordeling mob is a frenzied swarm of maws, stingers, horns, and claws that tear enemies into bloody ribbons. Being bathed in foes' blood further excites the fiends, and eager hordelings occasionally pop out of the mob to lap up the liquid before attacking from a new position.

DEVIL, WRATH

The secret to corrupting a mortal lies in allowing the creature to author his or her own downfall. Present temptations, lure the fool onto corruption's path, and then creep silently in the victim's wake as his or her decisions lead to the Nine Hells.

Similar to the succubi and imps tasked with gathering mortal souls for their masters, a wrath devil roams the natural world, preying on people who indulge in erratic behavior and allow their passions to rule them.

Lore

Arcana DC 29: Despite their hunger for mortal souls, devils rarely enter the natural world, some scholars insist. They say devils cannot visit the natural world without a mortal's invitation. Other sages mock such assertions, saying fear is driving their research. These scholars believe devils are everywhere, hidden as they watch and wait for the best time to entice a mortal into finding succor in darkness. What truth is known is that while devils are glad to accept any soul, they crave those belonging to powerful individuals. The brighter a soul shines, the more energy the Hells can squeeze from it.

According to legend, a devil exists for every mortal failing. Indeed, devils seem bred to target specific weaknesses, striking at their quarries where they are



DEVIL, WRATH

most vulnerable. A succubus preys on lust-consumed creatures, while an imp targets ambition-ruled mortals. Meanwhile, a wrath devil exploits the anger burning in mortal hearts. It goads its targets to give into hatred and impulsively act on their passions.

Encounters

When a wrath devil is near, self-control frays and tempers flare. It has a knack for escalating violence and driving mortals mad with uncontrollable anger. A wrath devil uses its victims to work evil and thus become consumed by it.

While in the Nine Hells, a wrath devil uses bearded devils as bodyguards. While in the natural world, succubi and duergar are its common companions.

Wrath Devil	Level 13 Controller
Medium immortal humanoid (devil)	XP 800
HP 128; Bloodied 64	Initiative +10
AC 27, Fortitude 24, Reflex 25, Will 27	Perception +14
Speed 6	Darkvision
Resist 10 fire	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Claws ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 12 damage.	
✂ Compel Anger (charm, psychic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +16 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 psychic damage, and the target takes a free action to charge or make a basic attack against a creature the devil chooses. If this attack hits, the target is dominated (save ends).	
Afterside: Until the end of the encounter, the target treats its allies as enemies only for the purpose of making opportunity attacks. The target must make opportunity attacks if provoked.	
MOVE ACTIONS	
⚔ Driven by Hate (charm) ♦ At-Will	
Effect: Ranged 5 (one creature dominated by the devil). The devil slides the target up to 3 squares.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⚔ Confounding Escape (fire, teleportation) ♦ At-Will	
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the devil hits it with a melee attack.	
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +16 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 4d6 + 7 fire damage.	
Effect: The devil teleports itself or the target up to 6 squares.	
Skills Bluff +17, Insight +14	
Str 11 (+6)	Dex 19 (+10) Wis 16 (+9)
Con 16 (+9)	Int 16 (+9) Cha 23 (+12)
Alignment evil	Languages Supernal

Wrath Devil in Combat

A wrath devil stays out of melee combat if it can, preferring to incite violence from a distance, acting as though it has nothing to do with the brutal scene unfolding. The devil has its nose in a book or drinks its ale as it works to turn foes against each other. When mortal blood is flowing freely and unconscious bodies litter the scene, the devious creature stands up gracefully and hefts its quarry over its shoulder. A wicked, lopsided grin stretches across the wrath devil's face as it begins its return trip to its master.

DRAGONSPAWN, NHAGRUUL

Nhagruul, the deformed wizard who sought to use the *Book of Vile Darkness* to conquer and enslave the world, left behind many dark legacies. The Nhagruul dragonspawn are among the most fearsome remnants of his schemes. The psychotic mage grew the dragonspawn in his laboratory from evil dragon eggs his apprentices stole. The wizard used his own demonic essence to corrupt the embryos. When the eggs hatched, twisted, dragon-like monstrosities magically connected to Nhagruul greeted their maker, and they instinctively bent their necks to the greater wicked power.

At the height of Nhagruul's influence, the dragonspawn were formidable and cunning beasts that could magically outmaneuver even the most accomplished magi. When the *Book of Vile Darkness* consumed Nhagruul, the dragonspawn weakened and grew desperate. Eventually, the monsters turned on one another as they vied for territory and treasure. It's unknown how many of the creatures survived the rivalry. In the years since, the survivors have withdrawn to their secluded lairs, and their memories of Nhagruul and the glory days have faded away with their magic.

Lore

Arcana or History DC 29: Dragonspawn are the foul progeny of the demon-wizard Nhagruul, who incubated their eggs in festering pools of demonic slime. Dozens of these wyrmlings were born linked to the mage's evil essence, but Nhagruul destroyed the most heinously deformed ones.

Few Nhagruul dragonspawn have survived since the dark wizard's destruction (or disappearance, as some attest). Although it's hard to mistake them for true dragons, Nhagruul dragonspawn possess certain characteristics in common with their draconic ancestors, including leathery wings and breath weapons.

No two Nhagruul dragonspawn look exactly alike. Their draconic features blend hideously with the more monstrous traits of the vile wizard who spawned them. For this reason, they are often referred to in historical accounts as "vile dragons," though this name hardly captures the terror their appearances instill in would-be prey.

Encounters

The hardest of the Nhagruul dragonspawn live on civilization's fringes, making their lairs in deep caves, forests, and old ruins.

A Nhagruul dragonspawn attacks any dragon it encounters. After laying claim to a dragon's lair, a dragonspawn devours all but one of its victim's eggs. The dragonspawn corrupts the remaining egg with its



saliva, bathing the shell in sputum several times a day until it hatches into a new Nhagruul dragonspawn.

Nhagruul Dragonspawn Level 14 Solo Artillery

Large natural magical beast (reptile) XP 5,000

HP 564; Bloodied 282 Initiative +13
 AC 28, Fortitude 28, Reflex 24, Will 26 Perception +16
 Speed 6, fly 8 Darkvision
 Saving Throws +5; Action Points 2

TRAITS

Action Recovery

Whenever the dragonspawn ends its turn, any dazing, stunning, or dominating effect on it ends.

Instinctive Ferocity

On an initiative of 10 + the dragonspawn's initiative check, the dragonspawn can use *bite* or *fiery spittle* as a free action. If the dragonspawn cannot use a free action to make this attack due to a dominating or a stunning effect, then that effect ends instead of the dragonspawn making the attack.

STANDARD ACTIONS

⬆ Bite (poison) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
 Hit: 2d6 + 10 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

⬆ Double Attack ♦ At-Will

Effect: The dragonspawn uses *bite* against two different creatures.

⚔ Fiery Spittle (fire) ♦ At-Will

Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +19 vs. Reflex
 Hit: 2d8 + 11 fire damage.

⚡ Breath Weapon (fire, poison) ♦ Recharge [3] [1]

Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +17 vs. Reflex
 Hit: 4d10 + 11 fire and poison damage.
 Miss: Half damage.

⚡ Frightful Roar (fear) ♦ Encounter

Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in the burst); +17 vs. Will
 Hit: The target is dazed until the end of the dragonspawn's next turn.

Aftereffect: The target chooses to either take a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of its next turn or take a free action to move its speed away from the dragonspawn.

Miss: The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of the dragonspawn's next turn.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS

⬆ Wing Claw ♦ At-Will

Trigger: An enemy within 2 squares of the dragonspawn hits the dragonspawn with a melee attack.

Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 2 (triggering enemy); +19 vs. AC
 Hit: 4d6 + 8 damage.

Effect: The dragonspawn flies up to 4 squares. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

⚡ Bloodied Breath ♦ Encounter

Trigger: The dragonspawn is first bloodied.

Effect (Free Action): *Breath weapon* recharges, and the dragonspawn uses it.

Skills Intimidate +15, Stealth +18

Str 24 (+14) Dex 22 (+13) Wis 18 (+11)

Con 21 (+12) Int 11 (+7) Cha 17 (+10)

Alignment chaotic evil Languages Abyssal, Draconic

Nhagruul Dragonspawn in Combat

A hungry Nhagruul dragonspawn is not above gobbling up a cow or horse, but its hunt is unsatisfying if it doesn't elicit the screams of humanoid victims. A Nhagruul dragonspawn circles over a town, raining fire on buildings and people so it can luxuriate in the smell of fear and death. When its prey starts running, preferably while on fire, the monster swoops down to rip the creature apart with its poisonous teeth.

A Nhagruul dragonspawn isn't particularly smart, but it is cunning. When confronted in its lair, the beast stalks intruders in a manner similar to a great cat, creeping through the shadows and springing when interlopers are least prepared. When cornered, a dragonspawn lashes out to rake its opponent with its clawed wings.



FILTH HAG

Hags have strong ties to natural forces; yet being uniformly wicked, they lack nature's impartiality. A filth hag exemplifies the depth of corruption to which these wretched creatures gaily wallow.

Lore

Arcana DC 31: A filth hag is never encountered without its offspring, a mountainous being shaped from a mixture of the hag's filth, garbage, mud, and leaves. The hag binds to its creation the souls of mortal males it's seduced, thus animating the son's foul body. The souls remain trapped until the animate is destroyed or the filth hag releases them, a gift these savage fey rarely grant.

Encounters

A filth hag and its son haunt abandoned villages deep in Feywild or untamed wildernesses in the natural world. Ghouls and other undead are drawn to the promise of meat and thus can be found haunting the fringes of a filth hag's lair.

Filth Hag		Level 16 Skirmisher (Leader)
Medium fey humanoid (shapechanger)		XP 1,400
HP 155; Bloodied 77		Initiative +15
AC 30, Fortitude 30, Reflex 28, Will 26		Perception +9
Speed 8 (earth walk)		Low-light vision
TRAITS		
☼ Stench ◆ Aura 2		
Enemies in the aura grant combat advantage.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
④ Filthy Claws (poison) ◆ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).		
Effect: The hag shifts up to 4 squares.		
➤ Goad Son ◆ Recharge ☐ ☐ ☐		
Effect: Ranged 5 (one filth hag son). The target uses <i>slam</i> twice.		
MINOR ACTIONS		
Devour Offspring (healing) ◆ At-Will (1/round)		
Effect: Ranged 5 (one filth hag son). The target takes 20 damage, and the hag regains 15 hit points.		
Change Shape (polymorph) ◆ At-Will		
Effect: The hag alters its physical form to appear as a crone or young female of any Medium humanoid race until it uses <i>change shape</i> again or until it drops below 1 hit point. To assume a specific individual's form, the hag must have seen that individual. Other creatures who succeed on a DC 36 Insight check to discern that the form is a disguise.		
Mother's Demand ◆ Encounter		
Effect: Ranged 5 (one filth hag son). The target is dazed (save ends), and the hag gains 1 action point.		
Skills Bluff +16, Nature +14, Stealth +18		
Str 24 (+15)	Dex 20 (+13)	Wis 13 (+9)
Con 19 (+12)	Int 15 (+10)	Cha 17 (+11)
Alignment evil		Languages Common, Elven

Filth Hag Son		Level 16 Brute
Large Fey animate (construct)		XP 1,400
HP 191; Bloodied 95		Initiative +12
AC 28, Fortitude 30, Reflex 27, Will 26		Perception +11
Speed 8		Low-light vision
Immune disease, fear, marked, poison		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⊕ Slam ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +21 vs. AC		
Hit: 3d12 + 9 damage.		
⊕ Son's Ire ♦ At-Will		
Requirement: A filth hag within 20 squares of the son must be bloodied.		
Effect: The son uses <i>slam</i> against two different creatures, with a -2 penalty to each attack roll.		
TRIGGERED ACTIONS		
⊕ Mute Fury ♦ Recharge ☞ ☞		
Trigger: An enemy within 5 squares of the son hits a filth hag with an attack.		
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The son charges the triggering enemy.		
Str 25 (+15)	Dex 18 (+12)	Wis 16 (+11)
Con 21 (+13)	Int 3 (+4)	Cha 3 (+4)
Alignment unaligned Languages –		

Filth Hag and Son in Combat

A filth hag wears a maiden's form. The creature dances in the mud while its lumbering "son" smashes through other intruders. The hag toys with its enemies, inviting gullible males into its curvaceous embrace. If anyone draws too near, the stench of the hag's corruption reveals its true nature, as does the sharpness of the monster's wicked claws.

TSOCHAR

The tsochar are Far Realm body thieves that have invaded the natural world. They are tasked with establishing a foothold for their dread master, the Nine-Tongued Worm.

Lore

Dungeoneering DC 25: The tsochar are not so much a race as they are an extension of the elder evil known as Mak Thuum Ngatha, the Nine-Tongued Worm and Devourer of Worlds. Each tsochar is a tendril liberated from the great thrashing worm. It is sent into the natural world to prepare the way for the elder evil.

When it escapes the Far Realm, a tsochar's first task is to secure a viable body. The creature slithers into a victim's flesh and embeds itself in the target's brain. The parasite quickly detaches a victim's will, or cognitive awareness, from its mind, thus gaining total control over its new meat vessel.

Encounters

The Nine-Tongued Worm drives its agents to amass and hoard magical power. The parasites, in their host vessels, search the world for relics, potent rituals, and anything else that might help them erect a stable passageway to the Far Realm that Mak Thuum Ngatha can traverse to enter the natural world. Tsochar are smart enough to ally with monsters that can serve or aid them in this purpose.

Tsochar Parasite

Every tsochar infestation includes several tsochar that have yet to find suitable hosts.

Tsochar Parasite		Level 9 Minion Controller
Small aberrant magical beast		XP 100
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.		Initiative +9
AC 23, Fortitude 21, Reflex 22, Will 20		Perception +7
Speed 4, climb 4		Darkvision
TRAITS		
Hideous Grasp		
While the tsochar has a creature grabbed, the tsochar gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⊕ Tentacles (poison) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC		
Hit: 8 poison damage, and the target is grabbed (escape DC 17).		
⊕ Burrow into Host (poison) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one humanoid creature grabbed by the tsochar); +12 vs. Fortitude		
Hit: The target is dominated (save ends). While the target is dominated, the tsochar is removed from play, though it can still issue commands to the target. If the target is dominated at the end of the encounter, the tsochar takes full control of the target until the target drops below 1 hit point. A Remove Affliction ritual or similar magic can force a tsochar out of its host.		
Aftereffect: The tsochar appears in an unoccupied square adjacent to the target.		
Skills Stealth +14		
Str 13 (+5)	Dex 20 (+9)	Wis 16 (+7)
Con 18 (+8)	Int 15 (+6)	Cha 13 (+5)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Deep Speech, telepathy 10		

Tsochar Parasite in Combat

A parasite understands its fragility and wastes no time seeking a host. The parasite latches onto any available humanoid and then burrows into its tender flesh to take control. Once it has enslaved its host, the tsochar and its host effectively become one until the host dies or the parasite is expelled.

Tsochar Wearer of Flesh

After a tsochar finds a body, it sets out to find a superior one. It stalks a healthy and powerful individual whose form is more likely than its current vessel to withstand the dark work ahead.

The following statistics represent the tsochar parasite and its enslaved host.

Tsochar Wearer of Flesh		Level 9 Soldier
Medium aberrant humanoid		XP 400
HP 95; Bloodied 47		Initiative +6
AC 25, Fortitude 23, Reflex 20, Will 21		Perception +12
Speed 5		Darkvision
Immune dazed		
TRAITS		
⚙️ Psychic Scream (psychic) ♦ Aura 1		
Enemies in the aura take 5 psychic damage whenever the tsochar takes psychic damage.		
Parasitic Mind		
At the start of its turn, the tsochar makes saving throws to end any stunning or dominating effect on it.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔️ Longsword (weapon) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.		
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the tsochar's next turn.		
TRIGGERED ACTIONS		
⚔️ Guarding Strike ♦ At-Will		
Trigger: An enemy marked by the tsochar shifts or makes an attack that does not include the tsochar as a target.		
Effect (Opportunity Action): The tsochar uses <i>longsword</i> against the triggering enemy.		
Infestation Unveiled ♦ Encounter		
Trigger: The tsochar drops below 1 hit point from an attack that does not deal psychic damage.		
Effect (No Action): A tsochar parasite appears in the tsochar's space or the nearest unoccupied square.		
Skills Bluff +9		
Str 20 (+9)	Dex 10 (+4)	Wis 16 (+7)
Con 15 (+6)	Int 15 (+6)	Cha 11 (+4)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 10		
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, longsword		

Tsochar Wearer of Flesh in Combat

A wearer of flesh keeps its true nature concealed and hides among other humanoids until the infestation has spread.

Tsochar Worm Servant

A few tsochar have a superb connection to the Nine-Tongued Worm and act as its overseers in the natural world. Thus, a worm servant rules an infestation's tsochar in the name of the elder evil. It guides their spread through a community and coordinates their search for items to further their master's plans.

The statistics presented here represent the tsochar parasite and its enslaved host.

Tsochar Worm Servant		Level 9 Artillery
Medium aberrant humanoid		XP 400
HP 72; Bloodied 36		Initiative +5
AC 23, Fortitude 19, Reflex 21, Will 23		Perception +12
Speed 5		Darkvision
Immune dazed		
TRAITS		
⚙️ Psychic Scream (psychic) ♦ Aura 1		
Enemies in the aura take 5 psychic damage whenever the tsochar takes psychic damage.		
Parasitic Mind		
At the start of its turn, the tsochar makes saving throws to end any stunning or dominating effect on it.		
STANDARD ACTIONS		
⚔️ Scourge (weapon) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d10 + 6 damage.		
⚙️ Unhinging Visions (psychic) ♦ At-Will		
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +14 vs. Will		
Hit: 1d10 + 9 psychic damage, the tsochar can slide the target up to 2 squares, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of the tsochar's next turn.		
⚡ Madness Storm (psychic) ♦ Encounter		
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +12 vs. Will		
Hit: 2d8 + 11 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).		
Miss: Half damage, and the target is slowed until the end of its next turn.		
TRIGGERED ACTIONS		
Infestation Unveiled ♦ Encounter		
Trigger: The tsochar drops below 1 hit point from an attack that does not deal psychic damage.		
Effect (No Action): A tsochar parasite appears in the tsochar's space or the nearest unoccupied square.		
Skills Bluff +14, Religion +12		
Str 10 (+4)	Dex 13 (+5)	Wis 16 (+7)
Con 12 (+5)	Int 17 (+7)	Cha 20 (+9)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 10		
Equipment chainmail, scourge		

Tsochar Worm Servant in Combat

A worm servant is the most valuable member of a tsochar infestation. Other tsochar fight to protect it. The worm servant doesn't stand idly by though. It stays busy psychically bludgeoning enemy minds, filling them with Far Realm visions, while lesser tsochar physically strike against opponents.

Noble Tsochar

A noble tsochar is a conduit of Mak Thuum Ngatha's magical might and dominates a battle to protect the colony. While a worm servant orchestrates the great worm's plans off the battlefield, a noble takes charge over any fighting that ensues.

The statistics presented below represent the tsochar parasite and its warped, enslaved host.

Noble Tsochar		Level 9 Elite Controller	
Medium aberrant humanoid		XP 800	
HP 184; Bloodied 92		Initiative +6	
AC 23, Fortitude 19, Reflex 21, Will 24		Perception +13	
Speed 5		Darkvision	
Immune dazed			
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1			
TRAITS			
⚡ Psychic Scream (psychic) ♦ Aura 1			
Enemies in the aura take 5 psychic damage whenever the tsochar takes psychic damage.			
Parasitic Mind			
At the start of its turn, the tsochar makes saving throws to end any stunning or dominating effect on it.			
STANDARD ACTIONS			
⚡ Tentacle (poison) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +14 vs. AC			
Hit: 2d10 + 6 poison damage.			
⚡ Violet Lightning (implement, lightning, psychic) ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex			
Hit: 2d8 + 8 lightning and psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn.			
⚡ Double Attack ♦ At-Will			
Effect: The tsochar uses <i>violet lightning</i> twice.			
⚡ Insanity Vortex (charm, implement, psychic) ♦ Recharge ☞ ☞ ☞			
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +12 vs. Will			
Hit: 3d6 + 10 psychic damage, and the target makes a melee basic attack as a free action against a creature the tsochar chooses.			
Miss: Half damage.			
MINOR ACTIONS			
Pierce the Barrier (psychic, zone) ♦ Encounter			
Effect: Area burst 2 within 10. The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the tsochar's next turn. Any enemy that ends its turn in the zone takes 5 psychic damage. As the zone ends, four tsochar parasites appear in unoccupied squares in the zone.			
TRIGGERED ACTIONS			
Infestation Unveiled ♦ Encounter			
Trigger: The tsochar drops below 1 hit point from an attack that does not deal psychic damage.			
Effect (No Action): A tsochar parasite appears in the tsochar's space or the nearest unoccupied square.			
Skills Arcana +12, Dungeoneering +13, Religion +12			
Str 8 (+3)	Dex 14 (+6)	Wis 18 (+8)	
Con 12 (+5)	Int 17 (+7)	Cha 22 (+10)	
Alignment chaotic evil		Languages Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 10	
Equipment robes, orb			



TSOCHAR

Noble Tsochar in Combat

A noble tsochar does not fear exposure and throws its mental energy into the battle at hand. As the elder evil's vessel, the tsochar channels Far Realm power to fuel its potent magic attacks. If the situation becomes dire, the noble doesn't hesitate to tear a hole in reality and call Far Realm reinforcements to the scene.

VILE ORGANIZATIONS

"Destroy the book?! You can't destroy the book, you silly twit. Not that it can't be destroyed. It can. Just . . . not by you."

—The Keeper of Scrolls

The moral decay coinciding with vile darkness's spread is not limited to the individual. Sometimes, the wicked find ways to overcome their divisive natures and work together to achieve incredibly dark objectives. The following organizations offer a sampling of groups sworn to evil.

Chosen of the Sun

"The final battle between good and evil is at hand."

Civilization dies. Virtue gutters like a candle in the wind. The last days are at hand, and the righteous can no longer tolerate the wickedness driving the world to destruction's brink.

Chosen of the Sun adherents are self-appointed champions of good. They roam the countryside, arrogant in their certitude, judging and executing anyone they deem corrupt. Although they do combat genuine evil, they condemn anyone who does not share their beliefs as an enemy worthy of death.

Lore

Religion (hard DC): The Chosen of the Sun rose in Nerath's waning days. Believing the gnoll and demon horde to be divine justice meted against a people who had allowed wickedness to prosper, the Chosen sped the empire's decline in a murderous crusade to purge evil, real or imagined, from their homeland. The Chosen have since splintered into numerous sects, all more vicious and bloodthirsty than their forebears.

Goals and Methods

The Chosen believe they are soldiers in an apocalyptic war between good and evil, and that through corruption and decadence, evil has gained the upper hand. In these desperate days, righteous certainty is the only thing the Chosen have left.

These zealots root out the wicked and use burning, torture, and mutilation to make examples of them. They travel the countryside, roaming from community to community in search of evil's thralls. The Chosen's disciples know evil is a cunning adversary that can hide in the most virtuous communities. For this reason, the Chosen are quick to put anyone to the question. Pain is useful for clarifying a person's thoughts and revealing clues about corruptive actions the evildoer would eventually take.

Organization

A few disorganized bands are all that's left of the vast armies that appeared following Nerath's fall. Scattered and shabby, they are little better than brigands and murderers. High Inquisitors have absolute authority in a band and act as judge, jury, and executioner for anyone who crosses the Chosen.

Under these demagogues are the soldiers, a motley mix of murderers, bandits, and mercenaries. They pay lip service to the Chosen's agenda and use the "noble" mission to justify their brutal behavior. A few people do join the Chosen because they believe they work in defense of good. Most, however, are just as evil as the enemies they claim to fight.

Game Link: Judge and Jury

Rumors about a hidden demon cult draw the Chosen of the Sun to the village of Red Tree, or any other sleepy community the characters are passing through. After settling into the community, the Chosen begin holding sham trials to ferret out cultists. Perhaps an actual cult is rooted in the community, but the Chosen seem more interested in torturing villagers than dealing with an infestation.

Dark Brotherhood

"The only path to surviving the darkness is to embrace it."

The Dark Brotherhood is a mysterious cabal founded on the belief that the duality of good and evil is an incorrect explanation for a cosmic force the chaotic evil god Tharizdun introduced into Creation. Disciples reject the idea of "good" and instead embraces the darkness that is slowly consuming all that is.

Lore

History (hard DC): The Dark Brotherhood emerged ages ago as a secret society built atop the teachings of its founder Heinrich. A philosopher and magician of no little talent, Heinrich understood evil's emergence in Creation was not something intrinsic to reality; rather, it was an intrusion, an alien force the actions of one misguided deity brought into being. Knowing this, Heinrich postulated evil has no counter. What people call "good" is actually Creation's resistance to an invading force, much like how a healthy body reacts to disease. This disease is not something time or effort can cure. It is lethal. It is a ravenous cancer that will eventually devour reality.

Rather than fight the disease's progress, Heinrich believed that one must embrace evil to survive the process. When evil blankets reality, it will turn against itself, and then the Dark Brotherhood will be in the best position to destroy its rivals and inherit all that remains.

Goals and Methods

The best way to understand the Dark Brotherhood and its goals is to consider the writings of its founder, the magician and philosopher Heinrich:

"I will not deny we instinctively find certain actions distasteful, yet our abhorrence does not make these actions evil. Rather, it signals some instinctive quality, some unconscious recognition of wrongness. The wrongness is not a byproduct of idealized good or evil. Instead, it is our recognition that a certain agency is at work in the cosmos."

"Notions about good and evil are mortal definitions for what is the absence and presence of this agency. We define actions as good or evil based on how a particular choice impacts our moral sensibilities. Such thoughts are useful for building stable and peaceful societies, if that end is to be desired. But to apply these concepts to, for lack of a better term, vile darkness is inaccurate."

"You see, evil doesn't have an antithesis. Good doesn't exist. Creation is composed of the material Tharizdun's darkness has yet to touch and what it has touched. Now loosed, nothing can stop the taint. Fighting it is pointless. The end is inevitable. Rather than taxing ourselves in a misguided struggle, is it not better to use this power, to embrace its strength to ensure our survival in the time when evil has conquered absolutely?"

The Dark Brotherhood has no interest in turning mortals to darkness; evil will triumph in the end. Dark Brothers and Sisters foster darkness already within others, nudging creatures closer to embracing the evil already inside them. To this end, Dark Brothers and Sisters conceal themselves behind inoffensive masks. They assume influential positions as advisors, priests, seers, and sages to guide creatures to the truth.

Organization

The Dark Brotherhood is a far-reaching organization. Its agents are installed in communities across the known world. All Dark Brothers and Sisters are fully versed in the order's ancient teachings and have extensive resources available to use to protect themselves and influence others. Each agent has several underlings, but these lackeys usually have no idea who they're really serving. Most members are human, but the order doesn't discriminate against other races.

All disciples acknowledge the Keeper of Scrolls as their leader. The keeper safeguards the organization's lore, tracks its members, and moves resources to where they are most needed. A talented and famous wizard named Melphor currently holds this position. When not conducting the organization's business, he oversees the largest library in all the lands, which is located in the southern city of Armistice.

Game Link: Puppet Master

The Cardamom Massacre was the final straw for the people of Westermont. Years of high tariffs and oppressive taxes, combined with brutal reprisals from the ducal palace, drove citizens to arm themselves. As adventurers enter the city, mobs storm the castle in the city's center, shouting for the duchess's head.

Many believe the fault lies with the duchess's advisor, a mage named Azaal. However, some people have begun to notice that most of these accusations are coming from one source, a seemingly harmless priest who just happens to be a secret agent of the Dark Brotherhood.

Disciples of Nhagruul

"The answers to all questions can be found in the Book."

The *Book of Vile Darkness* gathers legends like a miser hoards gold. Many arcane scholars believe Vecna authored the tome, and its contents reinforce this theory. However, this hasn't stopped others from adopting the book as their own, which Nhagruul's disciples have done.

Lore

History (hard DC): Nhagruul was a deranged wizard whose reign of terror marked a particularly dark chapter in the world's history. A master of magic, he allowed his profane research to twist his body and shatter his sanity. According to legend, as Nhagruul neared his life's end, he underwent an excruciating ritual to preserve his wicked knowledge for eternity. Using the wizard's blood, flesh, and bones, his servants constructed the *Book of Vile Darkness*. Into it they poured Nhagruul's every diseased thought as well as every terrible truth he had discovered.

His followers used the vile manuscript to seed evil and madness throughout the world. They would leave bound creatures in the open tome's presence. Its essence would billow from the pages to encase victims, drive them mad, warp their bodies, and regurgitate them as creatures of darkness before retreating back into the book.

In reaction, the Knights of the New Sun, a holy band of paladins, swore to destroy the disciples and their blasphemous book. They made great inroads against the dark servants, but Nhagruul's disciples divided the tome into three parts and sent the sections in opposite directions to safeguard the lore until a time when the Knights were no more.

Goals and Methods

Since the sundering, the Disciples of Nhagruul have watched and waited for the right time to reassemble the book as they further the work of their namesake.

In that time, lesser creatures have replaced the Knights' old guard. Now only a feckless band remains.

With no enemies to halt them, the disciples are darting from the shadows to scour the land for the Thirds so they can reassemble the *Book of Vile Darkness* and bring about the apocalypse their founder intended.

Organization

The disciples would be a disorganized and chaotic mess if it weren't for their new leader, the mind flayer Shathrax. After its efforts to secure the legendary *Tear of Ioun* failed, Shathrax retreated to the Underdark where it happened upon a cell of degenerate disciples. The mind flayer quickly defeated them and, from the consciousness it devoured, learned about the book. It has since gathered the remaining disciples and enslaved them to its cause, asserting that it alone can reassemble the book.

Shathrax commands the disciples from a flying fortress. Workshops that churn out evil magic items and vile spells are ensconced in the citadel's myriad rooms and corridors. The labyrinthine passages contain a veritable menagerie of horrors, ranging from undead to aberrant monsters the Far Realm's influence has twisted.

Game Link: Last Knight

The Disciples of Nhagruul have secured two of the book's thirds and are on their way to recover the final segment. Shathrax believes the blood of a holy paladin is needed to mend the sundering's damage to the *Book of Vile Darkness*, so it has sent other minions to find, bind, and bring the last honorable Knight of the New Sun to the citadel, where the mind flayer intends to complete the ritual and set in motion Nhagruul's vile plan.

Opposed to the world's end, adventurers could chase after the third fragment, go after Shathrax, or try to free the Knight.

Kargatane

"What have we to fear from death when immortality is at hand?"

What was originally the secret police for a now lost domain of dread, the Kargatane has emerged as one of the most powerful and dangerous organizations in the Shadowfell. Led by Lady Kazandra, Kargatane agents foment discord, murder, steal, and sabotage in accordance with their mistress's inscrutable goals. No one knows where the Kargatane is going to strike next or what it truly seeks, but everyone fears it.

Lore

History (hard DC): Darkon, a domain of dread, was once a powerful fief in the Shadowfell. The lich lord Azalin ruled Darkon, making it a place of inflexible order and crushing despair. The Kargatane, Azalin's network of spies and assassins, was his greatest weapon. Under Lady Kazandra's command, its agents kept the people obedient to the dark lord's will. Azalin's reign came to an abrupt end, however, and when he vanished, Darkon went with him. In its place rose the terrifying Necropolis and its new master, Death.

Kazandra proved agile. Anticipating the changing circumstances and preferring to not be absorbed into the new regime, Kazandra summoned all of the Kargatane's agents to her, and together they withdrew into another land. Although the lich lord no longer props her up, Lady Kazandra's Kargatane remains one of the Shadowfell's most dangerous destabilizing forces.

Goals and Methods

Eternal life is promised to any creature invited to join the Kargatane. Few members understand the immortality offered is to become a vampire.

While immortality is their hope, serving Lady Kazandra is their reality. Agents are allotted no independence, no freedom, and no personal will. Kazandra regards members as tools; as such, they are to be used until they are no longer useful. The Kargatane engages in all manner of sordid endeavors. Grave robbing, espionage, theft, and murder are but a few of its activities. All missions relate to Kazandra's larger goal of proving herself worthy to receive a domain of dread of her own.

Organization

The great deception Kazandra perpetuates is that the immortality her servants crave will come from her directly. She is a vampire and a powerful one at that. She could transform her servants into vampires, but she withholds that gift to prevent rivals from rising up against her.

Volunteers are not invited to join the Kargatane. In fact, the organization eliminates petitioners who seek membership. Instead, it drafts potential candidates and does not accept refusals.

Members are living humanoids. The agency prefers inducting humans and half-elves because they can infiltrate most communities. If members need to identify themselves to other agents, they show their ampoules of crimson fluid attached to cords they wear around their necks. The fluid might look like blood, but it is a virulent toxin agents are required to drink if captured.

Game Link: Murder Most Foul

A friendly acquaintance of the adventurers' winds up dead. Investigation suggests a villainous agency murdered the victim. Even though the Kargatane did kill the acquaintance, it's not the organization being fingered. Lady Kazandra's agency framed a rival organization. The Kargatane intends to draw characters into a conflict with its foes so its agents can quickly and quietly assassinate the organization's leadership.

Servants of Xopos

"Weep not, little friend. You have been given a great honor. Not everyone can give birth to a god."

Whenever civilization falters, some believe the end is at hand. They search for signs in the upheaval, omens in the events that gnaw at stability and order. From deranged watchers who scour the heavens for the wandering star that is the World Born Dead to insane cultists devoted to the Elder Elemental Eye, the world has no shortage of alarming believers and beliefs. In each case, an urgency to hasten the end is present.

The Servants of Xopos is the latest in a long line of mortal organizations tasked with preparing the world for its end.

Lore

Arcana (hard DC): Had the wizard Tyben not dared to summon a slaad, the Servants of Xopos would not exist. But Tyben's recklessness and unquenchable thirst for power led him to explore the essence of chaos. The act of calling Xopos the slaad into the natural world was not what doomed him, though. Tyben's fate wasn't assured until the wizard breached the magic circle, freeing the slaad. Xopos then implanted an embryo in Tyben's brain before rampaging about until it destroyed itself.

A mortal exposed to a slaad's embryo does not live long. The invader devours the mortal's mind and eventually burrows out of the victim's skull, growing rapidly until it becomes an adult slaad.

Aware of his peril, Tyben used magic to bind the embryo and retard its growth. Although it increased in

size, it did so slowly, buying the wizard time to search for a way to escape death. The parasite's presence eventually drove Tyben mad, and in his lunacy, the wizard became convinced the slaads were gods.

Goals and Methods

Tyben has carried the slaad embryo for so long it has fused with his brain matter. Where the human ends and the slaad begins is impossible to determine. Tyben believes it is his task to deliver the slaads into the world so they can return existence to the way it was before the primordials and gods imposed order on the chaos.

Exposing mortals to chaos phage (*Monster Manual* 3, page 179) is the quickest and easiest way to bring about the change Tyben desires. His Servants kidnap viable hosts and insert embryos in their heads. Sometimes, a Servant releases a host if doing so is apt to cause greater damage than holding onto a victim until the slaad tadpole breaks free. When Servants have infected a dozen or so hosts in one locale, they move on to trouble another community.

Organization

It takes a special breed of madness to join the Servants of Xopos. Members are outsiders, exiles, and misanthropes. They regard their work as a sacred calling and tell victims that to be chosen as a vessel is an honor. Servants openly discuss their allegiances when asked. However, they are lucid enough not to volunteer information to people they suspect might try to stop them.

Since most Servants carry the chaos phage themselves, their time in the world is brief. Until the tadpoles kill them, they gather into small cells and coordinate their efforts to breed as widely as possible through a community. Usually one member per cell is not a carrier, and it falls to him or her to move the operation to another town when enough embryos have been placed to ensure a lively brood.

Game Link: Surrogates

While traveling through the countryside, adventurers come upon a town that the Servants of Xopos have infiltrated. Slaad embryos have been implanted in several prominent citizens, and slaads are hatching from heads at a rapid rate.

Dark Rewards

"Have you the courage to take what is offered? That is the question I most often pose to the adventurers whose fortunes I have read. Too often, there is bluster and bravado. Rarely do I find substance in those I meet. They claim to have strength, claim to have power, yet I have spied the truth in the cards and in the swirling mist darkening my crystal ball. Oh yes, I intrigue them with cryptic warnings and tantalizing hints, yet I know that once they set foot on the road to the Master's castle, their future is certain, their doom at hand. Death's shadow chills the road, as his scythe plucks at life's strings.

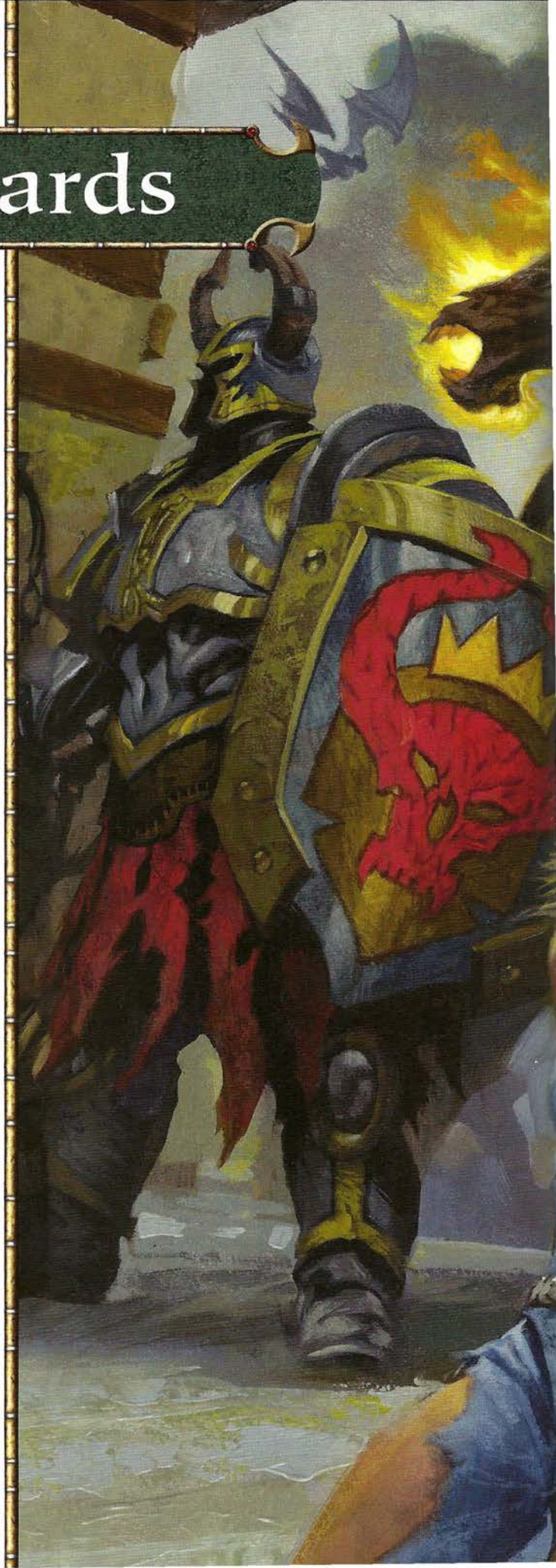
"Why risk death? The darker the shadow, the greater the rewards. All the easy treasures have been plucked from the land, leaving only the unexplored darkness to offer up wonders to those with the courage to claim them. This is why the heroes leave their homes. Oh, there may be some noble cause, some princess in need of rescuing, but it is always the promise of riches and wealth that keeps the darkness fat on so-called adventurers."

—Madame Eva

DEATH IS hardly the worst fate one can find fighting evil. Disease and curses, terrible afflictions that kill the body and mind, loss of loved ones, failure and a world overrun by wickedness are all things a would-be hero might face. Vile darkness has many weapons with which it might defeat the good, and not all are obvious. These perils take the form of deadly monsters and environments, but they can also come from the very rewards adventurers hope to gain.

The magic items and alternative rewards presented in this chapter are all touched in some way by darkness. Some items are cursed and prevent heroes from reaching their full potential in battle. Other items include a selection of divine boons granted by the dark gods. In each case, the items and rewards offer great power at a risk to those who use them.

You might be tempted to seed many of these items in your campaign. Do so with caution. Magic items and alternative rewards have a direct effect on a player character's ability to contribute to the game, and some items can wreak havoc on the play experience. Reserve the items for players who do well with roleplaying challenges and would enjoy playing through the danger that owning such items brings.



CHRISTOPHER WOELLER



CURSED ITEMS

"I sell only the finest merchandise. My potions of healing are to die for—a recipe handed down to me by my mother, gods bless her soul."

—Alluvius Ruskin of Sigil

Magic item creation can have unexpected results when the creator tries to craft something beyond his or her abilities. Most cursed items were created by accident, though some wicked makers create them intentionally, to laugh as their wielders march toward doom.

A cursed item usually appears benign. The wielder knows all of the item's powers, but the properties remain hidden until triggered. Once a character triggers the property, the character cannot get rid of the item by any means short of a Disenchant Magic Item ritual, a Remove Affliction ritual, or similar magic.

Berserk Weapon

The berserk weapon's wielder finds self-control fading and vicious anger swelling in his or her heart.

Berserk Weapon Level 4+ Uncommon

The cruel weapon feeds your hate, goading you to greater and greater acts of violence.

Lvl 4	+1	840 gp	Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp
Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp

Weapon: Axes, hammers, heavy blades

Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d12 damage per plus

Property

While you are bloodied, you treat all creatures as enemies, and you must make opportunity attacks when provoked.

† **Attack Power** ♦ **Daily** (Free Action)

Trigger: You are bloodied by an attack.

Effect: Make a melee basic attack using this weapon against a random creature adjacent to you.

Boots of Many Steps

These mismatched boots promise unmatched mobility with only the slightest risk. Yet the longer one wears them, the greater the chance for the curse to reveal itself. Too many jumps can send the wearer into a dark and sinister place, a realm of endless corridors and passages.

Boots of Many Steps

Level 17 Uncommon

This mismatched pair of boots help you cross distances in an instant.

Feet Slot 65,000 gp

Property

Whenever you roll a natural 1 on an attack roll or a saving throw, you are removed from play (save ends). When the effect ends, you reappear in the square you last occupied or in the unoccupied square nearest it.

Utility Power (Teleportation) ♦ **Encounter** (Move Action)

Effect: You teleport up to a number of squares equal to your speed.

Cloak of Poison

While the infamous *cloak of poison* can be deadly to its wearer, the cloak provides unexpected benefits to those with the courage to wear it.

Cloak of Poison

Level 5+ Uncommon

The heavy cloak feels oily and has a faint chemical smell.

Lvl 5	+1	1,000 gp	Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp
Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp

Neck Slot

Enhancement Bonus: Fortitude, Reflex, and Will

Property

Whenever you roll a natural 1 on an attack roll or a saving throw, you take ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends). You can end this effect by removing the cloak as a minor action.

Level 15 or 20: Ongoing 15 poison damage.

Level 25 or 30: Ongoing 20 poison damage.

Attack Power (Poison) ♦ **Encounter** (Immediate Reaction)

Trigger: An adjacent enemy hits you with a melee attack.

Effect: The triggering enemy takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Level 15 or 20: Ongoing 10 poison damage.

Level 25 or 30: Ongoing 15 poison damage.

Cursed Weapon

A cursed weapon commits its wielder to fighting one enemy at a time.

Cursed Weapon

Level 1+ Uncommon

This weapon feels comfortable in your hands.

Lvl 1	+1	360 gp	Lvl 16	+4	45,000 gp
Lvl 6	+2	1,800 gp	Lvl 21	+5	225,000 gp
Lvl 11	+3	9,000 gp	Lvl 26	+6	1,125,000 gp

Weapon: Any

Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d8 per plus

Property

The first time during an encounter you hit an enemy with an attack using this weapon, you take a -2 penalty to the attack rolls of attack powers that do not include the enemy as a target. This penalty lasts until the end of the encounter or until the enemy drops to 0 hit points.

Potion of Delusion

Created by a twisted mind or perhaps from a ritual gone awry, the *potion of delusion* makes the drinker believe he or she has been healed when in truth the entire effect is an illusion. When characters gain this potion, it always appears to be a potion of healing.

Potion of Delusion Level 5 Uncommon

You feel a surge of energy but are surprised to find none of your wounds have healed.

Consumable: Potion 50 gp

Utility Power ♦ **Consumable** (Minor Action)

Effect: You drink the potion and lose a healing surge. You gain 10 temporary hit points, and you shift 1 square toward the nearest enemy.

Divine Boons

The gods sometimes take notice of mortals who perform great deeds on their behalf. Should the god be moved by this act, he or she might grant a boon to the mortal. Any god can bestow a boon, not just those gods the adventurer favors. An evil god, for example, might bestow a boon onto a good hero as a temptation or a reward for some inadvertent service. Regardless of the reason (and sometimes the reasons are unknown), gaining a divine boon is often a life-changing event. As with all alternative rewards, divine boons typically fade after about five levels (see *Dungeon Master's Guide* 2).

Asmodeus's Dread Authority

When a character gains *Asmodeus's dread authority*, a sinister sigil appears in the palm of his or her left hand. The symbol shines when the character calls on the boon's power.

Asmodeus's Dread Authority Level 3+ Rare

Asmodeus invests you with the authority he uses to rule the Nine Hells.

Lvl 3	680 gp	Lvl 23	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	17,000 gp		

Alternative Reward: Divine Boon

✂ **Attack Power** (Charm) ♦ **Encounter** (Minor Action)

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); the boon's level + 5 vs. Will

Hit: The target is subject to your dread authority (save ends).

Until this effect ends, you can slide the target 1 square as a free action at the start of each of its turns.

Level 13: Slide the target up to 2 squares.

Level 23: Slide the target up to 3 squares.

✂ **Attack Power** (Fire) ♦ **Daily** (Minor Action)

Effect: Ranged 10 (the creature subject to your dread authority).

The target chooses either to fall prone or to take 5 fire damage.

Level 13: 10 fire damage.

Level 23: 15 fire damage.

Bane's Battle Acumen

A character who gains *Bane's battle acumen* assumes a sinister appearance. His or her eyes grow black and through them the character can see opportunities on the battlefield.

Bane's Battle Acumen Level 3+ Uncommon

The Iron General is the consummate warrior and those with his favor gain a measure of his tactical genius.

Lvl 3	680 gp	Lvl 23	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	17,000 gp		

Alternative Reward: Divine Boon

Property

Whenever you roll a natural 19 or 20 for an attack roll using a weapon, one ally within 5 squares of you can shift 1 square as a free action.

Level 13: The ally shifts up to 2 squares.

Level 23: One ally within 5 squares of you can shift up to 2 squares as a free action, or two allies within 5 squares of you can each shift 1 square as a free action.

Utility Power ♦ **Daily** (Free Action)

Trigger: You roll initiative.

Effect: You can slide each ally within 5 squares of you 1 square.

Level 13: Slide up to 2 squares.

Level 23: Slide up to 3 squares.

Gruumsh's Bloodthirsty Wrath

Gruumsh desires only to spread strife and sow destruction in the mortal world. On gaining this boon, the character tears out his or her own left eye. The organ returns when the boon fades away.

Gruumsh's Bloodthirsty Wrath Level 3+ Rare

Destruction and carnage are the only things able to quell Gruumsh's appetite for chaos.

Lvl 3	680 gp	Lvl 18	85,000 gp
Lvl 8	3,400 gp	Lvl 23	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	17,000 gp	Lvl 28	2,125,000 gp

Alternative Reward: Divine Boon

Property

You gain temporary hit points equal to this boon's level the first time you drop an enemy to 0 hit points during an encounter.

Attack Power (Healing) ♦ **Daily** (Free Action)

Requirement: You must be bloodied.

Trigger: You hit an enemy with a melee attack.

Effect: After the attack, you make a melee basic attack against a random creature adjacent to you. If this attack hits, you can spend a healing surge.

Lolth's Fickle Favor

Since her fall, Lolth's sanity has frayed and splintered until she has become a petty, scheming monster. She cares nothing for her worshipers, and when she grants her boon it is only to escalate the conflict troubling her servants. Character who gain this boon hear faint voices and see things watching them from the shadows.

Lolth's Fickle Favor

Level 3+ Rare

The Demon Queen of Spiders is a fickle goddess, as likely to offer a gift as she is to bestow a curse.

Lvl 3 680 gp Lvl 23 425,000 gp

Lvl 13 17,000 gp

Alternative Reward: Divine Boon

Property

You gain resist 5 poison and a +1 item bonus to Stealth checks.

Level 13: Resist 10 poison and +3 item bonus to Stealth checks.

Level 23: Resist 15 poison and +5 item bonus to Stealth checks.

Utility Power (Illusion, Teleportation) ♦ **Encounter** (Immediate Reaction)

Trigger: An enemy bloodies you with an attack.

Effect: Roll a d8. On an odd number, you are dazed until the end of your next turn. On an even number, you teleport up to a number of squares equal to the die roll and become invisible until the end of your next turn.

Tharizdun's Madness Spiral

Tharizdun is silent. No prayer reaches his ears. No commandment escapes his prison. His priests are left to learn about their deity through the scant fragments written by raving lunatics or from the princes of elemental evil who claim to represent the Chained God's interests. From time to time, a devoted servant might experience an unsettling dream, a window into the madness afflicting the dark god, and use this madness as a weapon.

Tharizdun's Madness Spiral

Level 12 Rare

Although the Chained God is silent, the god's will is revealed in the mad actions of its followers.

Alternative Reward: Divine Boon 13,000 gp

Property

You gain a +2 item bonus to saving throws against charm effects, fear effects, and ongoing psychic damage.

Utility Power ♦ **Encounter** (No Action)

Trigger: You make an attack roll and dislike the result.

Effect: You reroll the attack roll and use the second result. If the second die roll is less than 11, you are stunned until the end of your next turn after resolving the attack.

Tiamat's Insatiable Greed

On rare occasion, Tiamat finds it to her advantage to bestow a boon on a particularly valuable follower, provided she gets a greater return on her investment. Characters with this boon grow multicolored scales across their backs, scales that spread to their arms and legs.

Tiamat's Insatiable Greed

Level 5+ Rare

Tiamat commands her followers to let no slight go unpunished and to take what they want.

Lvl 5 1,000 gp Lvl 20 125,000 gp

Lvl 10 5,000 gp Lvl 25 625,000 gp

Lvl 15 25,000 gp Lvl 30 3,125,000 gp

Alternative Reward: Divine Boon

Property

You gain a +1 item bonus to damage rolls against any creature that has damaged you since the end of your last turn.

Level 10: +2 item bonus.

Level 15: +3 item bonus.

Level 20: +4 item bonus.

Level 25: +5 item bonus.

Level 30: +6 item bonus.

Utility Power ♦ **Daily** (Minor Action)

Effect: One ally you can see loses a use of a daily magic item power, and you regain the use of an expended daily magic item power for a magic item you possess of the same level or lower.

Torog's Inescapable Suffering

One can hear the faint groans from the King that Crawls in the deep reaches of the Underdark. Torog endures the humiliation of his prison and the pain from his broken body and expects his followers to be as he is, agonized and enslaved to his demands. Those who receive his boon feel their bones grind in their flesh.

Torog's Inescapable Suffering

Level 4+ Rare

Torog instructs his servants to embrace their agony, for only through pain can one unite the mortal with the divine.

Lvl 4 840 gp Lvl 24 525,000 gp

Lvl 14 21,000 gp

Alternative Reward: Divine Boon

Property

While you are bloodied, you gain a +1 item bonus to attack rolls.

Utility Power ♦ **Daily** (Free Action)

Trigger: You hit an enemy with a melee attack.

Effect: Each creature adjacent to you is immobilized and takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends both).

Level 14: Ongoing 10 damage.

Level 24: Ongoing 15 damage.

Vecna's Dark Secret

Vecna guards the darkest secrets of the cosmos, hoarding ancient lore and mystical power to keep it from rivals. He does this not out of fear, but to amass the tools he needs to ascend even higher. Characters who earn the god's favor become pale, and shadows ring their eyes.

Vecna's Dark Secret

Level 9+ Uncommon

Vecna rewards your service with forbidden knowledge and a taste of what undeath has to offer.

Lvl 9 4,200 gp Lvl 29 2,625,000 gp

Lvl 19 105,000 gp

Alternative Reward: Divine Boon

Property

Gain a +2 item bonus to knowledge checks.

Level 19: +4 item bonus.

Level 29: +6 item bonus.

Utility Power ♦ Daily (Minor Action)

Effect: Choose one ally within 5 squares of you. Until the end of the encounter, that ally gains vulnerable 5 necrotic, you gain resist 10 necrotic, and you deal 1d6 extra necrotic damage on attacks that deal necrotic damage.

Level 19: Resist 15 necrotic and 2d6 extra necrotic damage, and vulnerable 10 necrotic for your ally.

Level 29: Resist 20 necrotic and 3d6 extra necrotic damage, and vulnerable 15 necrotic for your ally.

Zehir's Shadow Cloak

As lord of darkness, serpents, and assassins, Zehir attracts the worst sorts. Killing is not just a means to an end; killing is a prayer, a ritualistic offering to the dark god. Characters who gain this boon acquire a black serpent tattoo on a place easily concealed by clothing such as the back, arm, or leg.

Zehir's Shadow Cloak

Level 8+ Rare

Each life ended at your hands honors the Lord of Darkness. Kill often and without hesitation, and the god's favor will be yours.

Lvl 8 3,400 gp Lvl 28 2,125,000 gp

Lvl 18 85,000 gp

Alternative Reward: Divine Boon

Property

While you have total concealment from a creature, you are insubstantial to that creature's attacks.

Attack Power (Poison) ♦ Encounter (No Action)

Trigger: You hit a creature with a melee or a ranged attack.

Effect: The target takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

This damage ignores any resistance.

Level 18: Ongoing 10 poison damage.

Level 28: Ongoing 15 poison damage.

SINISTER ITEMS

"Sinister is the hand that wields the item, not the item itself."

—Kas

The following items are not cursed, but their properties and powers are certainly dark.

Bracers of Suffering

Shadar-kai fight a constant battle against the ennui defining their existence. Some go so far as to mutilate themselves so they can at least feel something. The *bracers of suffering*, called a *gal-ralan*, helps focus the wearer's mind. Once fitted over the arm, the spines inside bite deep into the flesh.

Bracers of Suffering

Level 9 Uncommon

The sharp spikes adorning each bracer bite into your flesh when you fit them over your arms.

Arms Slot 4,200 gp

Properties

♦ Your maximum hit points are reduced by 5.

♦ You gain a +1 item bonus to saving throws against charm effects and effects that stun, daze, or dominate.

Flesh-Eating Rod

The pain and suffering this implement inflicts make it desirable only to the cruelest wielders.

Flesh-Eating Rod

Level 7+ Rare

This blacked iron rod is carved with horrid demons cavorting and killing all along its length.

Lvl 7 +2 2,600 gp Lvl 22 +5 325,000 gp

Lvl 12 +3 13,000 gp Lvl 27 +6 1,625,000 gp

Lvl 17 +4 65,000 gp

Implement: Rod

Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d10 damage per plus

Property

Whenever you use this implement to make an attack that deals ongoing damage to an enemy, that enemy takes a -2 penalty to its saving throws to end the ongoing damage.

Attack Power (Acid) ♦ Encounter (No Action)

Trigger: You hit and damage an enemy with an attack using this rod.

Effect: Reduce the damage the target takes by 5, and the target takes ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends). Each time the target takes the ongoing damage, you can slide it 1 square as a free action.

Level 12 or 17: Reduce by 10, ongoing 10 acid damage.

Level 22 or 27: Reduce by 15, ongoing 15 acid damage.

Girdle of Skulls

The skulls adorning this belt can create undead servants to protect you in battle.

Girdle of Skulls

Level 12 Rare

By plucking a skull from the belt, you can call forth a skeleton to do your bidding.

Waist Slot 17,000 gp

Property

The girdle starts with four charges. When you take an extended rest, the item regains one charge.

Utility Power ♦ Daily (No Action)

Trigger: You reduce a creature to 0 hit points or fewer.

Effect: The girdle gains a charge (maximum of four).

Utility Power (Summoning) ♦ Encounter (Minor Action)

Requirement: The girdle must have at least one charge.

Effect: Expend a charge. You summon a skeletal warrior in an unoccupied space within 5 squares of you. The skeletal warrior is an ally to you but not to your allies, and it lacks actions of its own. Instead, you spend actions to command it mentally, choosing from the actions in its description. You must have line of effect to the skeletal warrior to command it. You and it share knowledge but not senses.

When the skeletal warrior makes a check, you make the roll using your game statistics, not including any temporary bonuses or penalties.

The skeletal warrior lasts until it drops to 0 hit points, at which point you lose a healing surge (or hit points equal to your surge value if you have no surges left). Otherwise, it lasts until you dismiss it as a minor action or until the end of the encounter.

Skeletal Warrior

Level 12 Summoned Creature

Medium shadow animate (undead)

HP 40; **Healing Surges** none, but you can lose a healing surge for the creature if an effect allows it to spend one

AC 28, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 22

Speed 7

♦ Standard Action ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 11 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the skeletal warrior's next turn.

Minor Action ♦ At-Will (1/round)

Effect: The skeletal warrior walks, shifts, runs, stands up, squeezes, or crawls.

♦ Opportunity Action ♦ At-Will

Trigger: An adjacent enemy marked by the skeletal warrior shifts or uses an attack power that doesn't target the skeletal warrior.

Attack: Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +17 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 11 damage.

Midnight Blade

An assassin's weapon if ever there was one, the *midnight blade* masks its true potential when inspected in bright light. In darkness, all the flaws fade when a soft violet light washes the weapon from point to pommel.

Midnight Blade

Level 12+ Rare

A weapon forged for dark deeds works best when cloaked in shadow.

Lvl 12 +3 13,000 gp Lvl 22 +5 325,000 gp

Lvl 17 +4 65,000 gp Lvl 27 +6 1,625,000 gp

Weapon: Heavy blade, light blade

Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d8 per plus, or +1d12 per plus in dim light or darkness

Properties

♦ You gain darkvision.

♦ You take a -2 penalty to attack rolls when attacking with this weapon in bright light.

♦ You gain a +1 item bonus to attack rolls when using this weapon in darkness.

Utility Power (Aura) ♦ Daily (Minor Action)

Effect: You activate an aura 2 that lasts until the end of the encounter or until you dismiss it as a free action. Bright light in the aura becomes dim light, and dim light in the aura becomes darkness.

Obsidian Wand

Shaped from an obsidian shard, this wand is adept at channeling arcane magic and shadow magic, making it a preferred implement for those who deal in dark magic.

Obsidian Wand

Level 3+ Rare

When you channel magic through the wand, you feel it grow as cold as the grave.

Lvl 3 +1 680 gp Lvl 18 +4 85,000 gp

Lvl 8 +2 3,400 gp Lvl 23 +5 425,000 gp

Lvl 13 +3 17,000 gp Lvl 28 +6 2,125,000 gp

Implement: Wand

Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d10 necrotic damage per plus

Wand Attack Power ♦ Daily (Standard Action)

Effect: As the wizard's ray of enfeeblement power. If this attack reduces the creature to 5 hit points or fewer, the creature dies.

Attack Power ♦ Daily (No Action)

Trigger: You reduce a creature to 15 or fewer hit points with an attack power using this wand.

Effect: The creature dies.

Ray of Enfeeblement

Wizard Attack 1

You point three fingers at your foe, curling them like talons. Weird green mist streams from your enemy's flesh, carrying away its strength.

Encounter ♦ Arcane, Implement, Necromancy, Necrotic
Standard Action Ranged 10

Target: One creature

Attack: Intelligence vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d10 + Intelligence modifier necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of your next turn.

Miss: Half damage.

Ring of Domination

A hag coven forged the *ring of domination* to steal the hearts of men. With only power enough to construct a single ring, the hags vied for the trinket's ownership. It wasn't long before they turned against each other to own the ring truly. While they fought, their slaves rose up and slew them all.

Ring of Domination Level 24 Rare

The Rellanic script drifting across the ring's surface tells a tale of a wicked hag who seduced mortal men.

Ring Slot 525,000 gp

Property

You gain a +5 item bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate checks.

✦ **Attack Power** (Charm, Psychic) ✦ **Daily** (Minor Action)

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +29 vs. Will. You take 15 psychic damage.

Hit: The target is dominated (save ends). Each time the target fails a saving throw to end the effect, you or one ally you can see takes 15 psychic damage.

If you've reached at least one milestone today, the target takes a -2 penalty to saving throws to end the effect.

Serpentine Knife of Zannad

The *serpentine knife of Zannad* is one of several treasures wrested from a lost empire's haunted remains. Its story has carved a path of murder and suffering through recent history. Assassins have used it to commit terrible murder, while death cults have killed to find it, even

when only chasing rumors. The knife has great value to Zehir's priests, since it helps focus divine energy and is also the perfect tool for dark deeds committed in the god's name.

Serpentine Knife of Zannad Level 5+ Rare

This wavy blade doubles as a weapon and an implement.

Lvl 5	+1	1,000 gp	Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp
Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp

Weapon: Dagger

Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d8 poison damage per plus

Properties

- ✦ You gain an item bonus to skill checks made as part of a ritual. The bonus equals the dagger's enhancement bonus.
- ✦ The dagger can be used as a holy symbol. It adds its enhancement bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls. You do not gain your weapon proficiency bonus to an attack roll when using the dagger as an implement.

Attack Power (Poison) ✦ **Encounter** (No Action)

Trigger: You hit an enemy with an attack using this dagger.

Effect: The target takes ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

This damage ignores any immunity or resistance to poison.

Level 15 or 20: Ongoing 10 poison damage.

Level 25 or 30: Ongoing 15 poison damage.

Utility Power ✦ **Daily** (Free Action)

Trigger: You perform a coup de grace using the dagger and kill the target.

Effect: You gain a +5 power bonus to skill checks made as part of the next ritual you perform before the end of your next extended rest.

Skull of Terror

Druids, shamans, and other primal magic-users create *skulls of terror* as a last resort to drive back those who would despoil the wilderness. The totem fills their thoughts with monstrous images and sensations of pain and suffering.

Skull of Terror Level 5+ Uncommon

Channeling primal magic through the skull infects your enemies with an overwhelming urge to flee from your presence.

Lvl 5	+1	1,000 gp	Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp
Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp

Implement: Totem

Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +1d6 damage per plus

Property

You gain a +1 item bonus to the attack rolls of fear powers and charm powers used with this totem.

Attack Power (Fear) ✦ **Daily** (No Action)

Trigger: You hit a creature with an attack using this totem.

Effect: You push the target up to its speed. If the target ends its next turn closer to you than where it started the turn, you regain the use of this power.



The Vile Tome

"Destroying the book is easy, cutter. You need only three things: the Ritual of Endings and Beginnings, the Well of Many Worlds, and a death wish."

—Rule-of-Three, cambion

THE GREATEST prize any servant of darkness can win is without a doubt the *Book of Vile Darkness*. There are more fabrications than truths about this dark work, yet it surely offers power beyond any mortal reckoning. Wicked beings have claimed this tome at various points in history, each time blotting the world with sinister deeds and vile acts. Sometimes the book finds its way into less villainous hands. When it does, tragedy almost always follows.

"The Vile Tome" is a short set of encounters you can add to an ongoing campaign to describe what happens when the *Book of Vile Darkness* falls into heroes' hands. The various encounters detail key events that can occur during the paragon tier as the adventurers grapple with the dread power in their hands. Unlike other adventures, the encounters described here do not immediately follow each other. Instead, you decide when to use them based on when they would be most appropriate to your campaign.

This chapter presents four encounters.

- ◆ The heroes find the book amid the ruins of a shattered fortress and battle demons.
- ◆ Hounded by agents of evil, the heroes stumble upon a crazy knight with a sordid tale.
- ◆ The heroes pursue a lead that could help them destroy the book—or master it.
- ◆ The future of the cosmos hangs in the balance as the heroes use the Well of Many Worlds to empower or destroy the *Book of Vile Darkness*.

In addition to the adventure itself, this chapter includes the *Book of Vile Darkness* artifact and support for introducing the item, dealing with its influence, and getting rid of the artifact once the adventurers have had enough.



ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The *Book of Vile Darkness* has a long and sordid history in the world, but that history's darkest chapter tells of the dread mage Nhagruul, who used his own flesh, blood, and spirit to reconstruct the tome. Nhagruul hoped to allow his followers to spread madness and destruction across the world. Riding to counter their foul deeds came a bright order of chivalry, a religious society devoted to Pelor's purifying light. As Nhagruul's twisted henchmen worked their evil, the Knights of the New Sun rode out to meet them, putting their foes to the sword or cleansing their souls in the pyre's purifying flames. Fearing they would lose their prize, Nhagruul's disciples divided the book into three parts and hid them where the knights would never find them.

Long years later, when the New Sun had faded to pale shadows of their former might, Nhagruul's disciples stirred again to remake that which was sundered and usher in a new age of darkness. One knight, a hero named Grayson, risked his soul to thwart the disciples' mad ambition. Though he was tempted time and again to embrace evil, he clung to his faith and purpose. After a climactic battle, Grayson defeated the wicked mind flayer Shathrax, who sought to steal the *Book of Vile Darkness*'s power for itself. The death of the mind flayer triggered the collapse of Shathrax's flying fortress, and the vile tome was buried amid the rubble.

Although Shathrax did not manage to master the artifact, his effort proved sufficient for the artifact to recombine itself on its own. As it slowly knits itself back together, the tome casts out its influence, seeking a new owner to be tempted. To be corrupted. To be destroyed.

BOOK OF VILE DARKNESS: THE MOVIE

This adventure uses elements taken from the film *Dungeons & Dragons: The Book of Vile Darkness*. You need not have seen the movie to use this material, nor do you have to assume its events took place in your campaign. You should freely adapt the material presented here as you see fit.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

"The Vile Tome" puts an artifact of dreadful power in the player characters' hands. The adventurers might resist its corrupting influence and set out to destroy it, or they might fall prey to its evil power and become ruled by it. In either case, the events described here unfold as written.

The *Book of Vile Darkness* is far more than a magical book. It is a blot on the world, a shadow cast by the seed of darkness festering in the depths of the Abyss. The tome does not have to wait long for some pliable creature to pluck it from the rubble of Shathrax's fortress; this time, it's happening when the adventurers reach the ruins.

A band of demons newly escaped from their fortress prison sift through the keep's remains, looking for people to kill, when the shadow demon senses the book. The adventurers have a chance to defeat the demons before they can make off with the treasure and thereby secure the book for themselves. The book conceals its true power for a while, letting the adventurers think they might have come across some useful magic item rather than an artifact of terrible power.

On gaining the *Book of Vile Darkness*, the characters are free to continue their other quests. From time to time, the adventurers might pick up clues about the book's identity from its evil character and dark power. Researching the book eventually points the adventurers to Nhagruul. The demonic archwizard is long dead, and his followers were supposedly destroyed during the last effort to reconstruct the tome. The best hope the adventurers have of learning more about the book is to travel to Nhagruul's tomb.

The adventurers know they've arrived at the tomb when they find a hideous statue erected to honor the vile mage. There, a disciple of Nhagruul and his wicked allies spill out from the surrounding forest to wrest the artifact from the party. If the characters prevail and keep the tome, they can commune with Nhagruul's spirit to learn that their objective waits for them at the fabled Well of Many Worlds.

If the characters want to master the artifact and its dread power, they must perform a ritual at the Well to summon evil from other realities and recreate the manuscript. If they wish to destroy the book, they must perform the same ritual, but draw forth good from all the worlds to completely destroy the book. In either case, there are others who want the tome for themselves, and these forces converge on the Well to stake their claim.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

"The Vile Tome" puts a dangerous and evil artifact in the player characters' hands, and presents one possible outcome of the acquisition. Since artifacts are expected to linger, it is best to allow the characters to experiment with the book and deal with the repercussions over several adventures. Each story element described could occur during the time the characters possess the artifact, and so you should find ways to insert these elements into your game after the characters first gain the artifact. Although the characters lack the means to destroy the artifact, they can always walk away from it. If they do, the Book of Vile Darkness might trouble them again when it appears in an enemy's clutches or falls into an ally's hands.

Expanding the Adventure

By spreading out the encounters across the paragon tier, you have the opportunity to add additional encounters and complications to the story. It's expected your other adventures will shoulder a lot of this weight, but you can also extend sequences and add more challenges, expanding this adventure into a short campaign. Look to the rules presented in this book for ideas, opponents, and rewards appropriate for this adventure's plot.

CORRUPTION EFFECTS

Each time a character who is not chaotic evil uses a power with a corruption effect, he or she must immediately make a saving throw. On a save, the character takes 5 damage per tier. On a failed saving throw, the character gains 1 corruption point. When a character's corruption points equal his or her highest ability modifier, the character's alignment shifts one step toward chaotic evil (lawful good to good, good to unaligned, unaligned to evil, or evil to chaotic evil). The character's corruption point total then drops to 1 + 1 for each time the character's alignment has shifted.

A character can remove any corruption points gained by using the Remove Affliction ritual, undergoing a quest for atonement, or some other powerful magic as the DM decides.

Dungeon Masters should consider adding corruption effects to other aspects of their vile darkness campaign. For example, a DM might rule that a character with the cultist theme who uses ritual sacrifice to kill a helpless prisoner has gained a corruption point. The slow but inexorable slide into wickedness and depravity can be modeled with corruption effects.

THE BOOK OF VILE DARKNESS (ARTIFACT)

The *Book of Vile Darkness* is appropriate for paragon tier adventurers.

Many powers granted by this item have corruption effects (see the "Corruption Effects" sidebar).

Book of Vile Darkness

Paragon Level

A blasphemous tome whose pages are stained with unspeakable knowledge, this vile work reveals evil's darkest secrets.

Artifact: Implement (tome)

Enhancement Bonus: +4 to attack rolls and damage rolls

Critical: +4d6 damage, or +4d10 damage against non-evil creatures

Properties

- ◆ You gain a +3 item bonus to Arcana checks, History checks, and Religion checks.
- ◆ Implement attack powers using this tome deal 2d10 extra damage to good-aligned targets.
- ◆ Whenever you gain a corruption point from using a power granted by this tome, an ally within 5 squares of you also gains a corruption point.
- ◆ If you are chaotic evil, all non-evil creatures must make opportunity attacks against you when you provoke them.

Attack Power ◆ Daily (No Action)

Trigger: You hit an enemy with an attack using this tome.

Effect: The enemy takes 1d10 extra damage. You gain 1 corruption point.

Utility Power ◆ Encounter (No Action)

Trigger: An enemy gains an effect that a save can end from an attack power using this tome.

Effect: The enemy takes a -2 penalty to saving throws until the triggering effect ends. You gain 1 corruption point.

Utility Power ◆ Daily (No Action)

Trigger: You miss with an encounter attack power using this tome.

Effect: The miss becomes a hit. You gain 1 corruption point.

Utility Power ◆ Daily (No Action)

Trigger: You use a summoning power with this tome.

Effect: The summoned creature gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses, and its attacks deal 1d10 extra damage. You gain 1 corruption point.

Lore

Arcana or Religion DC 18: Scrawled across each page of this strange and sinister book are invocations to evil, essays on dark magic, and descriptions of the most sinister forces in the cosmos. Although the theme is constant throughout, different hands and voices suggest many have added to the book's contents at various times. Perusing the book's odd pages, which consist of a mix of parchment, hammered metal, cloth, and other materials, conveys a sense of dread and seductive wonder.

Arcana or Religion DC 25: Divining the book's original author is a fruitless enterprise, since it is impossible to discern which parts were added and which are original. Many tales point to Vecna as the first author,

claiming he wrote the book in the months before the Great Betrayal cost him his eye and hand. Others have suggested darkness itself inspired the book, compelling those in its thrall to bind a fragment of their souls into the tome, both to record their insights and to give the book its power.

Arcana or Religion DC 34: Sages claim many copies of the *Book of Vile Darkness* exist, but all are lesser volumes, crude reproductions of the true work. Though there have been efforts to destroy the book in the past, each time the tome manages to reconstitute itself, as if it possessed a will to exist—a will that exerts dark influence over its wielder. Those who study its foul pages find their souls darkening and shriveling, until they become thralls to the darkness of the void.

As powerful as the tome appears, some sages have speculated that the artifact that surfaces from time to time is but a projection of the true *Book of Vile Darkness*. These theories suggest that each world—each reality—has its own *Book of Vile Darkness*, recording the insights and discoveries of the worst villains inhabiting that time and place. If one could draw forth the essence of evil from other worlds and combine them into one cosmos-shattering whole, one could become mightier than the gods. Similarly, the only way to truly end the book's threat to the world would be to draw the combined goodness from these worlds and use it to destroy the tome permanently.

Goals of the Book

- ◆ Reveal the book's secrets to a worthy servant and convince that servant to draw from its power.
- ◆ Magnify the book's sinister power by recording new evils into its pages.
- ◆ Spread evil and darkness across the world through conquest and corruption.
- ◆ Defeat good in every quarter until evil reigns supreme.

Roleplaying the Book

The *Book of Vile Darkness* is aware. Thanks to the soul fragments binding wicked ideas and writings to its pages, the book possesses a dim cunning and a drive to spread despair and suffering throughout the world. It senses when it is handled or examined, and can conceal its darker subjects to appear less sinister to a viewer whose alignment differs from its own. The book's great power should tempt the character to tap into the magic it contains and use it in place of whatever implement the character normally would wield. The more the character uses the book, the greater his or her corruption grows until the wielder becomes chaotic evil (see the "Corruption Effects" sidebar).

Although possessed of intelligence, the book has no means to communicate outside the words on its pages.



This said, the book can move words around on the page so the reader can divine its intentions and objectives, should he or she earn the book's trust.

CONCORDANCE

Starting Score	5
Owner gains a level	+1d10
Owner becomes evil	+4
Owner kills a good ally	+4
Owner kills a good creature that's not an ally	+2
Owner gains corruption points equal to highest ability modifier	+2
Owner performs an evil act	+1
Owner uses a healing power on an ally	-1
Owner performs a good act	-2
Owner removes corruption points by Remove Affliction ritual or similar magic	-4

Pleased (16–20)

"The words and diagrams that once swam across these pages have stopped their errant movement. I can now divine the awful truths this book contains."

The *Book of Vile Darkness* is greatly pleased with the character's corruption and trusts the character with the dark knowledge its pages contain.

Enhancement Bonus: +5 to attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +5d6 damage, or +5d10 damage against non-evil creatures

Properties

- ◆ You gain a +5 item bonus to Arcana checks, History checks, and Religion checks.
- ◆ Implement attack powers that deal damage using this tome deal 3d10 extra damage to good-aligned targets.
- ◆ Whenever you gain a corruption point from using a power granted by this tome, each ally within 5 squares of you also gains a corruption point.

◀ Attack Power (Charm, Fear) ◆ Daily (Standard Action)

Attack: Close burst 3 (creatures in the burst); your level + 5 vs. Will

Hit: If the target is non-evil, you can push it up to its speed, and it is dazed (save ends). If the target is evil, it is dominated until the end of your next turn.

Angered (0 or lower)

"I cannot bear this burden much longer. If I do, I fear I will go mad!"

The book loathes its wielder and uses its full power and influence to destroy what it considers its enemy.

Enhancement Bonus: +3 to attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +3d6 damage, or +3d10 damage against non-evil creatures

Properties

- ◆ You gain vulnerable 5 to all damage.
- ◆ You treat allies as enemies for the purposes of your attack powers. In addition, you must make opportunity attacks against your allies when possible.
- ◆ Each time you take damage while you are bloodied, you must make an attack as a free action using an at-will attack power against an ally you can see.

Moving On

"I am doomed!"

The *Book of Vile Darkness* devours its owner's soul, leaving behind a living and unresponsive husk. Black flames burn away the artifact until nothing but greasy ash remains. The place of the artifact's disappearance is forever cursed; nothing will grow there, and people who linger in the area sicken and die. As for the owner, nothing short of divine intervention will restore the devoured soul. Convincing a god to assist such a villain is a quest in its own right.

The book is not gone from the world for long. Some despicable soul will find a way to reconstruct the tome, by ritual or by quest, and those who look for the terrible book are bound to find it.

Using the Encounters

This adventure works best when you mix the encounters and events described here with another adventure so that thoughts of the *Book of Vile Darkness* fester in the background, periodically coming to the fore as the characters fight against its influence or try to master its teachings.

You'll need the *Rules Compendium* to run this adventure and for rolling random treasures. The tactical encounters use the poster map included with this product, so keep it handy.

Satisfied (12–15)

"I have proven myself a worthy servant of the book and I can now see greater meaning and power in its pages."

The book sinks foul claws into the reader's soul, twisting it toward wickedness. As a reward for the character's gradual slide into darkness, the book reveals a useful secret.

➤ Attack Power ◆ Encounter (Minor Action)

Effect: Ranged 5 (one Large or smaller unattended, nonmagical object). The target takes 4d20 + your level damage. This damage ignores any resistances.

Normal (5–11)

"There is power in this book. I must steel my heart and mind to master it."

The book conceals much from its wielder, though it hints at great power and terrible magic in the concepts that seem to crawl on every page.

Unsatisfied (1–4)

"Try as I might, I cannot block the sinister visions assailing my mind. The book's power is too great."

If the wielder resists the book's influence, the artifact grows angry and fearful that its wielder will somehow seek to destroy it or, at the very least, contain it. It actively works against its wielder until it finds a more reliable servant.

Properties

- ◆ You gain vulnerable 5 to all damage.
- ◆ The first time you become bloodied each encounter, the tome dominates you until the end of your next turn. It compels you to attack your allies or moves you into danger.

ENCOUNTER 1: DEVASTATION OF SHATHRAX

Combat Encounter Level 13 (4,800 XP)

The adventure begins when the characters come across the ruins of Shathrax's floating fortress. They might hear about a "mountain falling from the sky" and investigate, or they might simply come across the crater en route to some other location. If the adventurers aren't quite ready to find the artifact, you could foreshadow this encounter by letting them hear rumors about the ruined fortress and whispers about how evil creatures roam the devastated lands.

Unless the characters approach stealthily, they are seen and attacked by a gang of demons that survived the destruction of Shathrax's fortress. The adventurers should discover the *Book of Vile Darkness* either during or after the fight.

Light: Bright light during the day (sunlight), dim light at night (moonlight).

Monsters: 1 vile shadow demon (S), 2 mezzodemons (M), 2 demonic savage minotaurs (D), 4 dretch lackeys (L). The demons sift through the ruins in search of victims and plunder. The shadow demon senses that the *Book of Vile Darkness* is near.

Perception DC 20 (40 at night without dark-vision or low-light vision): The character sees a black book protruding from the rubble (in the square marked "B" on the map). It has a strange and sinister appearance.

When the adventurers arrive at the crater, read: *Rubble litters the landscape all around a deep crater. Twisted corpses lie here and there, tangled in the ruin. Picking their way through the debris are a pair of hulking minotaurs, two insectile fiends wielding tridents, and several bickering blobs of flesh. Flitting over them all is a shadowy figure that oozes menace.*

This encounter takes place on the battle map. Place the characters in their start area and monsters as shown on the map.

Tactics: Until a character attacks the shadow demon, it spends its actions moving and searching. Each time it makes a Perception check (a move action), it searches a 5-square-by-5-square space. If the adventurers haven't found the artifact by the third round, the shadow demon searches the area where it waits.

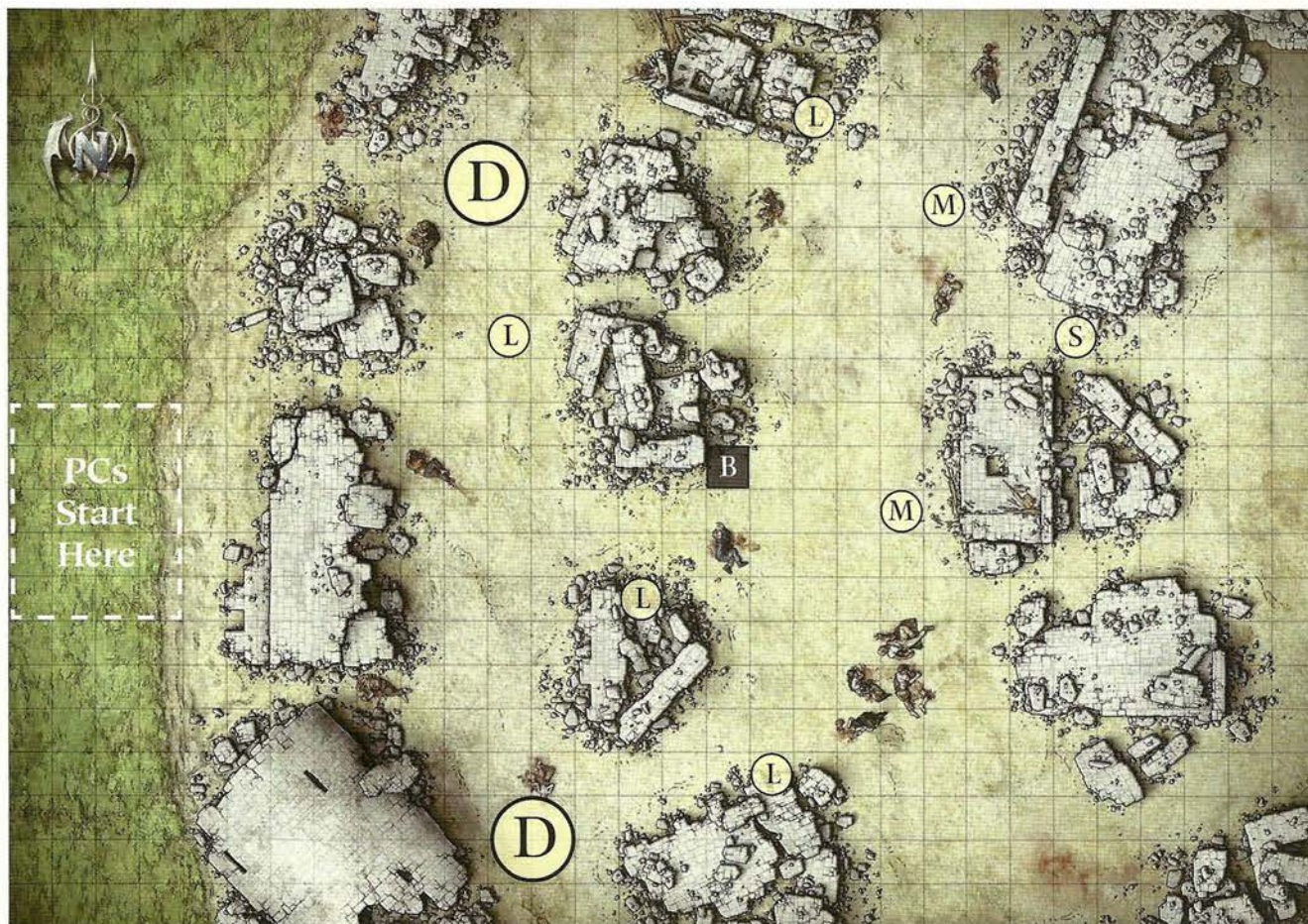
Should it come under attack, it uses *abyssal horror* to drive off its enemies to give it time to resume its search. Once it gets the book or it can no longer search for it, it goes on the offensive, using *fleeting shadow* to move into a flank and then following up with *vile possession*.

The mezzodemons block the adventurers from closing on the shadow demon and use *skewering tines* and *poison breath* to keep enemies in place.

The savage minotaurs charge the adventurers, attacking with claws and then springing away with *goring attack* to punish artillery.

The dretch gang up on the closest enemy, hoping to overwhelm it with their vile auras.

Vile Shadow Demon (S)	Level 12 Elite Lurker
Medium elemental humanoid (demon)	XP 1,400
HP 184; Bloodied 92	Initiative +17
AC 26, Fortitude 22, Reflex 26, Will 24	Perception +13
Speed 0, fly 8 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Resist 15 necrotic	
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
TRAITS	
☼ Shadow Shift (necrotic) ♦ Aura 1	
Any enemy in the aura that hits the shadow demon with a melee attack takes 5 necrotic damage.	
Insubstantial	
The shadow demon takes half damage from all attacks, except those that deal force damage. Whenever the shadow demon takes radiant damage, it loses this trait until the start of its next turn.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Claw (necrotic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d8 + 7 necrotic damage, plus 1d8 necrotic damage if the shadow demon has combat advantage against the target.	
⚡ Vile Possession (charm, psychic) ♦ Recharge when no creature is affected by <i>vile possession</i>	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature granting combat advantage to the shadow demon); +15 vs. Will	
Hit: 4d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is dominated (save ends). While the target is dominated, the shadow demon is removed from play.	
Aftereffect: The shadow demon returns to play in an unoccupied square of its choice within 5 squares of the target.	
⚡ Abyssal Horror (fear) ♦ Recharge ☼ ☼ ☼	
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +15 vs. Will	
Hit: The shadow demon pushes the target up to its speed, and the target grants combat advantage (save ends).	
⚡ Abyssal Void (necrotic, zone) ♦ Recharge when first bloodied	
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d10 + 6 necrotic damage.	
Miss: Half damage.	
Effect: The burst creates a zone of darkness that lasts until the end of the shadow demon's next turn. The zone blocks line of sight for all creatures that cannot see in darkness. Any enemy that starts its turn in the zone takes 5 necrotic damage and is immobilized until the start of its next turn.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
⚡ Void Rake ♦ At-Will (1/round)	
Effect: The shadow demon uses <i>claw</i> .	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
Variable Resistance ♦ 2/Encounter	
Trigger: The shadow demon takes acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage.	
Effect (<i>Free Action</i>): The shadow demon gains resist 20 to the triggering damage type until the end of the encounter or until it uses variable resistance again.	
Skills Arcana +15, Bluff +15, Stealth +18	
Str 8 (+5)	Dex 24 (+13) Wis 14 (+8)
Con 14 (+8)	Int 19 (+10) Cha 19 (+10)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Abyssal, Common	

**2 Mezzodemons (M)**

Medium elemental humanoid (demon)

HP 113; Bloodied 56

AC 27, Fortitude 24, Reflex 22, Will 23

Speed 6

Resist 10 poison

Level 11 Soldier

XP 600 each

Initiative +9

Perception +13

Darkvision

STANDARD ACTIONS⚔ **Trident (weapon) ♦ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +16 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 10 damage.

⚔ **Skewering Tines (weapon) ♦ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +16 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 10 damage, and the target is restrained and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends both). Until the effect ends, the mezzodemon cannot use *trident* or *skewering tines*.☠ **Poison Breath (poison) ♦ Recharge ☐ ☐**

Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +14 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 4d6 + 5 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Miss: Half damage.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS**Variable Resistance ♦ 2/Encounter****Trigger:** The mezzodemon takes acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage.**Effect (Free Action):** The mezzodemon gains resist 10 to the triggering damage type until the end of the encounter or until it uses variable resistance again.**Skills** Intimidate +11

Str 20 (+10)

Dex 15 (+7)

Wis 16 (+8)

Con 17 (+8)

Int 10 (+5)

Cha 13 (+6)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal**Equipment** trident**4 Dretch Lackeys (L)**

Small elemental humanoid (demon)

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.

AC 24, Fortitude 26, Reflex 24, Will 22

Level 12 Minion Brute

XP 250 each

Initiative +9

Perception +8

SPEED 5**DARKVISION TRAITS**☠ **Sickening Miasma ♦ Aura 1**Whenever an enemy in the aura takes a standard action or a move action, it takes 2 damage. Multiple *sickening miasma* auras stack, dealing up to 10 damage.**STANDARD ACTIONS**⚔ **Savage Claws ♦ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +17 vs. AC

Hit: 12 damage.

Str 20 (+11)

Dex 17 (+9)

Wis 12 (+7)

Con 16 (+9)

Int 5 (+3)

Cha 7 (+4)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal

2 Demonic Savage Minotaurs (D)

Large natural humanoid

Level 11 Brute

XP 600 each

HP 140; Bloodied 70**Initiative +8****AC 23, Fortitude 25, Reflex 22, Will 20****Perception +7****Speed 8****STANDARD ACTIONS****⚔ Claws ♦ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 2 (one or two creatures); +16 vs. AC. If the minotaur targets only one creature, it can make this attack twice against that creature.

Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and the minotaur grabs the target (escape DC 19) if it has fewer than two creatures grabbed.

† Impale ♦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the minotaur); +14 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 5d8 + 13 damage. The target falls prone and is no longer grabbed by the minotaur.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS**† Goring Assault ♦ At-Will**

Trigger: An enemy within 10 squares of the minotaur hits it with a ranged or area attack.

Effect (Immediate Reaction): The minotaur charges the triggering enemy.

Str 22 (+11)**Dex 16 (+8)****Wis 15 (+7)****Con 20 (+10)****Int 5 (+2)****Cha 7 (+3)****Alignment** chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common

Features of the Area

Book of Vile Darkness (B): If the shadow demon finds the artifact before the adventurers and grabs it, the shadow demon gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls and defenses until it drops to 0 hit points or until the end of the encounter.

Corpses: Corpses are scattered throughout the fortress wreckage, and residual magic from the shattered stronghold gives them a semblance of life. The corpses attack living creatures, and a corpse can be destroyed by spending a standard action to attack it (no attack roll necessary).

TRIGGERED ACTION**† Corpse Attack ♦ At-Will**

Trigger: A Medium or smaller living creature starts its turn in a square containing a corpse or adjacent to it.

Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 1 (triggering creature); +16 vs. Reflex

Hit: The target is grabbed (escape DC 20). Each time the target ends its turn grabbed by a corpse, it takes 10 damage.

Rubble Mounds: Great heaps of rubble litter the slope down to the crater's bottom. It costs 3 squares of movement to enter a rubble mound's space. In addition, the mounds grant cover to creatures standing behind them.

Treasure: In addition to finding the *Book of Vile Darkness*, adventurers searching the rubble find two treasure rolls on the Treasure by Party Level table (*Rules Compendium*, pages 298–302).

Gaining the Artifact

The characters can recover the *Book of Vile Darkness* after defeating the demons picking through the rubble of Shathrax's fallen fortress. **Read:**

You have found a massive book: a dark thing, crudely made and adorned with sinister decorations. The spine is a shrieking face held in place with nails and barbed wire. A toothy metal hasp keeps the black covers shut. Metal wing shapes reinforce the edges, resembling those of a bat or demon. Strange runes and diagrams have been painted on the black leather covers, the skins stretched taut over concealed boards. There is a strangeness about this tome, a sort of wrongness that speeds the heart and raises hairs.

Savvy players will guess that the tome is none other than the *Book of Vile Darkness*. Even if they don't, they should get a sense of the book's sinister nature. Good characters might be inclined to destroy the book, but, as an artifact, nothing they try will even scratch its cover. Not even the Disenchant Magic Item ritual will destroy it. This leaves the adventurers with two options: They can leave it behind—making it likely that some other passerby will find it—or they can take it with them.

Consequences of Possession

The first character to open the *Book of Vile Darkness* and examine its contents becomes its owner. From this examination, the character learns the book's essential characteristics including its enhancement bonus, critical dice, its first two listed properties, and its first power. Each time the character takes an extended rest and studies the book, reveal another power or property; you can also reveal an extra power or property if the character is evil or chaotic evil.

Don't announce the artifact's capabilities to the entire group. Pull the player aside or use notes to communicate this information. This way, it's up to the player to decide which discoveries to keep secret and which ones to share.

A character under the book's influence is going to perceive the world in a slightly different way. You can use any of the following descriptions to reinforce the artifact's dark power. You might share these openly or in secret with the players.

Decay: Food tends to spoil around the owner, and even water develops an acrid taste.

Disturbing Voices: The owner hears faint whispers. Although the words are incoherent, every once in a while, the owner hears things like “kill,” “read,” and “worship.”

Nightmares: The owner experiences vivid nightmares wherein he or she is betrayed, harmed, or maimed by his or her companions.

Paranoia: The owner senses that his or her companions are watching. From time to time, the owner imagines a companion staring at the book.

Shadows: Shadows seem to bend and flicker around the owner.

Stench: Good creatures have a sickening odor, making it hard for the owner to be around them without gagging.

Unwholesome Visage: The owner sees others in the very worst light, each flaw magnified until it eclipses all other features. A sore on the lip might pulsate evilly, while things might crawl in the spaces between dirty teeth.

ENCOUNTER 2: KNIGHT OF THE NEW SUN

Combat Encounter Level Varies

At some point after the adventurers have had the *Book of Vile Darkness* for a while, they encounter a Knight of the New Sun rotting in a crow cage suspended from a pole at a crossroads. He is nothing like the Knights of old; he's a broken man who allowed addiction and despair to shatter his faith.

Ahead, you spy a cage swinging on the end of a chain hanging from a wooden frame. Ravens cling to the metal bars, a shrieking host grown fat on rotten meat. At your approach, the ravens flap away in a rage. With the birds gone, you can see inside the cage. A tangle of limbs crammed inside present a grisly feast. With a start, you realize that not all of the limbs are dead, as you see a wild-eyed man with gray skin and slack mouth, his lips cracked and bleeding.

The man in the cage is Paulus, a fallen Knight of the New Sun. The local magistrate locked him inside after he was judged guilty of murder. The knight did indeed kill a man for his coins, to feed his addiction to the drug baccaran. He's near death, having had no water for almost three days. If the adventurers give him water or use a healing power such as healing word, he regains strength enough to talk.

Paulus reveals a sorry tale, from the pride and honor of joining the Knights, to his first encounter with baccaran and subsequent addiction, to the wicked deed that placed him in the cage. Fill in the details as you like to add color to his story. While his tale might be interesting to some, the information Paulus has about the order and the *Book of Vile Darkness* is the real point of this interaction. Paulus can reveal all the information in the adventure background and as many clues about the artifact as you like. You might also reveal information about the Disciples of Nhagruul (see Chapter 4). If

the adventurers reveal that they carry the book, Paulus starts screaming incoherently and tearing at his skin with dirty nails until his voice finally gives out and he collapses from exhaustion.

The wretched knight is too weak to be of any other use. Even if rescued from the cage, his wounds tended, he will die in a few days. He simply lacks the will to live.

Development

The world shudders at the *Book of Vile Darkness*'s return. There's no shortage of villains who would do anything to get their hands on the tome. The longer the adventurers carry the book, the more likely they are to face enemies drawn by the artifact's evil.

You can use the following encounters to demonstrate the growing interest in the artifact. Feel free to substitute different creatures or add more encounters.

Undying Ambition

Level 12 Encounter (XP 3,850)

- ♦ 1 lich necromancer (level 14 elite controller; *Monster Vault*, page 183)
- ♦ 2 master vampires (level 12 lurker; *Monster Vault*, page 283)
- ♦ 3 putrescent zombies (level 11 minion brute; *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead™*, page 196)

A lich necromancer and its undead henchmen pick up the adventurers' trail. The lich sends the zombies forward to keep the adventurers busy long enough for the vampires to snatch the artifact using their dominating gaze. The vampires and lich break off the attack if the lich gains the book.

Disciple of Shathrax

Level 14 Encounter (XP 5,500)

- ♦ 1 mind flayer thrall master (level 14 elite controller [leader]; *Monster Vault*, page 205)
- ♦ 2 arena-trained ogres (level 14 brute; *Monster Vault*, page 219)
- ♦ 6 derro thugs (level 14 minion brute; *Monster Manual* 3, page 49)

On learning of its master's death, a mind flayer acolyte of Shathrax sets out to continue the villain's work. It knows Shathrax's plan and eventually learns that the adventurers have the book. The mind flayer instructs its servants to kill all the characters except for the book's owner, whose brain it intends to devour. By doing so, the mind flayer hopes to gain whatever knowledge the owner has of the book.

Demon Directive

Level 14 Encounter (XP 5,400)

- ♦ 3 abyssal eviscerators (level 14 brute; *Monster Vault*, page 47)
- ♦ 3 babaus (level 13 skirmisher; *Monster Vault*, page 45)

A demon lord dispatches foot soldiers to take the book from the adventurers. The demon lord doesn't risk a direct confrontation to avoid showing its hand to its rivals. The demons are unsubtle and aggressive. They prefer to take the treasure from the adventurers' corpses.

ENCOUNTER 3: NHAGRUUL'S LEGACY

Combat Encounter Level 16 (7,600 XP) and Skill Challenge Level 17 (3,200 XP)

Although Nhagruul is long dead, his evil essence lives on in the *Book of Vile Darkness*. Nhagruul has not enjoyed his time inside the artifact and desperately wants to be free. He has little power independent of the book, but he might influence the artifact's owner by shifting words on the tome's pages or whispering into his or her mind. If, however, the characters have been good and avoided using the artifact, they probably come across Nhagruul's name in their own research or by talking with Paulus. It should be clear that the means to destroy the artifact lie with this dreadful being.

In any event, the adventurers should at some point come across the Idol of Nhagruul in a twisted and dark forest. The characters might seek it out or, failing this, stumble across it.

Light: Bright light during the day (sunlight), dim light at night (moonlight).

Monsters: 1 disciple of Nhagruul (D), 1 chaos beast deep hulk, 2 crazed ogre dreadnoughts (O), 4 Nhagruul fanatics (F). All of the monsters are hidden when the characters arrive.

Perception DC 22: The character spots the closest hidden enemy.

When the adventurers arrive at the scene, read:

The dense forest gives way to a clearing. Several monoliths, each carved with screaming humanoid faces, stand in a circle around a statue depicting a monstrous humanoid dressed in robes and fraught with horrid mutations.

Nhagruul's disciples raised a statue here to honor their master. They suspect, but are not certain, that a fragment of their master's soul is trapped within the stone. A few surviving disciples and monstrous allies

watch the statue in the hope their master will give them a sign.

The disciple and fanatics hide in the woods. The ogres hide behind two menhirs, waiting for the order to strike. The chaos beast deep hulk (not shown on the map) is underground and burrows up to join the fight once the combat begins. These creatures attack when spotted or when the adventurers come within 3 squares of the statue.

This encounter takes place on the battle map. Place the characters in their start area, but don't place the monsters until they're presence becomes known.

If the characters fail to notice the hidden monsters, read:

Several robed, flail-wielding humanoids spill out from the trees, while two hulking ogres clad in plate armor complete with skull masks step out from behind the stones. One shouts, "The book! Give us the book!"

When the deep hulk appears, read:

The ground splits wide to reveal a horrid monster: a strange, almost humanoid horror with rainbow-colored chitin plates covering its limbs and torso and great claws that end in curling talons. Strange lights play in its multifaceted eyes, while tentacles wriggle free from its body and its colors swirl and change.

Tactics: The creatures want the *Book of Vile Darkness* and sacrifice their lives to get it.

The disciple of Nhagruul hangs back behind its allies, hurling *death by thorns* at enemies it can see. The disciple then draws his flail and charges.

The deep hulk burrows up in a space near the adventurers and leads with *double attack*. If it grabs a character, it spends its action point to use *corporeal instability*. Henceforth, it alternates between *mad-dening gaze* and *double attack* until *corporeal instability* recharges.

The ogres charge into the front ranks, attacking with their greatswords each round. Once they become bloodied, they use *insane rage* to keep opponents locked down.

The fanatics skirt the battlefield's edges to hit ranged attackers from behind.

Disciple of Nhagruul (D) Level 16 Controller (Leader)

Medium natural humanoid, human XP 1,400

HP 153; Bloodied 76 Initiative +13

AC 30, Fortitude 26, Reflex 30, Will 28 Perception +7

Speed 6

TRAITS☼ **Palpable Evil** (fear) ♦ **Aura 2**

Enemies in the aura take a -2 penalty to all defenses.

STANDARD ACTIONS⊕ **Flail** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC

Hit: 2d10 + 8 damage, and the disciple can slide the target 1 square.

☞ **Soul Rot** (necrotic, psychic) ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +19 vs. Will

Hit: 2d8 + 5 necrotic and psychic damage, and the target cannot shift, use opportunity actions, or use immediate actions until the end of the disciple's next turn.

☞ **Death by Thorns** ♦ **Encounter**

Attack: Ranged 10 (one, two, or three creatures); +19 vs. Fortitude. If the disciple targets only one creature, it gains a +4 bonus to the attack roll.

Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is dazed and takes ongoing 15 damage (save ends both).

Miss: Half damage.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS☞ **Deranged Laughter** (fear) ♦ **Encounter**

Trigger: The disciple becomes bloodied.

Effect (No Action): Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst). The disciple pushes the target up to half its speed. Until the end of the encounter, the disciple takes a -2 penalty to all defenses.

Stern Command ♦ **Recharge** ☼ ☼ ☼

Trigger: An ally within 5 squares misses on an attack.

Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The triggering ally rerolls the attack roll. If it misses, the ally takes 10 damage.

Str 12 (+9) Dex 21 (+13) Wis 8 (+7)

Con 17 (+11) Int 24 (+15) Cha 20 (+13)

Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common

Equipment robes, flail

4 Nhagruul Fanatics (F) Level 14 Minion Skirmisher

Medium natural humanoid, human XP 250 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. Initiative +13

AC 28, Fortitude 28, Reflex 26, Will 25 Perception +6

Speed 6

Immune fear

STANDARD ACTIONS⊕ **Flail** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +19 vs. AC

Hit: 11 damage.

Effect: The fanatic can shift 1 square to a square adjacent to the target.

TRIGGERED ACTIONSHate ♦ **At-Will**

Trigger: An enemy within 5 squares drops an ally of the fanatic to 0 hit points.

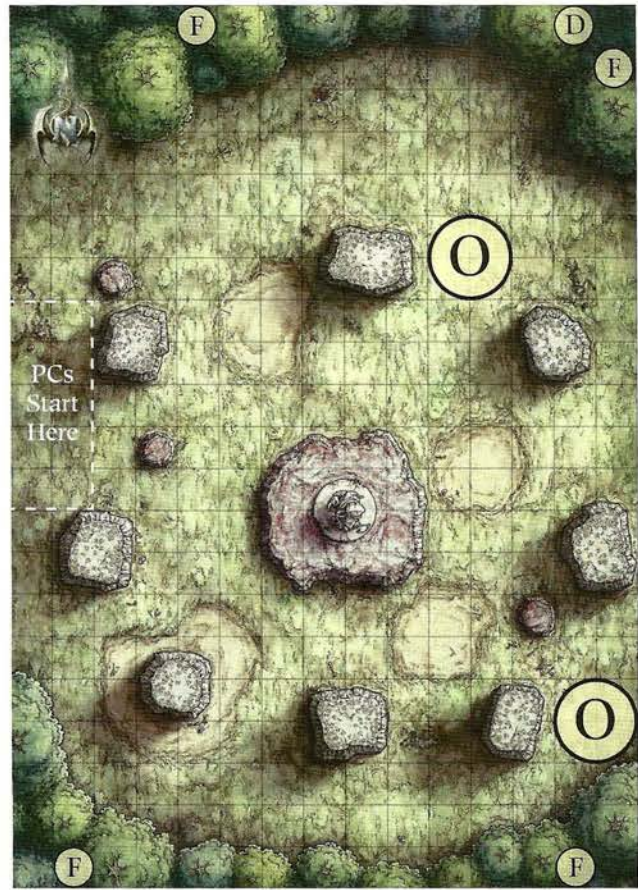
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The fanatic shifts up to 5 squares and uses flail against the triggering enemy.

Str 22 (+13) Dex 19 (+11) Wis 8 (+6)

Con 17 (+10) Int 11 (+7) Cha 16 (+10)

Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common

Equipment robes, flail

**2 Crazy Ogre Dreadnoughts (O) Level 14 Soldier**

Large natural humanoid

XP 1,000 each

HP 140; Bloodied 70

Initiative +12

AC 30, Fortitude 28, Reflex 24, Will 26

Perception +12

Speed 8

TRAITS**Threatening Reach**

The dreadnought can make opportunity attacks against enemies within 2 squares of it.

STANDARD ACTIONS⊕ **Greatsword** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +19 vs. AC

Hit: 1d12 + 11 damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the dreadnought's next turn.

MINOR ACTIONS☞ **Insane Rage** ♦ **At-Will** (1/round)

Requirement: The ogre must be bloodied.

Attack: Close burst 1 (enemies in the burst); +17 vs. Will

Hit: The target is slowed until the end of the dreadnought's next turn.

Effect: The target is marked until the end of the dreadnought's next turn.

TRIGGERED ACTIONS**Dreadnought's Resolve** ♦ **Recharge** ☼ ☼ ☼

Trigger: The dreadnought fails a saving throw.

Effect (No Action): The dreadnought rerolls the saving throw with a +2 bonus.

Skills Athletics +19

Str 24 (+14) Dex 16 (+10) Wis 20 (+12)

Con 20 (+12) Int 8 (+6) Cha 23 (+13)

Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common, Giant

Equipment plate armor, greatsword

Chaos Beast Deep Hulk**Level 17 Elite Brute**

Large elemental magical beast

XP 3,200

HP 404; Bloodied 202

Initiative +12

AC 29, Fortitude 30, Reflex 28, Will 27

Perception +16

Speed 5, burrow 2 (tunneling)

Darkvision, tremorsense 5

Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1

STANDARD ACTIONS⚔ **Claw** ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +22 vs. AC

Hit: 4d8 + 12 damage.

⚔ **Double Attack** ♦ **At-Will**

Effect: The deep hulk uses claw twice. If both attacks hit the same target and the deep hulk has no creature grabbed, the deep hulk grabs the target (escape DC 23).

◀ **Maddening Gaze** (charm) ♦ **At-Will**

Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +20 vs. Will

Hit: During its next turn, the target takes a standard action to make a basic attack against its nearest ally. If no ally is within range, the target instead takes a standard action to charge its nearest ally it is able to charge.

⚔ **Corporeal Instability** (disease) ♦ **Recharge** [1]

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +20 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 10 damage, and the target makes a saving throw at the end of its next turn. On a failed saving throw, the target contracts corporeal instability (stage 1; see page 48).

Miss: 10 damage.

Effect: The deep hulk takes 10 damage.

MOVE ACTIONS⚔ **Slithering Mass** ♦ **Encounter**

Effect: If the deep hulk is marked, the condition ends. The deep hulk can shift up to half its speed and ignores difficult terrain during this movement.

Str 26 (+16)

Dex 18 (+12)

Wis 16 (+11)

Con 22 (+14)

Int 5 (+5)

Cha 11 (+8)

Alignment unaligned

Languages –

Features of the Area

Forest: Squares containing forest are lightly obscured and difficult terrain.

Menhirs: These 10-foot-tall stones bear carvings of screaming faces and count as blocking terrain. A DC 16 Athletics check is required to climb a menhir, and its top is difficult terrain.

Carnage Stone: Whenever a creature starts its turn on a square containing carnage stone and before the creature does anything else, the DM rolls a d6. On an odd number, the creature falls prone. On an even number, the creature makes a melee basic attack as a free action against a random adjacent creature. If there is no target, the creature takes 10 psychic damage.

Statue of Nhagruul: This 15-foot-tall statue depicts a monstrosity deformed humanoid in robes. The statue is blocking terrain, and a DC 16 Athletics check is required to climb on top of it. If a character brings the *Book of Vile Darkness* within 3 squares of the statue, the statue animates. If this happens while the battle is raging between the characters and the emissaries of Vecna, the statue does not attack but instead waits until the battle is resolved before addressing the survivors (see below).

Skill Challenge: Dealing with the Idol

The statue of Nhagruul animates if the *Book of Vile Darkness* comes within 3 squares of it.

When the statue animates, read:

Dust spills from the hideous statue as it turns to face you. Its monstrous features contorting with hate, it bellows, "You dare bring that wretched tome here?"

The book's presence enrages the corrupted spirit trapped inside the statue. The spirit recalls enough about its mortal crime—reassembling the *Book of Vile Darkness*—to be of assistance to the adventurers, whether they hope to master its power or destroy it. Coercing the spirit to give up its secrets is the skill challenge. The challenge ends when the characters make six successful checks, at which point they convince the spirit to reveal the Ritual of Endings and Beginnings, or they gain three failures, at which point the idol attacks.

Level: 17 (3,200 XP).

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per round as a standard action.

Primary Skills: Arcana, Bluff, Diplomacy, History, Insight, Intimidate.

Bargaining with the Spirit (Bluff or Diplomacy DC 23 if they intend to destroy the book, DC 31 if they intend to harness its power): The characters can explain why they have the artifact and what they intend to do with it. A successful check earns the adventurers one success in the challenge, with an additional success for every 5 points by which the check result beats the DC.

Observing the Statue (Insight DC 23; maximum 1 success): A character can learn much about the spirit haunting the statue by watching and listening. On a successful check, the character learns that the spirit fears the book and gains one success toward the challenge.

Recalling Ancient Lore (Arcana or History DC 23): The character recalls lore about Nhagruul or his enemies that could be used to the party's advantage. A successful check earns the adventurers one success toward the challenge, and a success by 5 or more grants the adventurers a noncumulative +2 bonus on all Bluff and Diplomacy checks made until the end of the skill challenge. On a failed check, the adventurers earn a failure in this challenge and take a noncumulative -2 penalty to Bluff and Diplomacy checks until the end of the encounter.

Threatening the Spirit (Intimidate DC 23): A character can threaten the spirit by brandishing the book. If the character beats the DC by 5 or more, he or she also removes one failure.

Success: If the adventurers earn 6 successes before acquiring 3 failures, Nhagruul's spirit tells the characters that they must perform the Ritual of Endings and Beginnings at the Well of Many Worlds to either destroy the book or harness its power. The spirit reveals the well's location and the procedure for destroying the tome (see "Ritual of Endings and Beginnings" in Encounter 4).

Failure: If the adventures earn 3 failures before acquiring 6 successes, the spirit disappears, and the statue becomes a stone golem and attacks until destroyed. Within the rubble of the destroyed golem, the characters find a scroll with the Ritual of Endings and Beginnings scrawled on it, but it doesn't specify where the ritual must be performed. The characters might learn about the Well of Many Worlds from a divination ritual, a friendly nonplayer character, as information gained during another adventure, or with a DC 32 Arcana check (at your discretion).

Stone Golem		Level 17 Elite Soldier	
Large natural animate (construct)		XP 3,200	
HP 336; Bloodied 168		Initiative +8	
AC 33, Fortitude 31, Reflex 28, Will 27		Perception +7	
Speed 6 (cannot shift)		Darkvision	
Immune disease, poison			
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1			
STANDARD ACTIONS			
⚔ Slam ♦ At-Will			
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +22 vs. AC			
Hit: 4d6 + 11 damage, and the golem can push the target 1 square.			
⚔ Double Attack ♦ At-Will			
Effect: The golem uses <i>slam</i> twice. Each attack knocks the target prone if it hits.			
⚔ Golem Rampage ♦ Recharge ☐ ☐ ☐			
Effect: The golem moves up to its speed + 2. During this movement, the golem can move through enemies' spaces, and when the golem first enters any creature's space, it uses <i>slam</i> against that creature.			
TRIGGERED ACTIONS			
⚔ Death Burst ♦ Encounter			
Trigger: The golem drops to 0 hit points.			
Attack (No Action): Close burst 1 (creatures in the burst); +22 vs. AC			
Hit: 2d12 + 10 damage.			
Effect: The golem is destroyed. The area of the burst is difficult terrain until cleared.			
Str 24 (+15)	Dex 7 (+6)	Wis 8 (+7)	
Con 24 (+15)	Int 3 (+4)	Cha 3 (+4)	
Alignment unaligned		Languages –	

ENCOUNTER 4: THE WELL OF MANY WORLDS

Encounter Level 18 (11,600 XP)

The Well of Many Worlds is the most powerful portal in the planes. Unlike most portals, it connects to all places at once. While useful for a quick transit, it can also be used to draw objects, and possibly creatures, forth. Research indicates that the Well of Many Worlds is the party's best hope for destroying the *Book of Vile Darkness*—or mastering its power.

The well provides the means by which the adventurers can rid themselves of the accursed artifact or harness its ultimate power. There, they can perform the Ritual of Endings and Beginnings to call forth good or evil from other worlds and use those forces to augment or destroy the tome.

The Well of Many Worlds can be anywhere you need it to be. It might be deep in the Underdark, on an abandoned astral dominion such as Pluton or Shom, or somewhere in the Realm of Dreams. Run this encounter at some point before the artifact moves on.

Arcana DC varies: The character knows the effects of the reality holes (DC 17), temporal disturbances (DC 23), and obelisks (DC 33) in the vicinity. See "Features of the Area" for details.

Light: Bright light.

Monsters: 1 angel of vengeance (A), 2 spell howlers of Vecna (S), 8 angel of valor veterans (V).

When the adventurers arrive at the scene, read:

Four 20-foot-tall obelisks rise atop a rocky hill. Multicolored lights shine from the hilltop, filling the air with a scintillating glow. Here and there, you spy clouds of pink mist, iridescent gusts of wind, and other strange distortions.

Before the characters can begin the Ritual of Endings and Beginnings, creatures in service to Vecna show up to thwart their efforts.

This encounter takes place on the battle map. Let the players place their miniatures on the map, and then place the creatures as indicated.

When Vecna's servants appear, read:

A howling wind fills the air, presaging the appearance of a dreadful host. An enormous angel wreathed in fire and ice clutches two bone longswords, while smaller, man-sized creatures appear in the air to all sides. Two skinless humanoids scuttle across the ground, pain and madness evident in their twisted features.

The mighty angel speaks, its voice the sound of thunder: "Cease this fool's errand and surrender yourselves

to the Whispered One's will. Should you comply with haste, your deaths will be mercifully swift."

Tactics: The creatures are under orders to destroy the adventurers and bring the *Book of Vile Darkness* back to Vecna.

The angel of vengeance uses *sign of vengeance* against the one carrying the artifact and then teleports to that character's side, where it uses *double attack*. The angel follows the character until it is destroyed or until it gains the book. Once it does, it flies off with the artifact.

The angels of valor fight to keep the other adventurers busy while their powerful ally recovers the book. Meanwhile, the spell howlers keep back, peppering the characters with ranged attacks. The veterans and the howlers fight to the death.

Angel of Vengeance (A)	Level 19 Elite Brute
Large immortal humanoid (angel)	XP 4,800
HP 426; Bloodied 213	Initiative +13
AC 31, Fortitude 33, Reflex 29, Will 33	Perception +16
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover)	
Immune fear; Resist 15 cold, 15 fire, 15 radiant	
Saving Throws +2; Action Points 1	
TRAITS	
Cloak of Vengeance (cold, fire)	
While the angel is not bloodied, attack rolls against it take a -2 penalty, and any creature that hits the angel with a melee attack takes 10 cold and fire damage.	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Longsword (cold, fire, weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +24 vs. AC	
Hit: 4d10 + 12 cold and fire damage.	
⚡ Double Attack ♦ At-Will	
Effect: The angel uses <i>longsword</i> twice.	
MINOR ACTIONS	
✦ Sign of Vengeance ♦ Encounter	
Effect: Ranged sight (one creature). Until the end of the encounter, the angel can teleport adjacent to the target as a move action.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⚡ Coldfire Pillar Transformation (cold, fire, polymorph) ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: The angel is first bloodied.	
Effect (Free Action): The angel becomes a 6-square-high pillar of fire and ice until the start of its next turn. While in this form, it is immune to all damage. When the effect ends, the angel makes the following attack.	
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +22 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d8 + 18 cold and fire damage.	
Skills Insight +21	
Str 27 (+17)	Dex 18 (+13) Wis 25 (+16)
Con 13 (+10)	Int 19 (+13) Cha 26 (+17)
Alignment unaligned Languages Supernal	
Equipment 2 longswords	

2 Spell Howlers of Vecna (S)	Level 18 Artillery
Medium natural humanoid	XP 2,000 each
HP 130; Bloodied 65	Initiative +10
AC 32, Fortitude 28, Reflex 30, Will 30	Perception +11
Speed 6	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚡ Maddening Touch (psychic) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d8 + 12 psychic damage.	
⚡ Word of Force (force) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +23 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 2d10 + 15 force damage.	
⚡ Word of Doom (psychic) ♦ At-Will	
Requirement: The spell howler must be affected by <i>horrific visage</i> .	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +23 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d8 + 6 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the spell howler's next turn.	
⚡ Word of Madness (psychic) ♦ Recharge if the power misses	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d8 + 5 psychic damage. The spell howler slides the target up to 3 squares, and the target makes a basic attack as a free action against a creature of the spell howler's choice.	
⚡ Word of Pain (necrotic) ♦ Encounter	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +23 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 4d10 + 10 necrotic damage.	
Miss: Half damage.	
TRIGGERED ACTIONS	
⚡ Horrific Visage (psychic) ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: The spell howler is first bloodied.	
Attack (No Action): Close burst 2 (enemies in burst); +22 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the spell howler pushes the target up to 3 squares.	
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the spell howler cannot use any powers except <i>maddening touch</i> and <i>word of doom</i> .	
Str 15 (+11)	Dex 13 (+10) Wis 15 (+11)
Con 16 (+12)	Int 22 (+15) Cha 18 (+13)
Alignment chaotic evil Languages Common	

8 Angel of Valor Veterans (V)	Level 16 Minion Soldier
Medium immortal humanoid (angel)	XP 350 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	Initiative +12
AC 32, Fortitude 30, Reflex 27, Will 26	Perception +10
Speed 6, fly 9 (hover)	
Immune fear; Resist 10 fire, 10 radiant	
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⚔ Greatsword (fire, weapon) ♦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 11 fire damage.	
Str 24 (+15)	Dex 18 (+12) Wis 14 (+10)
Con 18 (+12)	Int 12 (+9) Cha 16 (+11)
Alignment unaligned Languages Supernal	
Equipment chainmail, greatsword	

Ritual of Endings and Beginnings

Any character with the Ritual Caster feat can perform the Ritual of Endings and Beginnings. The characters must use 7,000 gp of residuum. The ritual takes 1 hour to perform; during this time, the caster must concentrate on drawing forth the essence of good or evil from the Well of Many Worlds.

During the ritual's performance, the *Book of Vile Darkness* vanishes from its owner's hands and reappears over the well, as swirling darkness or light rises up from the well's depths to assail the tome. At the end of the ritual, the adventurers can hurl the book into the well, destroying it by choosing a destructive destination (into the heart of the sun, for example) and then succeeding on a DC 32 Arcana check (up to four allies can aid on this check). On a failed check, the book breaks apart, and vile darkness spills into a multitude of different worlds, sparing its owner the doom faced when the artifact moves on but unleashing unimaginable evil upon the planes.

If the characters channel evil from the well and keep the compiled *Book of Vile Darkness*, see "Ending the Adventure" for what happens next.

Features of the Area

Obelisk: A character adjacent to an obelisk can, with a DC 32 Arcana check, use the following power against a target of his or her choice (as a standard action). If the skill check fails, the obelisk attacks the character instead.

STANDARD ACTIONS

◀ **Obelisk** (psychic, teleportation) ♦ **At-Will**

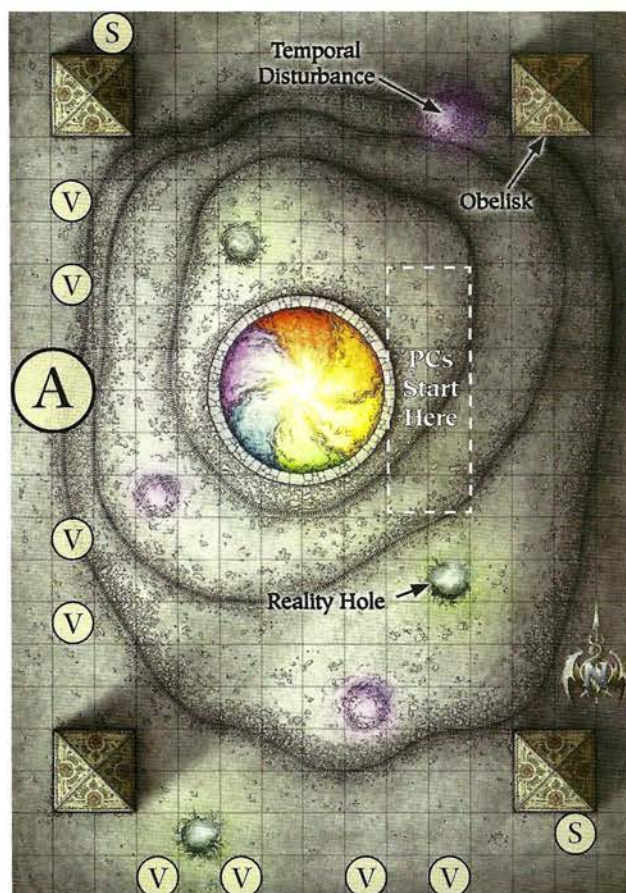
Attack: Close burst 10 (one creature in the burst); +21 vs. Will

Hit: 2d8 + 8 psychic damage, and the target teleports 1d6 squares in a random direction.

Reality Hole: A creature that enters a square containing a reality hole is removed from play until the start of its next turn. When the effect ends, the creature returns to play in an unoccupied space adjacent to any reality hole on the map.

A character with line of sight to a reality hole can end the effect by spending a standard action to make a DC 23 Arcana check. On a success, the creature removed from play is returned in an unoccupied space of the character's choosing.

Temporal Disturbance: When a creature starts its turn in a square occupied by or adjacent to a temporal disturbance, roll a d6. On an odd number, the creature is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the start of its next turn. On an even number, the creature gains an extra move action and gains a +2 power bonus to attack rolls until the start of its next turn.



Well of Many Worlds: Any creature that enters the Well of Many Worlds is removed from play as it vanishes to another plane or an alternate natural world (DM's choice). A character can choose the destination as a free action by succeeding on a DC 32 Arcana check. While removed from play, the creature can take a standard action to make a DC 32 Arcana, History, Insight, or Perception check. On a success, the character reappears in an unoccupied space adjacent to the Well of Many Worlds. Any object dropped into the Well of Many Worlds travels to a random plane and is lost.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure ends when the adventurers successfully destroy the *Book of Vile Darkness*, when they bind the other books to create the ultimate *Book of Vile Darkness*, or when the artifact moves on, leaving its former owner a soulless husk. If the adventurers imbue the book with evil from other worlds, the act proves so destructive and so profoundly evil that the characters responsible are destroyed utterly as pure, concentrated evil washes out across the planes. Whether this destroys the cosmos or simply sets the stage for a future campaign is up to you.



Devour It Before It Devours You

"It's a glorious blasphemy, a condemnation of all that is good and pure. Gods and demons have obliterated it many times, but like evil itself, the book always returns to enslave, corrupt, and destroy. It's utterly marvelous."

—Asmodeus, Lord of the Nine Hells

"Only the most indomitable minds dare to look upon the malevolent thoughts and forbidden secrets bound herein. This corrupt tome is filled with deplorable wisdom. Evil permeates every word and image inscribed within it."

—Orcus, Demon Prince of Undeath

"Terrifying. This could be the last book you ever read."

—Mordenkainen the Archmage

For use with these DUNGEONS & DRAGONS products:

Player's Handbook® core rulebooks

Dungeon Master's Guide® core rulebooks

Monster Manual® core rulebooks

Heroes of the Fallen Lands™

Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms™

Rules Compendium™

Monster Vault™

