

SECOND EDITION

PATHFINDER[®]

AGE OF ASHES

ADVENTURE PATH

HELLKNIGHT HILL

By Amanda Hamon

Breachhill



16. VUSKER'S CARTS & WHEELS •

10. PICKLED EAR •

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Tuskhead Slope

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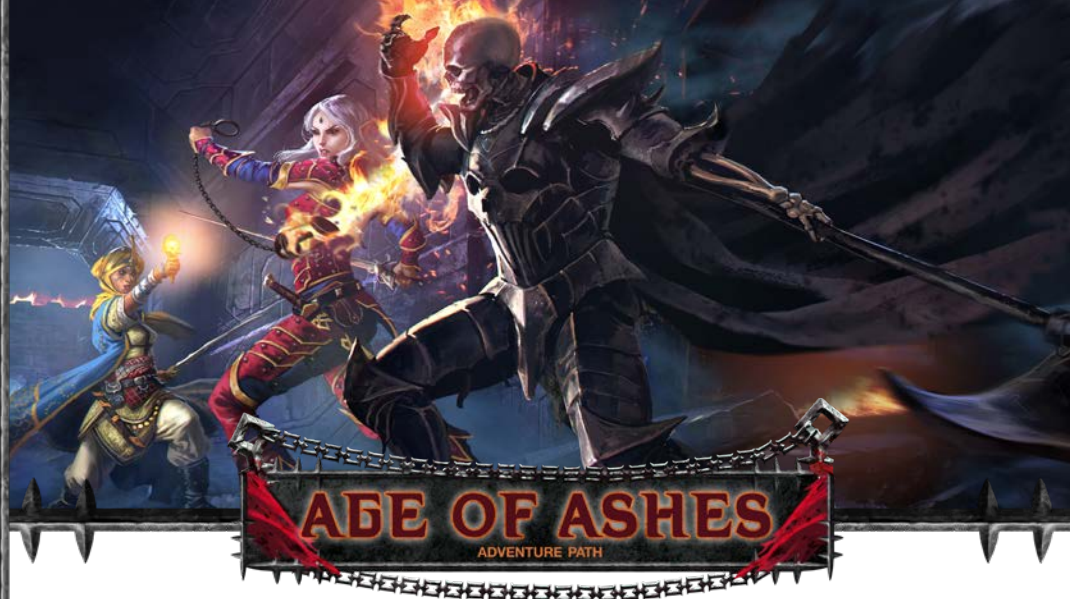
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ON THE COVER

Kyra and Merisiel face off against an undead Hellknight guardian in this thrilling cover by Leonardo Borazio.



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HELLKNIGHT HILL

Chapter 1: The Council's Chosen 4

The Age of Ashes Adventure Path begins with a routine town council meeting in the storied town of Breachill. But before the PCs can learn what sort of adventure the town council might hire them for, the building ignites in a fiery crisis!

Chapter 2: The Ruined Citadel 12

The heroes travel to Hellknight Hill and explore the ruined citadel that sits atop it. Therein, they might meet a few new friends, and they'll certainly clash with plenty of new enemies before they can rescue a tribe of imperiled goblins.

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The heroes descend beneath Citadel Altaerein, where they find something sinister: an isolated group of cultists called the Cinderclaws, who herald a more serious threat from their brethren below.

Chapter 4: Breachill's Secrets 44

After following a secret tunnel leading from the Hellknight citadel to the town where their saga began, the heroes must scramble to find out who in the town plots to use the keep for nefarious purposes. Clues lead the heroes to a cave complex that leads straight to the lowest level of the Hellknight citadel's dungeons. There, they must face a powerful cultist leader and discover an ancient elven gateway before untold horrors descend upon Breachill—and perhaps all of Golarion!

CHECK OUT THE TOOLBOX!

Welcome to the very first Adventure Path written for the second edition of Pathfinder! Readers who are familiar with our previous Adventure Paths will find that, apart from some cosmetic changes (check out that full page illustration on the opposite page, for example!), the presentation of adventures in the new edition of the game is largely unchanged. One significant new change, however, is the presence of the Adventure Toolbox, which begins on page 70 of this volume. Every adventure going forward will feature its own toolbox, where you'll find all the rules, advice, new monsters, player options, and more you'll need to run your game!

ADVANCEMENT TRACK

"Hellknight Hill" is designed for four characters.

- 1 The PCs begin this adventure at 1st level.
- 2 The PCs should be 2nd level before they descend into Citadel Altaerein's dungeon in Chapter 3.
- 3 The PCs should reach 3rd level after clearing two wings of the dungeon in Chapter 3.
- 4 The PCs should be 4th level before they enter the cavern complex around Alseta's Ring.

The PCs should reach 5th level by the time they complete the adventure.





CHAPTER 1: THE COUNCIL'S CHOSEN

Well over 10,000 years ago, during the fabled Age of Legend, an elven hero named Candlaron the Sculptor created the very first elf gates, inspired by the gate between Golarion and Castrovel. These portals, which he called *aiudara*, allowed for instantaneous travel between distant locales. He linked one from the elven capital city of Iadara to a nexus of magical power many miles to the southwest, at the convergence of several thrumming magical ley lines under a remote forested hill. But he was frustrated in his attempts to form a proper hub—the portal magic of these first *aiudara* wouldn't function if their destinations overlapped. As a compromise, Candlaron fashioned a circular chamber around the underground ley line nexus, then crafted five more *aiudara* to create a ring of portals. He named this chamber Alseta's Ring, after the demigoddess of doorways and transitions, and similarly dedicated each of the six surrounding portals in the chamber to one of six elven divinities. Lotusgate

linked back to Iadara and was dedicated to Alseta herself. Dreamgate, which linked to the western coast of Avistan, was dedicated to Desna. Duskgate, which linked to a site far to the south in Garund, was dedicated to Findeladlara, the elven goddess of architecture and art. Huntergate, which linked to the jungles of the Mwangi Expanse, was devoted to Ketephys, god of hunting and the moon. Jewelgate, which linked to a vast cavern below what would become known as the Five Kings Mountains, honored Yuelral, the elven goddess of crystals and magic. Finally, Vengegate, which linked to an island in the Steaming Sea that would one day be known as Hermea, was dedicated to Calistria.

Over the centuries that followed, Candlaron's disappearance, the devastation of Earthfall, and the use of the portals by the dragon god Dahak to manifest an avatar on Golarion wrought havoc on Alseta's Ring, and over the course of the next several thousand years

it fell into obscurity. In time, the gold dragon Mengkare discovered the portal network and formed a dangerous plan to strike a potentially mortal blow against Dahak but at a horrific cost. Further details on these events and Mengkare's plan can be found in the Adventure Toolbox beginning on page 70.

Life above Alseta's Ring went on. Goblin nations rose, squabbled, and fell. The nomadic human Kellids roamed here, and the imperial Taldans and later the Chelish nation each in turn staked claims on the hill. In time, the lands became known as the nation of Isger, a thrall-state of Chelias. Then, in 4550 AR, a mysterious town called Breachill was founded near the hill. This town and its strange secrets are detailed further in the article that begins on page 62. Years after Breachill's foundation, the knoll's natural defensibility made it an obvious spot for an order of the infamous Hellknights to build a keep. Hellknights are dedicated to the brutal pursuit of absolute law, and the Order of the Nail in particular is sworn to combat what its members call the regressive mires of the wild. This order built its headquarters, Citadel Altaerein, atop the rise, and the site has been known to the locals as Hellknight Hill ever since.

When the Hellknights dug into the hill to excavate crypts, vaults, and dungeons for their fortress, they discovered the ruins of Alseta's Ring, yet they never deciphered the purpose of the long-inactive elf gates. In time, the Hellknights abandoned Citadel Altaerein for a much larger and better-funded home to the northwest in Varisia, leaving Hellknight Hill's fortress mostly abandoned. For a few years, the Hellknights kept a small contingent of guardians to monitor the premises. But as their missions in Varisia mounted, the Order of the Nail abandoned even this effort, and the citadel began to fall into disrepair when its last caretaker left nearly a decade ago. Monsters of all stripes have since moved into the keep, as have a relatively peaceful and self-sufficient band of goblins.

Recently, a new group has come to the citadel's dungeons: a cult of Dahak worshippers called the Cinderclaws. Based far to the south in the Mwangi Expanse, this group of Cinderclaws became stranded in the dungeons below Hellknight Hill when its leaders managed to temporarily activate Huntergate. The Dahak cultists became separated from one another, and are divided between the keep's two basement levels, each of which was cut off from the other by a recent collapse in the fortress's main staircase. A leaderless group of these evildoers lurks in the shallowest dungeon level, while its truly dangerous sub-commander Malarunk and several of his minions remain trapped near Alseta's Ring itself, impatiently waiting for their allies far to the south to reactivate Huntergate so he can return home.

Meanwhile, a secretive Norgorber cultist in Breachill named Voz Lirayne has discovered the existence of Alseta's Ring, and now plots to find a way to reactivate it to earn support from a group she's allied with: the Scarlet Triad. As tight-lipped as the half-elf has remained about this discovery, however, she's let too much slip to her apprentice, a greasy halfling man named Calmont. Himself a ne'er-do-well and an opportunist, Calmont seeks a way to activate the portals for his own gain.

This adventure dawns as these threads begin to converge. When the heroes petition the Breachill Town Council for work, as is customary for adventurers in the area, chaos breaks out. Soon it becomes clear that the cause of the fires is linked to Hellknight Hill, and it's up to the heroes to find out what plots might envelop the town—the answers might be the only way to save Golarion itself!

CHAPTER 1 SYNOPSIS

During the opening portion of this adventure, the heroes are pulled into a crisis at Breachill's town hall, where it's up to them to save the councilors and the gathered townspeople from a raging fire as well as a manic fire mephit. Witnesses report that the arsonist fled the town toward Citadel Altaerein. What's more, a beloved ambassador to a goblin tribe hailing from the keep is desperately worried that she's lost contact with her people, and she's concerned about smoky distress signals that waft from the citadel's battlements.

HELLKNIGHT HILL

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Welcome to Breachill

Located in the foothills of the Five Kings Mountains in eastern Iser, Breachill is a thriving town of about 1,300 inhabitants; most are humans, although there are notable populations of dwarves, half-elves, and gnomes here as well. The town predates its most notable landmark, which sits about 1 mile to the northeast, high on low-rising Hellknight Hill: Citadel Altaerein, the foreboding but now-abandoned fortress that was once the home of the Hellknight Order of the Nail.

In years past, Breachill gladly served as a supply source for the Hellknights, who commended the well-ordered peace the town enjoyed. But 8 years ago, when the Order of the Nail fully retreated from Citadel Altaerein in favor of the order's new home in Varisia, Breachill's inhabitants simply shrugged, continuing the agriculture, crafting, and bartering that has always sustained them. Now, common wisdom generally recommends avoiding the citadel, which serves as an isolated haven for peaceful groups that don't want to be disturbed but is also rumored to be overrun with dangerous monsters.

The PCs' reasons for being in Breachill—whether they're locals or visitors, heroes or troublemakers—is up to them, but you can use the *Age of Ashes Player's Guide*, a free download available at paizo.com, to help your players answer these questions and prepare characters for the Age of Ashes Adventure Path.

For more information about Breachill, see the gazetteer that begins on page 62.

APPROACHING THE TOWN COUNCIL

Breachill's local government has a long and proud history of hiring adventurers to tackle any challenges its residents face that fall outside the scope of the town guard's duties. The merchant whose expected shipment of goods hasn't yet arrived, the shepherd whose herd of goats mysteriously died in the night, the farmer whose entire season's harvest was ruined or stolen—investigating and resolving any of these matters are considered good jobs for adventurers, and so Breachill's town council uses its resources to hire heroes as needed. These monthly meetings, known as the Call for Heroes, are distinct from the council's normal regular governance meetings, a tactic that separates such matters from regular municipal business and shows the townspeople that the council indeed allots sufficient time to the issues that are often most important to them personally.

Spending public money on hiring adventurers to help the townspeople serves several purposes, as far as Breachill's leadership is concerned. First, it provides the townspeople with an official and fully funded way

to seek help when they've exhausted all other options. Second, it allows the salaried town guard to focus on run-of-the-mill crimes and mundane threats to the townspeople's safety. And third, it provides experience to local adventurers—and allows the council to vet out-of-town heroes—whose presence and talents the council considers boons to the populace, harking back to the hero Lamond Breachton, Breachill's original patron who saved the town's founders.

The council holds a public Call for Heroes once per month expressly to hear petitions from residents who wish the town to hire adventurers on their behalf. At the end of a resident's address to the council, the council members discuss the petition before voting whether to expend public funds on it. For petitions that are approved—and most of the one or two requests per month are approved—the council then opens the floor to adventurers in attendance at the meeting who wish to tackle the challenge. Heroes looking for work often attend these meetings with a prepared list of qualifications, and the council hires an appropriate number of candidates who are well suited for each job. After the meeting, the adventurers are expected to follow up regularly with the petitioner and with the council. Those heroes who resolve their assigned challenges are paid handsomely in gold pieces and receive preferential consideration for future official work that might use their demonstrated talents.

At the beginning of "Hellknight Hill," the PCs are adventurers who plan to attend this month's Call for Heroes to lobby for work. As such, each PC should have a reason for doing so, although their motivations might differ wildly. It's up to each PC to decide why they're planning to approach the council for work. Before this adventure begins, encourage the players to decide how each character knows or is tied to the other PCs, if at all.

A list of ideas for why a PC might be planning to seek work from the Breachill Town Council appears in the *Age of Ashes Player's Guide*; each is keyed to one of the new backgrounds also presented there.

BEFORE THE CALL FOR HEROES

Since the Breachill Town Council has been holding monthly Calls for Heroes for decades, a fair number of local traditions have built up around the event. Many adventurers who plan to lobby for the jobs outlined at the meeting visit Wizard's Grace, a popular nearby tavern, before the proceedings begin. Some hold traditional toasts for good fortune, some schmooze with the townsfolk in hopes of being hired, and some seek to scope out the other adventurers with whom they might be working—or competing for the jobs at hand.

The PCs might wish to partake in some of these local traditions at Wizard's Grace, or they might visit any number of locations in Breachill before the meeting begins. The meeting starts at noon, and so all businesses in the town are open as normal. Regardless, as it turns out, the PCs are the only adventurers who plan to look for work at this particular meeting. Those PCs who are in the same location beforehand should have a chance to meet each other, if they're strangers, and discuss the upcoming meeting, their goals, or anything else as they see fit.

OUTSIDE TOWN HALL

Once noon approaches, the PCs should be headed toward the town hall, where they notice a small crowd milling outside the building, waiting for the appointed time. In all, about 40 townspeople are congregated outside the building, chatting and passing the time until the meeting starts.

When you start this adventure, it's a good idea to share the map of Breachill (found on the inside cover of this book and in the *Age of Ashes Player's Guide*) with the PCs. When you do, point out where the PCs are coming from, as well as Fountain Circle and Breachill Town Hall, their destination. This should help the players visualize the surroundings, but it also serves as a discreet way to emphasize the placement of the well pumps just outside the town hall. It's likely that the PCs won't think much of the pumps' presence now, but knowing about them will come in handy during the fire to come.

If the PCs spend any time talking with these townspeople, they find the locals friendly and deeply curious about them as adventurers, no matter the PCs' backgrounds or motivations. Some locals have brought their children with them to meet any new heroes, and the youngsters are starstruck to meet adventurers who plan to step up to the challenges that might be at hand. Most of the townspeople are attending the meeting to keep up on the news of what troubles their neighbors, though some are specifically there out of curiosity to see which adventurers might step up. You can use the locals' questions about the PCs to give each player a chance to describe their character's appearance and goals, if you wish.

While the PCs are awaiting the meeting's start, they notice a well-dressed goblin woman pacing right outside

the front doors of the building. This studious-looking goblin has her hands clasped behind her back, and she's mumbling to herself, oblivious to all those who stand nearby. Any PC who stands within 15 feet of her can easily overhear what she's saying. "My Bumblebrashers," she laments in a distraught tone. "Why haven't I heard from my Bumblebrashers? Are my people trapped in the citadel?"

A successful DC 12 Society check reveals that the Bumblebrashers are a small local goblin tribe that lives in Citadel Altaerein, the abandoned Hellknight keep to the northeast. Simply asking the woman what she's worried about also reveals this information. If the PCs talk to her, she apologizes for her distracted nature and assumes a dignified demeanor for any conversation that might ensue. Below are answers to some questions the PCs might ask her.

Warbal Bumblebrasher

Who are you? What is your name?

"Please, do allow me to introduce myself. I am Warbal, ambassador to the Bumblebrasher goblins of Hellknight Hill. It is my great honor to serve my fellow citizens of Breachill as the town's official representative to the Bumblebrashers. I communicate with the Bumblebrashers, convey the town's concerns and interests to them, and advocate on the tribe's behalf. It is a duty I take very seriously—they are my people, after all. Hence why I am here today, and my rather distracted nature earlier. I hope you'll forgive it."

Who are the Bumblebrashers, and why are you worried about them? "The Bumblebrashers are a tribe of goblins who have, for years now, lived peacefully and in isolation in Citadel Altaerein, the former Hellknight keep on the hill just outside of town. Typically, every two weeks I meet with Helba, the tribe's chieftain, on the road outside the keep. We discuss news, and I convey the town's interests and hear any concerns that the tribe might wish me to bring before the council. It is a relationship of utmost importance, and Helba is normally punctual. But she has missed our previous two meetings, and I have seen plumes of smoke coming from the top of the citadel. The smoke is a chalky red in color—the tribe's traditional color of distress. I fear that the Bumblebrashers are in danger, or that something dire has befallen them. It has sickened me with worry."

Why do you plan to attend the council meeting?

"I am certain something foul has befallen the Bumblebrashers—their leader, Helba, would not miss our meeting twice in a row for no reason, nor would

HELLKNIGHT HILL

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The Council's
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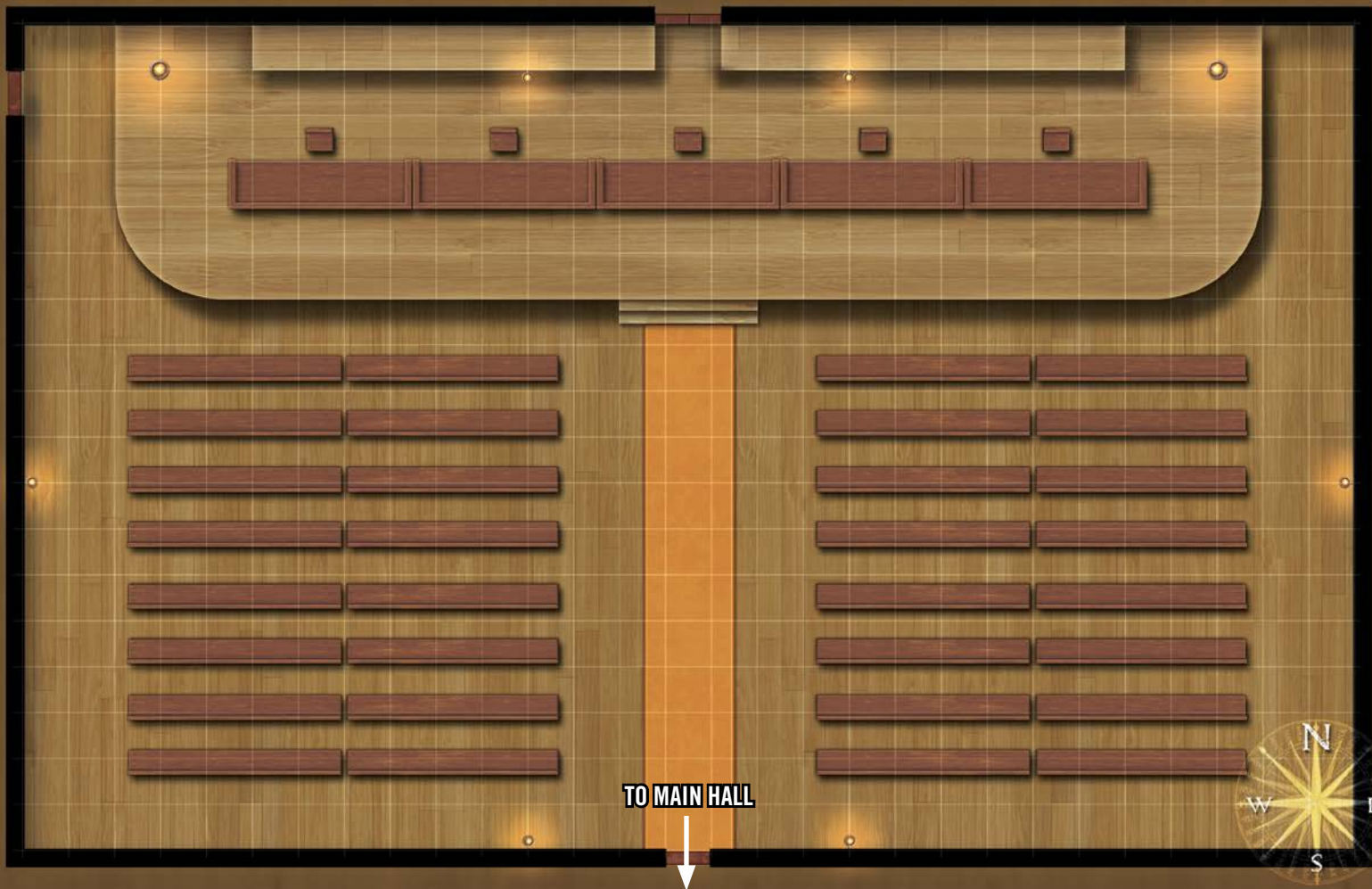
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EVENT 1: CALL FOR HEROES

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

the tribe signal its distress if something terrible were not amiss. I plan to present this information to the council and ask them to hire adventurers to contact my tribe.”

Is there anything we can do to help? “You are adventurers! Are you not? You are just the heroes I hope the council might hire on my behalf. But please, there is a system in place for a reason. Come with me into the meeting and listen to my petition. If you are up for my task, I beg you to offer your services to the council. You might be my tribe’s only hope!”

The Call for Heroes

When the PCs have had time to chat with the milling townspeople and have met Warbal, noon strikes and the gathered crowd filters into the building while the children who have gathered run off to play. When the PCs enter the town hall, guards positioned at the front doors direct them to the council chamber, the entrance of which is just past the main hallway. Just before the meeting begins, the guards move to stand outside the chamber’s southern door.

Once inside the council chamber (see the map above), the PCs see that the room is set up as an auditorium, with a carpeted walkway separating several rows of benches into two sections. The carpet leads to a small set of steps and a raised dais. On the dais is a large desk separated into five parts, where the Breachhill Town Council’s five members are seated, talking quietly with one another as they wait for the meeting to start. On the desk, situated in front of each chair, are tarnished bronze plaques bearing the names of the council members. From east to west, the names are Jorsk Hinterclaw, Melma Ann Sendari, Greta Gardania, Trini Sprizzlegig, and Quintino Posandi. Melma, Greta, and Quintino are humans, Jorsk is a dwarf, and Trini is a gnome. Even if the PCs don’t read the plaques, a successful DC 10 Society check easily reveals this information, as does asking any member of the crowd assembled for the meeting. Further, a successful check or chatting with the crowd reveals that Greta Gardania, who is seated at the desk’s middle spot, is the council president and is expected to open the meeting.

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In all, there are 40 townspeople in addition to the PCs and the councilors assembled for the meeting. (These are the same townspeople who were outside the building waiting for it to begin, so the PCs might recognize people they spoke with, or they might choose to sit with any newfound friends.)

Read or paraphrase the following to get this scene underway.

With a sharp rap from her gavel onto the desk, a stern, dark-haired woman with a deeply furrowed forehead and kind eyes brings the assembled crowd to a hush.

"Welcome, neighbors and friends..." the dark-haired woman begins, her rich voice washing over the room, "...to the Breachill Town Council's monthly Call for Heroes. I am Council President Greta Gardania, at your service. On behalf of my colleagues beside me, I promise you all that we will hear and consider today's petition with the utmost discretion and care. There is no existence without community, as our town charter says.

"Today, our agenda includes one petition. Miss Warbal, our very own ambassador to the Bumblebrashers of Hellknight Hill, requests the help of heroes for a matter of utmost importance. Let's hear her concerns in her own words, shall we? Miss Warbal?"

At this summons, Warbal emerges from the front row of benches. The well-dressed goblin woman makes her way to the foot of the dais's steps. She clears her throat and begins her address to the council.

"Esteemed councilors," Warbal says, with a frazzled tone to her voice. "It has been more than a month since I've been able to contact the Bumblebrashers. I fear that something terrible has befallen them. What's more, I have seen my people's distress signal coming from the top of Citadel Altaerein—"

Before the goblin can continue her petition, the door on the western side of the room flies open, as a young man, his eyes wide with panic, runs in shouting and waving his ink-stained hands. Billowing black smoke and flames follow him into the room: "Fire! There's a fire! Everyone flee!"

SNICKERS IN THE SMOKE MODERATE 1

Someone has indeed set the hall outside the council chamber's western door on fire, with the express intent of clearing out the meeting (see the Creature section for more on what happened). For now, the PCs must focus on helping the attendees and councilors escape the fire, putting the fire out, or both. As soon as the fire jumps into the chamber, the councilors begin moving down

off the dais and shouting for the crowd not to panic. But the 40 spectators are terrified; they scream, jump up from their benches, and try to jostle toward an exit row. See the Endangered Spectators section on page 10 for more details.

Creature: In the unfolding chaos of the fire, as dozens of frightened townsfolk begin to panic, a snickering little fire mephitis slips through the chamber's western door. This smoldering elemental creature is a rudimentary ally of Calmont, the ne'er-do-well who set the fire in the first place. Calmont used a magical parchment he discovered (and stole) from his Mistress Voz's bookshop to conjure the mephitis outside of town after he formulated his plan to disrupt the meeting, and managed to convince the creature to help him in spreading mayhem at the meeting. Of course, Calmont hopes that the townsfolk and PCs will simply assume that the fire was set by the mephitis and not look to other causes—a plan that has obvious flaws if the PCs manage to capture the mephitis alive.

Once it darts inside the chambers, the mephitis quickly notices that the PCs are the most significant threat. The mephitis enters combat with the nearest PC who either confronts it or is trying to douse the fire. If no PCs do either, the mephitis simply snickers and cackles gleefully as it focuses on using its fiery powers to spread the fire more quickly (see the Fire Mephitis section on page 11).

FIRE MEPHIT

CREATURE 1

Pathfinder Bestiary 151

Initiative Stealth +6

Hazard: By far the most dangerous aspect of this encounter is the rapidly spreading fire in the town hall chambers. Later sections detail how PCs can rescue spectators, and how the councilors, guards, and fire mephitis behave during the fire.

TOWN HALL FIRE

HAZARD 1

COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTAL FIRE

Stealth -10; initiative modifier is +5

Description A fire engulfs the western door and a 10-foot-by-10-foot area immediately east of it, then spreads on each of its turns.

Disable Eliminating the hazard requires dousing the flames. Water typically clears a 5-foot square if the amount is small (such as that from *create water* or *hydraulic push*). Larger amounts of water, such as a full bucket, typically douse a 10-foot-by-10-foot area (or 4 squares in some other shape). Throwing a bucket of water on flames requires an Interact action. A waterskin doesn't contain enough water to put out even 1 square of fire. Cold can also put out fire, but only if the cold can affect an area; cold is usually less



effective than water, so a frost vial typically puts out 1 square of fire, and *ray of frost* is ineffective.

Fountain Circle, located outside town hall, has several working water pumps. These are far enough away that it's impractical for a PC to bring water back and forth. However, a PC might instruct the more steely nerved spectators to create a bucket brigade. It takes 15 spectators (which can include those rescued by councilors as well as by PCs) to set this up, and 2 rounds for the townspeople to line up and begin pumping water from Fountain Circle. As of the 3rd round, there is a bucket of water available for the PCs to use at the chamber's southern entrance at the beginning of each PC's turn. Members of a bucket brigade are lined up outside the chamber, and don't take damage from smoke inhalation.

If a PC does want to carry the water, it's 150 feet from the chamber's southern door to a pump, so it 6 actions are usually needed to reach the pumps or return. Filling a bucket requires an Interact action.

Other methods might also help control the fire, as you determine. For example, the PCs might be able to find something to barricade the fire with to control its path, or use a cloak to beat out some of the fire.

Routine On its turn, the fire spreads into a number of additional squares equal to half the number of squares the fire currently occupies, with a minimum of 1 square. You determine the squares the fire spreads into—typically those with the most flammable materials. Any creature that ends its turn next to the flames takes 1d6 fire damage, and any creature within the flames takes 4d6 fire damage. Both of these have a DC 17 basic Reflex save. A creature can take damage from flames only once per round. (For simplicity, track damage only for the NPCs and their allies, not for the spectators; Turn 5 and Turn 7 have instructions regarding the spectators' health).

The fire has an additional effect on each of its turns after the first.

Turn 2 The chamber's northern door flies open and flames burst through, igniting the 10-foot-by-10-foot area in front of the door. All fires spread on subsequent turns, at the same rate listed above. Any fires that join together become one fire for this purpose.

Turn 4+ Creatures in the room take 1d6 damage from smoke inhalation at the ends of their turns. Anyone who uses an Interact action to tie a wet rag around their nose and mouth (or uses another creative solution) halves the damage.

Turn 5 Spectators still inside the room fall unconscious from burns and smoke inhalation.

Turn 7 Spectators still in the room die.

Endangered Spectators: As soon as the fire begins, the panicked spectators jump up and knock over

the benches in their hurry to escape, many of them falling over themselves in the process. The entirety of both sections of benches is difficult terrain during this encounter. Some of the spectators are able to pick themselves up and escape the chamber with help from the councilors, but others are so terrified or tangled among the benches and each other that they need further assistance or they won't escape the fire unharmed. There are 20 such spectators—10 on each side of the room, placed in random locations—whom the PCs must help, or they will pass out from smoke inhalation or worse.

Spectators avoid the flames but don't exit the room on their own—they need to be rescued by PCs. For simplicity, the hazard indicates when they typically fall unconscious or die.

Rescuing Spectators: The PCs can each help two spectators at a time out of the room's southern door. Once a PC is on the correct side of the room, rescuing spectators requires 3 actions, which includes locating the spectators, calming them, and escorting them to the exit. This doesn't necessarily require moving adjacent to the spectators; a PC needs only to be on the same side of the room as the spectators. Multiple PCs can work together to help groups of spectators who are clustered together. Two PCs working together can help up to six spectators at a time, as long as the PCs and the spectators they're helping are all on the same side of the room. When spectators begin passing out, PCs can each instead help only one spectator at a time out of the room, since this now requires picking up or dragging the unconscious spectator, and you might need to track the PCs' movement toward the unconscious spectators. Two PCs can work together to help four unconscious spectators at a time.

Town Councilors: Unless the PCs instruct them to do otherwise, the town councilors spend this encounter helping spectators escape the chamber. Each of the five councilors helps one spectator escape in the second, third, fourth, and fifth rounds, for a total of four spectators per councilor and 20 all together (the PCs must rescue the other 20). However, if the PCs shout instructions at one or more of the councilors to do something, the councilors are eager to listen to the heroes and follow their instructions, although the PCs then must help any spectators who still need help and would have been helped by the councilors. The councilors can be instructed to do anything except fight the fire mephit.

Councilors can be instructed to retrieve buckets of water from Fountain Circle, in which case this task requires the same number of actions as for a PC. The councilors could instead be instructed to form the

bucket brigade. Each councilor asked to help do this reduces the number of rounds to set up the brigade by 1 (to a minimum of 0 rounds, starting the brigade as soon as 15 spectators have been rescued). You can encourage using the councilors in creative ways.

Guards: Unless the PCs shout out what's happening at the beginning of this encounter, the guards who were outside of the chamber's doors try to determine what caused the fire and attempt to catch the perpetrator. If the PCs alert the guards to the presence of the mephit, one guard answers and confronts the creature at the beginning of the next round. In this case, it takes the guard 3 rounds to defeat the mephit—for simplicity's sake, there is no need to run the mechanics of this combat.

At your discretion, the PCs might instruct one guard or both guards to help escort spectators or douse the fire. If the PCs want to track down the guards at a later time, they must spend the full round tracking down the guard or guards.

Fire Mephit: If no PCs confront the fire mephit in combat or are trying to douse the fire (and no guard confronts it), the creature spends its turns harnessing its inner fiery nature to breathe fire. Each round the fire mephit moves to a random part of the room and then uses 2 actions to light a 5-foot-square area of the council chamber on fire. These fires spread at the same time as the larger fires and at the same rate.

XP Award: For each spectator saved, award the party 5 XP (to a maximum of 100 XP). If the party douses the fire entirely, award them an additional 30 XP.

FIRE AFTERMATH

Once the PCs have helped the spectators escape, doused the fire, or otherwise fled the burning building, they end up outside the town hall with the harried survivors of the ordeal. After a moment, the soot-stained councilors emerge from the crowd, and Greta Gardania whistles loudly to get the scared crowd's attention.

Read or paraphrase the following when this occurs.

Greta Gardania looks around, hugging some of the townspeople next to her, while others wearily clap her on the back in thanks for their lives. "What manner of

madness just happened?" This can be no accident! Did anyone see anything?"

One of the guards who was stationed outside before the fire began raises his hand, then his voice. "Aye," says the wearied, uniformed man. "The clerks saw everything—it was Calmont, that cad of a bookseller's apprentice. He lit the fires in the halls next to the chamber. He also set that fire monster loose on the crowd!"

The second guard shouts in assent. "Indeed!" says the grave but steely woman. "And witnesses outside the building saw him run toward Hellknight Hill!"

A surprised and worried wave ripples through the crowd at this information, including Warbal's distinct voice: "The citadel! My Bumblebrashers!"

Greta raises her hand authoritatively, and the crowd begins to calm. "Friends, we'll get to the bottom of this," she assures them. "But we can't do

it alone. Who are the heroes in attendance today? Heroes, are you willing to investigate Hellknight Hill?"

At this point, allow the PCs to introduce themselves to the council and to present their qualifications as heroes. Regardless of how they do so, Greta and the other councilors are eager to hire the PCs to both make contact with the Bumblebrashers, and track down Calmont in the citadel and bring him to justice—or at least haul him in for questioning. If the PCs helped everyone escape from the fire, Greta thanks them profusely and awards the party two *minor healing potions* to help them in the trials they might face at Hellknight Hill. If they doused the fire entirely, she offers the party a lesser antidote and a lesser antiplague as thank-you gifts. If they accomplished both, she gives them all these items, as well as 50 sp each.

Regardless, Greta thanks the PCs for any help they provided during the fire. She offers the PCs 10 gp for the job of contacting the Bumblebrashers and 10 gp for tracking down Calmont, whom she specifically asks the PCs to bring back to the town alive for questioning if at all possible. Both of these rewards are payable as soon as the PCs complete the associated tasks. The PCs can approach Hellknight Hill whenever they wish, although Greta and the other townspeople encourage them to do so as soon as they can gather the needed provisions. After all, there's no time to waste tracking down this firebug, helping the goblins, and figuring out what sinister mystery is happening on Hellknight Hill!

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Greta Gardania



CHAPTER 2: THE RUINED CITADEL

Citadel Altaerein, formerly a Hellknight fortress, stands just over a mile northeast of Breachill, at the end of a rocky but well-demarcated path that leads up the gradually sloping sides of Hellknight Hill. The path to Citadel Altaerein is known to be fairly safe, so the PCs might Hustle as their exploration activity (*Pathfinder Core Rulebook* 480). Most other exploration activities don't gain the PCs much. Once they actually begin exploring the citadel itself, you can ask what the PCs are doing and determine their exploration activities. However, the location is small enough in scale that you might simply go room by room on a map instead.

As the PCs draw near to Citadel Altaerein, read or paraphrase the following.

Rising from the hilltop above is a looming structure of crumbling stone and still-imposing battlements, though verdant nature is reclaiming the site. Plumes of red

smoke—which ambassador Warbal believes to be distress signals from the Bumblebrasher goblins—rise from the roof of the keep's central tower. This place can only be Citadel Altaerein, the infamous former home of the Order of the Nail Hellknights, now fallen into ruin. The gate-like doors in the center of the keep hang ajar—not surprising, since no one has maintained this facility in years.

If the PCs leave town directly after the Call for Heroes, they soon arrive at the gates of Citadel Altaerein. In this case, it's easy for the PCs to find a fairly comfortable and defensible hillock nearby on which to make camp, and the night passes uneventfully.

If the PCs have asked Warbal to accompany them on their journey, she gladly camps with them and uses the campsite as her base of operations during the course of this adventure. Despite her refined appearance and manners, she is well acquainted with survival

camping and has brought all of the supplies and tools that she needs for an extended stay outside the citadel. She politely refuses to enter the citadel with the PCs, citing the undoubted danger inside, but is happy to remain the PCs' point of contact outside the gates and watch their horses, should the heroes wish.

The PCs don't need to attempt skill checks to see the smoke signals coming from the top of the citadel. Further, they should already know that these distress signals are tied to the missing Bumblebrasher goblins Warbal described during the Call for Heroes, but if the PCs did not pick up on this fact, allow them a DC 12 Society check to realize it.

A successful DC 15 Crafting or DC 13 Architecture Lore check reveals that keeps in the style of Citadel Altaerein are typically built with stairways that lead up to any lookout or battlement areas. Therefore, venturing inside the citadel is the best way to find a path toward the goblins, who are presumably camping or even trapped within. Use the map on page 14 for the encounters in this chapter; note that the stairway to the battlements is located in area **A12**.

Below are some general details about the first floor and battlements of the citadel.

Citadel Perimeter: Significant overgrowth has overtaken the perimeter around the citadel. What were once well-maintained bushes have turned to wild brambles around the entire building. As a result, the 10-foot-wide perimeter around the entire citadel is difficult terrain.

Crumbling Walls: Most of the citadel's outer structure remains sound. However, the map on page 14 shows several places where the outer walls have crumbled or collapsed entirely, exposing the citadel's interior to the elements. These crumbled sections of wall are difficult terrain, but they allow the PCs to access the citadel chamber on the opposite side of the wall without using Altaerein's main doors. The exteriors of the walls are very steep, and loose stones make climbing the walls a dangerous prospect. A successful DC 20 Climb check is needed to scale the walls as a result, something a PC who succeeds at a DC 10 Crafting check can warn the party of before an attempt to climb is made.

Doors: Unless otherwise noted, with the exception of secret doors, Citadel Altaerein's wooden doors are unlocked. Some doors, especially exterior doors leading into the citadel, might be stuck or broken, as mentioned in the relevant areas' descriptions.

Entering the Citadel: There are public entrances into the citadel from areas **A1** and **A3**. The door to area **A1** is unlocked and ajar, thanks to the monsters, ne'er-do-wells, explorers, and others who have rifled through the keep since it's been abandoned, but the door to area **A3** is bolted and tied shut. Note that there is also a locked secret door leading into area **A9** at the back of the citadel. Additionally, broken masonry and gaps in walls allow access to the citadel through areas **A8**, **A13**, and **A17**.

Ceiling Height: Unless otherwise noted, the interior ceilings of Citadel Altaerein are 20 feet tall. (Note that the citadel's courtyard and battlements are exceptions, because each has no roof and is open to the elements.)

Interior Lighting: Citadel Altaerein has enough arrow slits and crumbling open-air masonry that the ambient lighting level inside the first floor is dim during daylight hours, unless otherwise noted.

Wall Thickness: Except for the crumbling walls marked on the map on page 14, the exterior and interior walls of Citadel Altaerein are made of reinforced masonry and have Hardness 20.

CHAPTER 2 SYNOPSIS

The PCs set off toward the citadel atop Hellknight Hill, and once there, they find an abandoned building filled with opportunistic monsters, dilapidated Hellknight trappings, and infrastructure failures blocking many of the main stairways. When they finally meet the Bumblebrasher goblins on the battlements, the heroes learn about a secret doorway leading down to an even greater menace—and they must face the harrowing creature that has cornered the goblins.

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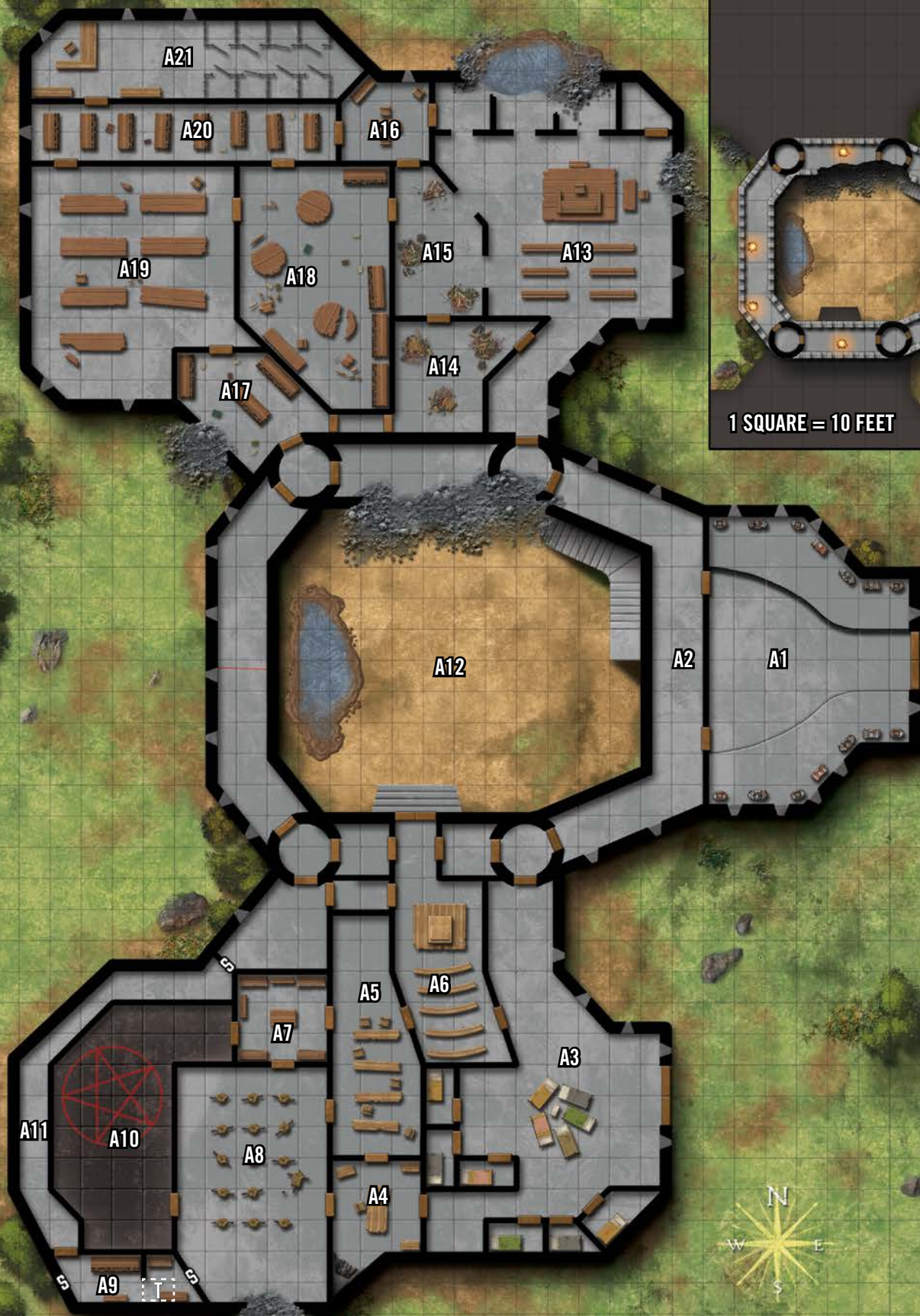
Breachill

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BATTLEMENTS



1 SQUARE = 10 FEET



CITADEL ALTAEREIN

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

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Secret Entrance: A particularly well-hidden secret door is built into the hillside just west of the central tower. A successful DC 25 Perception check reveals the door's presence, but initially there should be little reason for the PCs to search for a hidden door here. The Bumblebrasher chieftain Helba knows of this secret entrance, though, and can inform the PCs of its location once the goblins have been rescued. Beyond the secret door is a short, 5-foot-wide passage leading to a second secret door that opens into area **B1** below the citadel.

A1. FOYER

SEVERE 1

Battered, reinforced doors hang ajar at this main entrance to Citadel Altaerein, once the headquarters of the Hellknight Order of the Nail. Above the doorframe, a tarnished seal depicting a sunburst made of nails stands out in relief on the keep's stonework. Under the seal runs a worn but clear line of carved text.

The line of carved text reads, in Infernal, "Savagery must be quelled in the land, home, and mind."

The doors to the foyer are also the main entrance to the citadel, and they have long ago been breached by looters and by the monsters and isolated individuals who still call the keep home. No skill check is needed to see the scrabbling marks against the bolt-locks on the doors, or to tell that the entrance is unlocked.

However, if the PCs want to open the rusty doors wide enough to pass through without making enough noise to alert the goblin dogs in the foyer beyond (see **Creatures** below), they must succeed at a DC 12 Perception check to notice the rust and dents around the doors' hinges and realize how noisy simply shoving the doors open would be. On a successful check, as long as the PCs use caution when opening the doors, they do not immediately alert the goblin dogs.

The large room beyond is a cluttered amalgamation of a formal receiving parlor and a ruined husk. Dented, rusted, and otherwise ruined suits of outdated Hellknight armor line the north and south walls; each display is leaning or entirely tipped over and missing its helmet, gauntlets, boots, or other pieces (these still-functional elements were looted long ago). Broken furniture is scattered about the area, as are what look like the half-chewed carcasses of several small prey animals. A wide but dirty stretch of black carpet leads to two large doors, one to the northwest and one to the southwest (both lead to area **A2**). Scuffs on the walls indicate where valuable paintings or framed documents once hung. Prominently displayed on each wall is a seal depicting a sunburst

made of nails, carved in relief and identical to the one above the front doors to this area. Toward the ceiling, running the length of each wall, is the same motto, but this time presented in matching lines of Common and Infernal: "Savagery must be quelled in the land, home, and mind."

Creatures: Three goblin dogs have made this filthy room their lair. If the PCs opened the door to this area recklessly, the goblin dogs assume they are intruders. In this case, the goblin dogs face the PCs with their jagged teeth bared as soon as the heroes enter the room, and their attitude is hostile. If the PCs entered the room cautiously, the goblin dogs assume the visitors live in the keep, and regard them suspiciously but curiously when they enter. In this case, their attitude toward the PCs is indifferent (and PCs can use the Command an Animal action on them).

The PCs might improve the goblin dogs' attitudes by one step (either from hostile to indifferent, or indifferent to friendly) by offering each of the dogs a morsel of meat—the more putrid, the better. If the PCs befriend the goblin dogs, they can use the Command an Animal action to send the goblin dogs forward to scout the keep (or Leap, Seek, Stand, or Strike, as normal for Command an Animal). Clever Small PCs might even want to use one of the befriended goblin dogs as a mount!

GOBLIN DOGS (3)

CREATURE 1

Pathfinder Bestiary 182

Initiative Perception +6

Treasure: There is little treasure left in this heavily looted room, but if the PCs spend 10 minutes scrounging around the toppled and dented suits of Hellknight plate, they can assemble a suit of shoddy full plate that superficially resembles Hellknight plate, though the pieces are mismatched and worn and the style is outdated. Anyone who's had any interaction with a legitimate Hellknight is not fooled, but wearing such a suit otherwise grants a +2 circumstance bonus to Deception checks to pretend to be a Hellknight of the Order of the Nail.

XP Award: If the PCs improve the goblin dogs' attitude by a step or successfully use the Command an Animal activity on one of them, award them XP as if they had defeated all three of the dogs in combat.

A2. HALLS

This narrow corridor stretches around the octagonal center of the keep, and is divided into segments by doors leading through this level of the towers or into

interior rooms. Here and there, a few remaining paintings of dour-faced Hellknights still grace the walls between high, narrow windows that let in limited light.

These hallways were always utilitarian, and have only become bleaker since the citadel was abandoned. They provide access to both the northern and southern wings of the keep; the northern wing was once reserved for public trials and functional Hellknight offices, while the southern wing held the knights' living, eating, and training spaces.

A3. BARRACK

Low 1

The eastern doors from the barrack to the exterior of the keep are bolted and tied shut from the inside. A successful DC 15 Athletics or Thievery check is required to open these doors from the outside, but attempting an Athletics check automatically alerts

the room's inhabitant. These checks can also be used to open the doors from within, but in that case the PCs gain a +4 circumstance bonus to the checks; alternately a character can just take a minute to undo all the ropes used to tie the doors shut and throw back the bolts.

This dingy room is littered with toppled bunk beds and broken furniture, and doors to small but more private bedchambers hang open along the western and southern walls. In the room's center, bed frames are stacked upon each other to form a sort of fort, with filthy and ripped bedding draped over the top to form its ceiling and walls.

This area was once a hostel-like barrack for low-ranking Hellknights and recruits—called armigers—with smaller private rooms along the wall to the west for higher-ranking knights, and more plush rooms for leaders in the rooms to the south.

Creature: A bugbear named Yoletcha has built herself quite a lair here, using bunk bed frames and bedding to build a central structure. She is proud of her home, filthy as it is, with garbage littering its outskirts like a moat. Unless the PCs make significant noise entering this area, Yoletcha is sitting in her fort arranging the spoils of a recent hunting trip into gruesome if fairly neat piles. The fort's "walls" are such that the PCs cannot see her inside of it, nor can they hear her, since she's sorting quietly.

This could allow the PCs to sneak up on Yoletcha with a successful Stealth check, or it might allow Yoletcha to eventually hear the unsuspecting PCs and take them by surprise. If the PCs' attempts to open the eastern doors from outside have alerted her, though, Yoletcha is ready for a fight and uses Stealth for initiative.

As soon as she hears the PCs moving about the area, or if they poke their heads inside her home, Yoletcha charges out of the fort and attacks.

YOLETCHA

CREATURE 2

Female bugbear thug (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 47)

Initiative Perception +7 or Stealth +6

Treasure: Any valuables that were left in the open barrack are long looted and gone. However, in the smaller private bedchambers to the south, there are still a few hidden items of note. In the western bedchamber, a successful DC 18 Perception check reveals a lesser tanglefoot bag and a lesser flask of bottled lightning. In the middle bedchamber, a successful DC 15 Perception check reveals a *minor healing potion*. In the eastern bedchamber,



Yoletcha

a successful DC 20 Perception check reveals a *wolf fang* talisman.

To the west, in the central room, a successful DC 15 Perception check reveals two flasks of *holy water* and a wooden shield.

A4. KITCHEN

Low 1

A dust-covered, black wooden countertop runs along the walls of the southwestern end of this galley-style room. It clearly was once a kitchen, but its cupboards and shelves were stripped of most tools and provisions long ago.

There are cabinets underneath the table here, as well as shelves running the length of the walls above it.

Creatures: The interior wooden dividers between the cabinets have long fallen into rot, and so the space underneath the countertop is uninterrupted. Two swarms of fat, red spiders have taken up residence in this cool, dry place, and if the PCs open any of the cabinets under the counter, the swarms attack. If the PCs bypass the cabinets, the swarms instead notice them if they head toward the door to area **A8**, and they attack at that point.

SPIDER SWARMS (2)

CREATURE 0

Pathfinder Bestiary 306

Initiative Perception +4

Treasure: Most of the provisions and supplies left here are rotted and ruined, but if the PCs spend a few minutes searching and succeed at a DC 15 Perception check, they can salvage a few things. Specifically, there are enough loose herbs and oils remaining in storage jars to make two antidotes (although a PC still must have the Alchemical Crafting skill feat to craft the antidotes as normal). Further, in a cabinet that looks like it once contained simple medical remedies, there are two doses of arsenic.

A5. MESS HALL

Rows of long, slender dining tables sit in skewed rows throughout this room. Broken chairs are scattered throughout the chamber, and the entire room has an air of disuse and disarray.

Although it was once a mess hall where rank-and-file Hellknights took their meals, this room has now been looted nearly beyond recognition.

A6. DRILL AUDITORIUM

See the Noisy First Visit sidebar on this page when the PCs first enter this room.

A NOISY FIRST VISIT

The first time the PCs enter area **A6**, they'll hear some curious, perhaps frightening, sounds coming from area **A12** to the north—a series of barking growls, the sound of claws scraping stone, and further in the distance what sounds like goblins and a halfling arguing. With a successful DC 10 Perception check, a PC who can speak Goblin can make out snatches of the argument—the unknown halfling man is making increasingly insulting demands that he be shown the way into the citadel dungeon, while the goblins refuse and throw back insults of their own.

If the PCs ignore this strange situation for too long, see areas **A12** and **A22** for the repercussions.

To the north of many rows of stadium-style benches stands a wide dais. Garbage clutters what was once undoubtedly a pristine floor. A small corridor near the dais leads to the west, while to the north, an iron gate provides a view into a central courtyard.

When Citadel Altaerein still housed Hellknights, this was a staging and instruction area for knights about to enter the courtyard to the north. Their intensive drills included fully outfitted mock battles with each other, simulated tactical missions, and practice for low-stakes initiations (those other than the infamous Hellknight test, which was conducted in area **A10**). Before such drills, the participating Hellknights would listen to their instructions here, usually from a maralictor or paralictor, before the iron gate to the north would open, prompting them to take their battle positions in the courtyard.

The iron gate that leads to area **A12** was locked until recently, but the arsonist Calmont picked the lock not long before the PCs arrived, so the gate sits slightly ajar now.

Treasure: Although most of the trash on the floor here is useless, a few minutes of searching or a successful DC 12 Perception check reveals several crumbled Order of the Nail cloth insignias that seemingly were lost or discarded when the Hellknights departed. These insignias were originally tokens for recruits, called armigers, to wear during drills in the courtyard and were stored in the cabinets, though looters have disrespectfully thrown them about the room. If the PCs gather the insignias, they are valuable to the Hellknight they might meet in the citadel's Hellknight Test chamber; see area **A10** for more.

AGE OF ASHES

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If the PCs investigate the cabinets, they find several loose leather book bindings and leaves of pages strewn messily on the shelves. Looters have destroyed the documents and books that were originally stored here. The titles on the remaining book bindings reveal that they once contained information about the Order of the Nail's traditional drills and procedures. If the PCs examine the surviving pages, they can find snippets of details about old Hellknight drills—largely simulations between lawless bandits and raiders and the Order of the Nail Hellknights trained to defeat them.

The piecemeal documentation also includes a list of recruits' names, along with indications of those who had been issued "temporary order badges." This is a reference to the discarded Nail insignias found on the floor; a successful DC 15 Society check reveals that the Hellknights considered these insignias sacred symbols of their order, and that they'd be valuable to anyone with any ties to the knights, or any current or former member of any Hellknight order (including Alak Stagram, the Hellknight in area A10).



Order of the Nail Insignia

here in the courtyard (area A12). The dummies are filled with rotting straw, and some are falling apart.

In the southwest corner, a secret door leads to area A9. A PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Perception check spots the door, which is unlocked (this is because Alak Stagram passed through this door on his own business; see area A10 for more).

The wall to the south has crumbled and the room is now open to the outside, so during the day this area is brightly lit. This crumbled wall allows entry into the citadel through this area.

Treasure: Looters have largely left these dummies alone, assuming their rotted nature marks them as garbage. However, most of the creatures who have traversed the citadel recently didn't know that the Hellknights had a tradition in which armiger recruits would have to pay a tithe by tucking coins into the dummies when their clumsy strikes failed to strike any stationary object. (A successful DC 20 Society check reveals this obscure fact about the order.) If the PCs search the dummies, they can still find some of these coins. There is a total of 20 sp hidden in the dummies' stuffing.

A7. PANTRY

Floor-to-wall shelves here still hold a few rotted provisions and cooking utensils, though the room is disastrously filthy and has clearly been ransacked.

Treasure: These pantries are mostly empty or full of rotted refuse. However, there are still a few dry, shelf-stable goods here, as well as a couple of kitchen implements that have slipped through the cracks between the shelves and walls. If the PCs spend 10 minutes searching here, they can assemble enough edible food for 8 rations, and they can find a silver knife (use the statistics for a silver dagger).

A8. TRAINING HALL

This large training chamber holds rows of moldering straw-filled dummies, many of them wielding wooden replicas of various martial weapons.

This once served as a training area for recruits, known as armigers, who were not yet ready to take part in the live drills the Order of the Nail often held

A9. TEST PROVISIONS

This well-hidden closet holds dust-furred tables covered in jumbled but ominous accessories: pentagram-covered tomes, heavily melted candles, scattered pieces of loose chalk, vats of moldy incense, moth-eaten robes, and several empty and dusty weapon racks.

Anyone familiar with the Church of Asmodeus (or who succeeds at a DC 20 Religion or Society check) recognizes the supplies here as elements needed for rituals to summon devils from Hell, and that the weapons once stored here were likely silver weapons, which are known as particularly effective against those devils. Further, if a PC's check is a critical success, they're familiar with the details of the Hellknight Test—a ritual that all Hellknight recruits, or armigers, must survive before becoming fully initiated members of the Hellknights. The test involves the armiger slaying a summoned devil in front of their peers and is described further in area A10. The PCs might also discover some of these details when searching this room (see Treasure on page 19).

To the west, a secret door affords access to the wilds beyond the citadel. A successful DC 25 Perception check reveals the door, which is locked and requires a successful DC 15 Thievery check to open.

Hazard: Ten feet past this area's eastern entrance is a hidden spear launcher trap (marked with an "T" on the map).

SPEAR LAUNCHER

HAZARD 2

Pathfinder Core Rulebook 523

Stealth DC 20

Treasure: The Hellknights took most of the silver weapons with them when they left, but with a successful DC 20 Perception check, a PC uncovers a single silver longsword that got left behind. In addition to half-burnt candles, used pieces of chalk, and various badges and religious symbols bearing the sign of Asmodeus, there is also a forgotten and sealed lockbox (DC 18 Thievery check to open) with 31 sp and a *hand of the mage* (*Pathfinder Core Rulebook* 611) inside.

If the PCs spend 10 minutes searching the room or succeed at a DC 15 Perception check, they find a loosely bound but otherwise intact manuscript that describes the Hellknight Test as conducted in area A10. The manuscript provides all of the details about the test.

A10. TEST ARENA

SEVERE 1

Its flagstones painted entirely black, this sprawling and irregularly shaped room contains a circular, sunken arena in its middle. The arena's edges are painted deep crimson, and an ominous crimson pentagram fills the center.

This is the staging and observation area for the infamous Hellknight Test, which all recruits must undertake before they are given official status with the organization. Across all Hellknight orders, the rituals involved in the test are more or less the same. The test is typically administered at each active Hellknight keep twice each year, although sometimes exceptions are made for armigers who show particular promise or who need to be officially inducted quickly.

The Hellknight Test involves the leader, or lictor, of the order (or another suitably high-ranking officer) conducting a long, ceremonial introduction. Then the armiger in question steps into the testing area's clearly marked arena, and a ranking spellcaster, or signifer, summons a devil the order has deemed a suitably challenging opponent. These are often bearded devils, but can be any devil, depending on the armiger's expertise and the officers involved. The armiger and the devil then fight to the death. If the armiger is

victorious, they are inducted as a full, ranking member of the order with the title of Hellknight.

If the PCs haven't already discovered the basics of the Hellknight Test, they can attempt a DC 15 Society check to Recall that Knowledge now.

Creatures: When the PCs enter this area, they see a handsome, dark-haired man in matte black armor wielding an heirloom greatsword, moving with confident and assured technique while engaged in combat against a snickering imp. The man is Alak Stagram, an Order of the Nail Hellknight on leave from Citadel Vraid in Varisia. Though not here on official business for the Order of the Nail, Alak is an armiger who hopes someday to take the test and become a Hellknight. When the PCs enter this room, Alak is just about to defeat the imp—in fact, the PCs see him drive his greatsword through the shrieking creature's heart right as they enter the room. If the PCs succeed at a DC 15 Perception check, they see a small religious symbol of Asmodeus imprinted onto the shoulder of Alak's armor.

If the PCs want to take time to talk with and perhaps ally with Alak, they'll have to wait, since just as the Hellknight destroys the imp, two more of the little devils hiss and drop down from the rafters. Alak grumbles, "Great. More bloody hell monkeys," and gestures toward the PCs to take strategic battle positions as combat begins.

IMPS (2)

CREATURE 1

Pathfinder Bestiary 87

Initiative Perception +7

ALAK STAGRAM

CREATURE 2

UNIQUE LN MEDIUM HUMAN HUMANOID

Male human fighter 2

Perception +7

Languages Common, Infernal, Varisian

Skills Athletics +8, Intimidation +4, Religion +5, Society +4

Str +4, **Dex** +1, **Con** +3, **Int** +0, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

Items full plate armor, greatsword, javelin (2)

AC 20; **Fort** +9, **Ref** +7, **Will** +5

HP 34

Attack of Opportunity ⤵

Speed 20 feet

Melee ♦ greatsword +10 (versatile P), **Damage** 1d12+4 slashing

Ranged ♦ javelin +7 (versatile P), **Damage** 1d6+4 piercing

Intimidating Strike ♦♦ (*Pathfinder Core Rulebook* 146)

Power Attack ♦♦ (*Pathfinder Core Rulebook* 144)

Special: When the dust from combat settles, Alak takes the extra time to use his greatsword to ensure

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each imp is truly dead, beheading each devil with a smirk of satisfaction. “One must always be sure these nasty things are really finished off,” he says. “It seems my predecessors here perhaps lost sight of that.” Once done, he pulls out a length of black cloth from a pouch on his belt and wipes the gore from his sword. “I thank you for your assistance, by the way. I suspect you’re not looters—who are you then, if you please?”

Alak could be a valuable ally to the PCs throughout this adventure, depending on the conversation that ensues and any friendship the PCs show him. Specifically, Alak can be a helpful ally during this adventure, particularly with Guardian’s Way in Chapter 3 and the Hellknight crypts in Chapter 4.

Alak begins the conversation with an attitude of indifferent toward the PCs, and

interacts with them with a veneer of cool courtesy. If his attitude ever drops to hostile, the Hellknight ends the conversation with a curt hand gesture and a derisive raise of his eyebrow and walks away, perhaps even fighting the PCs if they try to stop him. If Alak’s attitude is improved to friendly or better, his charming and sarcastic nature becomes more evident.

There are several ways to improve Alak’s attitude.

If, at any point in the conversation, the PCs give Alak the Order of the Nail insignias from area A6, he gently takes them, smooths their edges, and pockets them, thanking the PCs for showing respect to his order when the citadel’s previous looters did not. This improves his attitude to friendly. Also, if the PCs give Alak the book his father wrote (see area A16), Alak is even more grateful, given the item’s personal significance to him. Giving Alak the book improves Alak’s attitude to helpful as long as he isn’t hostile; if he’s hostile, it instead improves his attitude to unfriendly.

If the PCs find Alak’s family signet ring in the Hellknight crypts below and give it to him (likely not possible until later in this adventure), as long as he’s not hostile, this always improves his attitude to helpful. Otherwise, it improves his attitude by one step.

Additionally, Alak appreciates sarcasm and dark humor. As long as it’s not disrespectful, especially to the Hellknight orders, Alak’s attitude toward the PCs improves to friendly after one or more PCs make three appropriately sarcastic or darkly witty comments about the situation. A PC using this tactic doesn’t need to attempt a Diplomacy check to improve his attitude, though they can still use Diplomacy to Make an Impression on him as normal.

Answers to PCs’ likely questions for Alak are below.

Who are you? Alak offers a disarming, charming smile. “Armiger Alak Stagram of the Order of the Nail. Formerly of Citadel Altaerein, currently of Citadel Vraid in Varisia.” He gives a formal bow. “How nice to meet you in this beautiful and well-kept estate.”

You’re a Hellknight? Why aren’t you wearing your official armor? “No, not quite a Hellknight yet, and thus I’ve not yet earned the right to wear the armor. But I hope to some day. And I’m not here on official order business anyway—I’m merely, well... I suppose I’m on holiday, you see.”

Why are you here? “I’ve taken a short leave of absence from the Order of the Nail to attend to some personal business.” If Alak’s attitude toward the PCs is at least friendly, he tells them the full truth: he’s here at the citadel looking for his family’s signet ring. His late parents, who were also Hellknights of the Nail,

Alak Stagram

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never indicated the location of this treasured family heirloom, but Alak recently found out that it was stored “in a safe place” somewhere in Citadel Altaerein. He has checked the Hellknight test area, since his mother had previously administered the test during her later years and might have locked it away with other hidden valuables. He next plans to check the crypts below the citadel, as respected order members sometimes kept valuables or keepsakes in the vault. Alak is worried that looters might have absconded with the ring, but trusts that his parents wouldn't have left it where it could be easily found or stolen.

If the PCs ask Alak to accompany them or vice versa, and his attitude is at least friendly, he reveals that he hoped to check the crypts below for his ring, but noticed that the main stairwell leading down to the crypt from the courtyard has collapsed. He knows that there's a hidden door somewhere in the Citadel that acts as a secondary entrance to the crypt, but hasn't managed to find it yet—he certainly welcomes the PCs' aid in this search.

Why did those imps attack us? Did you summon them? Alak raises an eyebrow and gives a devilish smile, perhaps suppressing a laugh. “Goodness me, no, I didn't summon those imps. They're nothing but pests—pests from Hell, I'll grant you, but verminous all the same. Simply no useful qualities at all. I suspect they snuck into the citadel ages ago through some ritual or another, and simply avoided the Order of the Nail for years until they had the run of the place. Hell's rancid children live forever, you know. I do appreciate your help putting them down.”

You're not angry with us for trespassing in your order's former home? “Not at all. This place is a ruin, a relic of the past. Most of its valuables were taken to Varisia, after all, and what's left behind—with some few exceptions—is of little value. Plus, you seem industrious. I like that,” Alak says. “Such a shame our old home has been so gutted—I'd have liked it if we could have kept a contingent here, just for tradition's sake. But the Order of the Nail has queens to serve and law to uphold. As long as you're not opposing those tenets, I'd say we're fine.” He smirks and gives a low chuckle. “Unless you'd like me to take you back to Vraid for judgment?”

Do you worship Asmodeus? Does that make you evil? A bemused smirk flashes at the corner of Alak's mouth. “The Dark Prince does have a certain reputation, I'll grant,” he says. “And yet he has seen more of existence than any immortal being, and the absolute law he represents is unimpeachable. The Hellknights understand this.” At this point, if any of the PCs begin to panic or accuse him of being wicked,

Alak chuckles calmly. “Look,” he says. “I'm the first to say devils are hateful things. I'm not about to have tea with any of their lot—I did put those imps down, didn't I? And no, I don't worship Asmodeus. I don't have a lot of interest in matters of religion at all, to tell the truth.”

Do you know Citadel Altaerein? Can you help us with its layout? “Alas, I cannot. I know only the few rooms I've explored so far—I've never visited here, having grown up in Varisia, and I lacked the proper clearance to reference my Order's cartographic archives,” Alak says.

Are you here to reclaim the citadel? “Oh my no. My order has pretty much washed its hands of this place—most of them think of Isgar as a backwater, in fact. It's a shame seeing this place left to rot, though. In fact, there's a story that when my order left this place, they hid the deed to the Citadel somewhere inside, and anyone brave enough and strong enough to find it would be rewarded with ownership of the place.”

Do you know anything about the red smoke coming from bonfires on the battlements? “I do not,” Alak answers. “Except that this place is now crawling with monsters. Perhaps the fires are a sign of more of those. Or perhaps they're something else. I suppose I'll find out soon enough.”

If the PCs ask him to accompany them as they explore the citadel, especially if they do so with an eye toward amusing him and aiding him in his search, Alak agrees, since he's not on a particular timeline with his personal quest. Otherwise, the Hellknight armiger bids them farewell and sets off on his own. In this case, you can have the PCs encounter him later in the complex, or perhaps even come to their rescue if they get in over their heads. If Alak accompanies the group, don't adjust the XP awards they gain. However, he's not very stealthy, so his presence is more likely to cause enemies to find the group, possibly combining multiple smaller encounters into one more difficult fight.

XP Award: If the PCs convince Alak to accompany them, award them XP as if they had defeated him in combat.

A11. PARAVICAR'S PROMENADE

This long hallway leads from the doorway connected to area A6 around chambers used for storage (areas A7 and A9) and the Hellknight test (area A10). The secret door connecting this hallway to the passage leading to area A6 can be discovered with a successful DC 20 Perception check. There is little else of interest here.



WHAT HAPPENED HERE?

When the Cinderclaws invaded from below, they relied upon a pair of savage, draconic beasts called grauladons as their vanguard. It was these two frightening creatures that first confronted the Bumblebrasher goblins and drove them out of the dungeons below. When the goblins fled up the stairs to the battlements, the much heavier grauladons pursued, but their weight caused the stairs (and a significant portion of the stone walls of the battlements above) to collapse. This not only killed one of the two grauladons, but also buried the stairs leading down to the lower levels, splitting the Cinderclaws into two contingents on different dungeon levels below.

More recently, the arsonist Calmont sneaked through here while the surviving grauladon slept, then used the grappling hook and rope dangling from the stairs to clamber up to the battlements in hopes of bullying information about the citadel out of the goblins. It's the noisy confrontation above that has riled up the remaining grauladon in area **A12**, and the angry beast swiftly attacks any PCs that it notices.

A12. COURTYARD

Low 1

The courtyard encounter assumes the PCs enter soon after they explore area **A6** and hear the commotion here; if they instead avoid the courtyard at first and then come back to it at a later date, consult the Development section on page 23 for how to run the encounter.

A short flight of stairs leads down to an open-air courtyard surrounded by imposing octagonal walls, while a heavy iron gate separates it from the halls to the south. A few errant milkweeds and tufts of crabgrass protrude from the cracked cobblestone flooring. The ground to the west is sunken in, creating a natural pool of rainwater. To the north, the battlements above have partially collapsed into a huge mound of stone and wooden rubble, under which some sort of reptilian creature seems to have been crushed. The top half of a flight of wooden stairs rises up to the battlements above the collapsed section of the walls; broken plants from the bottom half lie amid the rubble below. A thick rope has been affixed via a grappling hook to the lower portion of the stairs, dangling down to within a few feet of the top of the rubble pile.

If the PCs enter the courtyard soon after hearing the ruckus while they were in area **A6**, also read them the following text.

The desperate shouts and barking growls continue here, but now their sources are obvious. The shouts come from the battlements above, where a few goblins and a halfling man holding another goblin at knifepoint can be seen. The man seems to be threatening the goblins, while the goblins look like they're pleading for mercy. The source of the growling is of greater concern, though—for it comes from a large, draconic beast not far away at ground level, roaring at the delicious but inaccessible prey above!

This is the central courtyard of Citadel Altaerein, once reserved for the Hellknights' field drills and large-scale training exercises. The entire courtyard is sunk into the earth a few feet, hence the short stairways leading up to the iron gate to the south. The iron gate that leads to area **A6** is locked, while the one that once opened to the north has collapsed under fallen rubble from the battlements above. This collapse also blocked the primary entrance to the vaults below. With a successful DC 13 Perception check, a PC notes that the collapse was quite recent.

The rope dangling from the lower portion of the stairs leading to the battlements can be used to climb up to the stairs from the rubble pile; doing so requires a successful DC 15 Athletics check to make the 10-foot climb. The rubble itself has settled and can be clambered over; it is difficult terrain. Digging the rubble out to expose the stairs that lead down to area **B1** is a downtime activity requiring days of work—in time, the PCs will be able to tackle this (see *Pathfinder Adventure Path #146: Cult of Cinders*), but for now the way should remain impassable.

Creature: The growling, dragon-like creature is an export from the Mwangi Expanse, a creature known as a grauladon that the Cinderclaws brought with them through Huntergate. (See the What Happened Here? sidebar for how the grauladon ended up trapped in the courtyard.) The goblins and halfling above are caught in a standoff, shouting in Goblin at each other. The halfling is Calmont, and he's taken one of the goblins hostage and is threatening to cut the goblin's throat if the others don't throw down their weapons and help him find a way into the dungeons below. The goblins stubbornly refuse—between begging him to let their chief Helba go, they foolishly hurl insults back at him without recognizing this is only making the standoff worse.

Once the goblins above notice the PCs, they start shouting down to the PCs for help in a mix of Goblin and Common. Calmont retreats into the northeast tower with his prisoner, Helba, to consider his options. See area **A22** for what happens next up on the battlements, but in the meantime, the grauladon shifts its attention from the scene above to the PCs themselves.

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The wide-open habitat combined with the swampy terrain in the area's west side has made this the perfect lair for the grauladon, a rather stupid and squat but vicious predator that normally preys on inattentive animals and people who happen to wander into its domain. The grauladon is hungry and mean—it has sustained itself so far by eating the remains of the other grauladon, which perished under the collapsing battlement. If the grauladon is reduced below 8 Hit Points, though, its bluster breaks and it retreats into the foul waters of the pool to the west, where it fights to the death if pursued.

Although it can't climb, the grauladon has been tormenting the Bumblebrashers on the citadel's battlements with its threatening growls on and off for days. For that entire time, the goblins have worried that the beast might find a way up and munch on them all. If the PCs defeat the grauladon, the goblins are extremely grateful; see area **A22** for more information.

The grauladon is not normally encountered in temperate climates, and a PC who succeeds at a DC 16 Arcana check not only identifies the tropical draconic creature for what it is, but recognizes that it is way out of its element. This hint foreshadows the portal that links Alseta's Ring below to the jungles of the Mwangi Expanse, but that explanation shouldn't be apparent to the PCs quite yet.

GRAULADON

CREATURE 2

Page 88

Initiative Perception +7

Hazard: The pool to the west is filled with rancid water that is about 3 feet deep at its deepest point. Any PC who either touches the water with uncovered skin or spends their turn in a square touching the water must succeed at a DC 15 Fortitude saving throw or be sickened 2.

Treasure: No fewer than seven dogslicers, three shortbows, and 15 arrows lie scattered about the courtyard, weapons dropped by panicked goblins as they fled upstairs and had to use both hands to balance while navigating the oversized (for them) steps.

Development: If the PCs don't immediately investigate this area after hearing the commotion from area **A6**, the grauladon has calmed down and isn't distracted by the yelling above, which has also subsided as Calmont and the goblins have drifted back into a quieter standoff mode. Once the grauladon notices the PCs and noisily attacks, though, the goblins and Calmont quickly take note as well—the goblins begin calling for help from above while Calmont starts threatening them once more, as described in the Creature section on page 22.

If the PCs storm into the courtyard and either defeat the grauladon and then retreat, or are forced to flee the grauladon, the standoff upstairs remains on hold until the PCs reach the battlements, as detailed in area **A22**.

A13. COURT OF THE NAIL MODERATE 1

A judge's bench, a witness stand, and councilors' tables are the only remaining indication of this room's previous use as a formal courtroom. Benches have long ago been smashed to fragments and strewn about the gallery, covering the floor of the room in debris. Through several empty doorways to the north, a large, ragged opening in the citadel's wall is visible—along with what appears to be a corpse wearing silvery armor, lying on a muddy lump in the center of a pool of water that has filled much of the collapsed section.

Once used for large public trials—usually of bandits or other petty villains who had caused harm in the wilds of Isgar—this courtroom was wrecked long ago. The area to the west, area **A15**, was once an overflow audience gallery for prominent trials. It's separated from area **A13** by a 3-foot-tall partition with several openings to allow people to pass between areas **A13** and **A15**. The partition is difficult terrain for Medium or larger creatures; Small or smaller creatures must succeed at a DC 10 Athletics check to Climb over it.

The archways to the north lead to several small offices once used as working chambers and conference rooms for barristers and judges. The ground here has subsided, resulting in a sizable collapse along the outer northern wall and forming a 5-foot-deep pool of brackish water. This water is not polluted like the pool in the courtyard, but has become the den of a dangerous monster (see Creatures below).

The crumbled outer wall to the north allows entry to the citadel from the outside and makes the lighting in this area bright during the daytime. The rubble strewn across the offices' floor makes them difficult terrain.

Creatures: The "muddy lump" in the middle of the pool to the north is in fact a dangerous ambush predator—a turtle-like beast called a graveshell. The lump is the graveshell's back, and the body atop it is a lure to attract new prey. A second graveshell lurks nearby, although it has no decoy mounted on its back yet. The monsters lurch out of the water to attack anyone who tries to investigate the lure, or who simply tries to move through the pool into or out of the citadel.

GRAVESHELLS (2)

CREATURE 1

Page 89

Initiative Stealth +4



Treasure: Given the sheer volume of damaged furniture in this place, looters have not yet discovered all of the loose change that has, over the years, fallen out of the pockets and coin purses of trial spectators. If the PCs spend 30 minutes searching and succeed at a DC 15 Perception check, they find a total of 5 sp and 40 cp scattered throughout the room.

Further, the PCs may wish to search the small rooms to the north. They find all of the doors unlocked, and the offices similarly plundered. However, if the PCs succeed at a DC 18 Perception check, in the room furthest to the south they find a *scroll of alarm* and a *scroll of fear*.

Finally, the body atop the graveshell is that of a dead human bandit who recently tried to infiltrate the citadel here, only to fall victim to the monster. The body still wears its chain shirt, and carries 6 gp and 9 sp in a pouch.

A14. WAITING CHAMBER

Once-plush crimson curtains hang in tatters on the walls, and scuffs reveal places where portraits once hung. Trash and rotted food lie in heaps on the floor like tiny moldering corpses. Open doors lead to north, northeast, and southwest.

This was once a public holding area for crowds to gather before the Order of the Nail courtroom (area A13) opened and trials began. Now, it's become a filthy storeroom of sorts for the warg in area A16. There is little of value in this room, but if the PCs spend any time searching or making significant noise here, they attract the warg from area A16, which attacks once it realizes the PCs are here.

A15. OVERFLOW GALLEY

This open area with a clear view into the courtroom to the east is littered with piles of filthy blankets, half-gnawed bones, and other signs that some sort of creature is squatting here.

This area was once a standing-room-only overflow chamber for spectators of Order of the Nail trials, but it has since become the nest of a pair of wargs (one of which is holed up in area A16).

Warg Puppies: Near the door to area A15, a pile of blankets draped over an overturned desk serves as the nest of two warg puppies. These warg puppies are just a few days old and each about the size of a domesticated cat. When the PCs approach, the puppies both growl and bare their little teeth, but they also make no move to attack. They've been living off of

insects and runoff rain water, and are quite hungry. They're intrigued by the PCs, and might even play with them if coaxed out of their den with a successful DC 16 Diplomacy check. If the PCs offer food, they gain a +2 circumstance bonus to this check.

Though the puppies are smarter than animals, they're still developing their personalities and intellects. While predisposed to the cruelty of their kind, they could grow into friendlier creatures if given love and support. This requires a successful DC 16 Diplomacy check each day, and does not count as a downtime activity. After 10 successful checks, the warg puppies' attitude toward a PC becomes friendly, and the creatures will follow a range of commands. The DC of this Diplomacy check is reduced to 14 for PCs with the Train Animal general feat, because the puppies are somewhere between a person and an animal in intelligence. Since wargs are smarter than most animals, GMs are encouraged to allow the warg puppies to follow more complex commands than normal.

The mother of the warg puppies might still be lurking in the surrounding wilds, and could well approach the PCs with a demand to hand over her children. The warg mother herself is a foul-tempered creature, and such an encounter could give the PCs a complicated moral conundrum: do they return the puppies to their evil mother, doubtless ensuring the creatures grow up evil themselves, or do the PCs keep the puppies and nurture them, a decision which is likely to force the PCs to kill the mother of the puppies? If the PCs make significant noise while interacting with the puppies, the adult warg in area A16 wanders in to investigate—it attacks the PCs not to defend the puppies (in which it has no interest) but simply because it enjoys crunching humanoid bones in its jaws.

XP Award: If the PCs rescue the puppies and take them under their wing, award the party 60 XP.

A16. LICTOR'S OFFICE

Low 1

This grim administrative office's heavy wooden desk, armchairs, and filing cabinets are still largely intact, though most of the furniture drawers have been pulled out and ransacked.

This was once the primary working office of the Order of the Nail's lictor, or leader, and often served as a meeting space, audience chamber, and working space where the lictor could conduct the many duties that came up during daily life within the order.

Creature: A few days ago, a pair of mated wargs moved into this room, but after the female birthed a

litter of puppies, the foul-tempered male chased her off, frustrated with the fact that none of the puppies were males. He has all but abandoned the puppies in area **A15**, as uninterested in keeping them fed as he is in killing them off. The warg has considered moving on, but for now remains in this room—it snarls and attacks any PCs it notices.

WARG

CREATURE 2

Pathfinder Bestiary 322

Initiative Perception +8

Treasure: There is little treasure to be had here, but if the PCs spend 10 minutes searching through the open drawers of the lictor's desk or succeed at a DC 15 Perception check, they find a book tucked into the back of a drawer. This book is a treatise on Order of the Nail protocols as they relate to both Chelish and Isgeri laws, and explanations of various interpretations of them as they apply to past cases against local criminals. At the beginning of the book is a personalized dedication that reads: "To Lictor Acillmar, with thanks for your interest in my work. Together we shall quell savagery.—Hellknight T. Stagram, Esq."

If the PCs have met and talked with Alak Stagram in area **A10**, they don't need to succeed at a check to know that this book was written by someone related to him. The book is the work of Alak's father, who was a new Hellknight and barrister when he gave this work to the order's then-lictor, who was in turn the grandmother of the order's current paravicar. Alak recognizes the book if it is shown to him, and the PCs can give it to him as a sign of friendship; see area **A10** for more details.

XP Award: If the PCs give the book to Alak, award the party 60 XP.

A17. RECORDS ROOM

Low 1

This wrecked room holds toppled shelves and filing cabinets. Its southwestern wall has entirely collapsed, revealing the verdant weeds and undergrowth outside.

Owing to its exposure to the elements, most of the surfaces of this room are covered in moss and vines, including snarls of wild blackberries. Along the room's southeastern wall is what looks like a mound of meat or dirt. However, examining the mound reveals that this is a badly decomposed humanoid corpse, the flesh of which has sustained obvious small bite marks.

Creatures: The abundance of vegetation and food in this area has attracted three giant rats, which attack the PCs when they move toward the room's eastern door.

PUPPY PROBLEMS

The warg puppies in area **A15** are meant to give the party a complicated moral problem to solve—left to their own, the warg pups will surely grow into evil monsters, but is it right for the PCs to keep the puppies from their mother and raise them instead? The fate of the warg pups isn't written into the Age of Ashes outline, so if your table isn't interested in moral problems like this (or if the idea of including warg puppies in the adventure doesn't appeal), you can simply remove the puppies from area **A15** and have the warg living in area **A16** be a simple combat encounter with a foul-tempered lone warg.

GIANT RATS (3)

CREATURE -1

Pathfinder Bestiary 276

Initiative Perception +5

Treasure: If the PCs examine the body found along the area's southeastern wall, they find two *minor healing potions* on the corpse's belt.

A18. READING ROOM

Although many of the circular tables and heavy wooden writing desks here are tipped over or otherwise ransacked, the bookshelves against the wall and the nature of furniture suggest this was once a room where significant legal research took place.

This was once the reading room for the Order of the Nail. There is little of value left here, but if the PCs spend 30 minutes perusing the few books left on the shelves along the wall, with a successful DC 15 Society check they can piece together the general history of the Order of the Nail as presented in the adventure background on page 5.

A19. CLERKS' CHAMBER

Low 1

Rows of desks here are bolted to the floor, though many of the cramped work spaces have been smashed to pieces or otherwise defaced. Wooden chairs have been thrown aside like discarded playthings.

This room was once a workspace for low-ranking Hellknights and armigers—or sometimes even interns with special privileges—to perform the order's lowest-level clerical duties. Making copies of the Order of the Nail's decrees, duplicating mundane legal texts, and processing the least urgent requests

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for Hellknight intervention were all common tasks carried out here.

Creature: A giant bat is nesting here in the rafters of this room. If the PCs linger here to search anything, the bat attacks.

GIANT BAT

Pathfinder Bestiary 39

Initiative Perception +11

CREATURE 2

Treasure: If the PCs spend 10 minutes searching this area, they can scrounge up enough parchment and ink to create up to six writing sets. Further, if the PCs search the area and succeed at a DC 20 Perception check, they find an *owlbear claw* (*Pathfinder Core Rulebook* 570) wedged up underneath one of the desk's drawers.

A20. LAW REPOSITORY

This long row of mostly empty bookshelves is remarkably untouched, though a thick layer of dust and the smell of mildew permeate the air. A door deeper in the citadel to the east hangs conspicuously open.

This room is remarkably untouched in comparison to the rest of the looted citadel, but the Hellknights left little of value in this room when they abandoned the citadel, save for a few extra copies of outdated tomes. However, if the PCs spend 30 minutes perusing these books, they can learn any parts of the Order of the Nail's history that they didn't previously learn, as outlined in the adventure background on page 5, without needing to attempt a skill check.

A21. HOLDING CELLS

MODERATE 1

A prisoner intake area with long benches, rings on the walls for shackles, and an administrative area occupies this room's western end. To the east, behind a raised iron gate, several prisoner holding cells stand with their doors hanging open. Storage lockers line the walls to the south.

This area was once a holding facility for prisoners awaiting trial in the Court of the Nail (area A13). When the citadel fell into disuse, various bandit groups occupying the site used it as a holding facility for captives they'd ransom or otherwise hold prisoner. The necromantic energies from some of the foul villains who have used this area have now animated these cells' occupants, as noted below.

Creatures: If the PCs peer into the holding cells, they see that the four easternmost cells are occupied

by rag-covered bodies so badly decomposed as to be merely bones—prisoners left here to die when the last bandit group departed in a hurry. If the PCs examine any of the bodies, all the bodies animate into skeleton guards. If the PCs instead ignore the bodies and move toward the storage lockers, the skeletons animate when the PCs approach that portion of the room.

SKELETON GUARDS (4)

Pathfinder Bestiary 298

Initiative Perception +2

CREATURE -1

Treasure: The storage lockers on the southern side of this room are locked (DC 20 Thievery to pick the locks). There are a total of four lockers. The lockers each contain one low-grade silver bludgeoning weapon (flail, light hammer, mace, and morningstar) and a *lesser darkvision elixir*. Additionally, one locker contains a *jade cat*, one contains a *lesser cheetah's elixir*, one contains a *potency crystal*, and one contains a *scroll of magic missile*.

A22. BATTLEMENTS

MODERATE 1

Citadel Altaerein's battlements provide a breathtaking view. To the east rise the majestic Five Kings Mountains, looming as ageless rocky monoliths in the hazy fog. To the south, rolling foothills unfurl, nestled around Breachill's rooftops. Along the battlements, six bonfires have been heaped, although currently only the southwestern three are burning fitfully, sending plumes of reddish smoke into the air.

The citadel's battlements are about 25 feet above the courtyard (area A12), and are just over 30 feet above ground level. The battlements' walls are about 4 feet high and crenellated, with a circular watchtower standing at each of the four corners. A significant portion of the northern battlements has collapsed into the courtyard below, leaving the northeastern watchtower partially exposed to the air.

Creatures: When the PCs reach this area, they should be presented with a harrowing standoff in progress. The halfling arsonist and troublemaker Calmont has taken the leader of the surviving Bumblebrasher goblins, Helba, hostage. While the other goblins outnumber him, fear for their leader's safety has so far paralyzed them, preventing them from taking action.

The hunched halfling man, his hair wild and gestures manic, has a terrified goblin in a headlock as he waves a knife about menacingly, standing in the only surviving doorway in the northeast tower. His screams and threats escalate as he notices the PCs' approach up the stairs

to the east, where the surviving eight Bumblebrasher goblins have gathered, eyes wide and faces locked in expressions of worry. The goblins themselves have no weapons other than a few brands and torches, having lost their dogslicers and other weapons during their flight up to the battlements. As the goblins beg for help in Goblinoid, Calmont addresses the PCs in a shrill voice, switching over to Common.

"And who are you? Oh... wait! The do-gooders from town! You were supposed to burn in the fire! What are you doing here... No closer! I'll cut this goblin's ears off if you don't leave at once!"

Calmont is, of course, the bookseller's apprentice who started the fire during the Call for Heroes, and his capture is one of the tasks the council assigned to the PCs. His attitude toward the PCs begins as hostile. Ultimately, it's up to the PCs to decide what to do with Calmont at this point—they might attack him without question, they might try to take him into custody, or they might simply wish to talk with him. You should let the PCs approach this situation however they wish, though it's worth reminding them that Greta Gardania and the Breachill council have asked them to bring Calmont back to them for questioning. If the PCs rush at Calmont, his eyes widen in shock; he tries to cut off one of Helba's ears but she takes advantage of the distraction and twists away, forcing him to drop his dagger. Helba manages to flee to the south to rejoin the other goblins, and Calmont needs to use an action to recover his knife, but from this point forward the fight is on between the PCs and the arsonist. Whether or not they take him alive is up to them.

CALMONT

CREATURE 3

UNIQUE LE SMALL HALFLING HUMANOID

Male halfling rogue 3

Perception +6, keen eyes

Languages Common, Goblin, Halfling

Skills Acrobatics +9, Athletics +7, Breachill Lore +8, Deception +7, Intimidation +7, Mercantile Lore +4, Society +7, Stealth +11, Thievery +11

Str +2, **Dex** +4, **Con** +1, **Int** -1, **Wis** -1, **Cha** +2

Items dagger, leather armor, *lesser healing potion* (2), +1 *shortbow* (20 arrows), thieves' tools

AC 20; **Fort** +6, **Ref** +11, **Will** +6

HP 35

Deny Advantage Calmont isn't flat-footed to hidden, undetected, or flanking creatures of level 3 or lower.

Nimble Dodge (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 183)

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ dagger +9 (agile, finesse, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+4 piercing

Ranged ♦ *shortbow* +9 (deadly 1d10, range increment 60 feet, reload 0), **Damage** 1d6 piercing

Ranged ♦ dagger +9 (agile, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+4 piercing

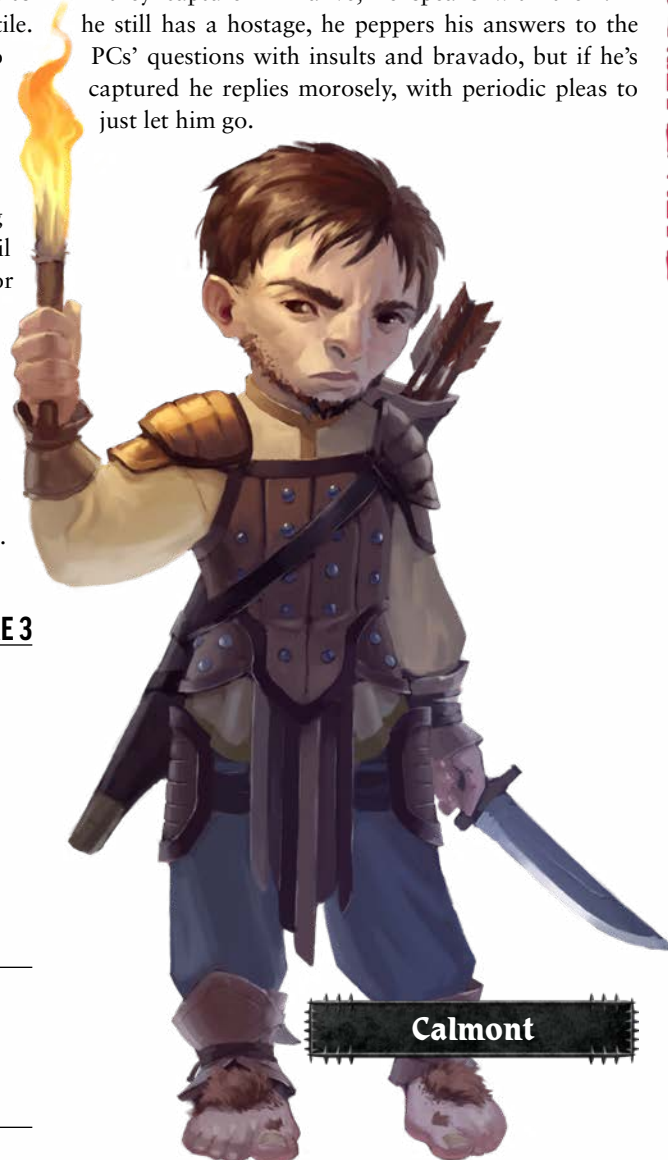
Quick Draw ♦ (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 184)

Sneak Attack Calmont deals 1d6 extra damage to flat-footed creatures.

Surprise Attack If Calmont used Deception or Stealth for initiative, creatures that haven't acted are flat-footed to Calmont on the first round of combat.

INTERROGATING CALMONT

If the PCs use Diplomacy or Intimidation to shift Calmont's hostile attitude to at least indifferent, or if they capture him alive, he speaks with them. If he still has a hostage, he peppers his answers to the PCs' questions with insults and bravado, but if he's captured he replies morosely, with periodic pleas to just let him go.



Calmont

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Calmont is not a bright man, and he stumbled upon the information he reveals below only by luck. He is shamelessly ambitious but also rather foolish, and he doesn't have much compunction revealing key pieces of information to the PCs. If the PCs end up speaking with Calmont, answers to likely questions and demands are below.

Put that goblin down! (Or any similar demand made to unhand Helba while Calmont still holds her hostage.)

Calmont sneers and waves his knife even closer to the captured goblin, then cries out, "I will not! Not until these little pests tell me how to find Alseta's Ring!" At this point, the PCs can attempt a DC 16 Intimidation check to Coerce Calmont to release his hostage—on a success, he seems to wilt, then releases Helba and surrenders to the PCs, but on a critical failure he attacks as detailed in area A22. This check, or a DC 16 Diplomacy check to Make an Impression, can also be used to get Calmont to talk further with the PCs, as described above.

What are you doing here/Why are you harassing these goblins? "Why do you think?!" Calmont shouts, waving his knife at the goblins again. "These freaks know how to get to the basement. They used to live down there! Everyone knows that! Those blocked stairs on the first floor, they can't be the only way down. There's an elf gate down there. Do you have any idea what someone would pay for information about lost elf gates? A lot! Only these worms won't tell me how to get downstairs!"

Did you set the fire at the Call for Heroes? Why? "Stupid question!" Calmont chides. "Of course I set that little spark. Whoosh! Aha! You should've seen everyone's faces. How else was I supposed to stop that stupid council from sending heroes"—Calmont sneers at the word—"to Hellknight Hill? That would have interrupted my plan to find the elf gates! But now you're here anyway. Bah!" Calmont slaps his own forehead in frustration. "Should have set an even bigger fire!"

What is this elf gate you're talking about? Why do you care about it? Calmont snorts. "Alseta's Ring? It's only a ring of elf gates. Connected to places all over the world. *Elf Gates*." Calmont emphasizes those last two words slowly. "You know those? You're not daft, are you? Don't you realize how valuable that information is to richies who want to travel fast? Selling that information would get me out from under Voz's thumb!" (A successful DC 15 Society check is enough for a PC to know that Voz is the name of the local bookseller in Breachill.)

But what if evildoers find out about Alseta's Ring? "Who cares?" Calmont laughs uproariously. "Long as I get paid—and get the hell out of Voz's shop!"

Who is Voz?/How did you find out about Alseta's Ring? "You know, Voz—the bookseller? In Breachill? Half-elf? Boy, you're not too quick, are you?" Calmont's slight amusement shifts to rage as he begins to rant. "Voz is my employer, but she thinks she's my god. Always bossin' me around! 'Calmont do this, Calmont read that, Calmont that's not how you pronounce Norgorber!' She's a jerk! I hate her! I've been digging around her stuff for weeks, trying to find something I could sell to buy my way out of this stupid job. Didn't find any goodies. But I did find her notes about Alseta's Ring. What's she planning to do with that information? Don't care! I just want to get paid!"

Calmont has little more to reveal to the PCs than this—once his information is exhausted, he reverts to repetitive begging to be let go.

XP Award: If the PCs capture Calmont alive, grant them XP equal to what they would have earned for defeating him in combat. Grant them an additional 60 XP if they find out about Alseta's Ring from him.

THE BUMBLEBRASHER GOBLINS

Once the PCs have dealt with the hostage situation, they can talk to the Bumblebrasher goblins. If the PCs don't approach the goblins on the battlements, eventually Helba, who had been Calmont's hostage, approaches them. Read or paraphrase the following.

As the dust from the drama on the battlements settles, you hear a distinctive, garbled throat-clearing coming from nearby. Soon, the short, slight goblin woman who'd been held hostage by Calmont approaches. "Excuse me," she says, in a voice like that of a hoarse bird. "Excuse me, and thank you, friends. You are friends? You must be friends, because you've just saved the Bumblebrashers from that man. So much flailing! And shrieking! Ack!"

"I am Helba, and I am the Bumblebrashers' chieftain. We have been stuck up here for so long—days it feels like! Maybe even weeks? Hard to keep track. First those awful monsters chased us from our comfy basement, then that dragon-dog came, and then that awful halfling man showed up talking about elves and other nonsense! No elves live here! Just us Bumblebrashers!"

Helba looks back at her people, and a deeply morose look settles upon her face. "I just want to protect my people. But everything—everyone—wants us dead."

If the PCs don't engage further with Helba or the Bumblebrashers, she hesitatingly trundles up to one of them, tugs on their sleeve, and asks them both to help the Bumblebrashers reclaim their home in Altaerein's vaults (areas B6–B11), and to deal with the cultists

terrorizing the dungeons. Most importantly, she tells the PCs about the secret door in the hillside just west of the Citadel that provides access to the vaults below.

The PCs may wish to spend some time talking with Helba, who is desperate but also deeply cares about her people. Answers to likely questions are below.

What drove you from your home in the vaults?

Helba gets a panicked look at her face, but then she glances back to her tribe mates and conspicuously rights her posture. “Cultists—at least I think they’re cultists. They called themselves the Cinderclaws, and they said our home was their home now. They threatened to roast us! To peel us and eat us! Ack! And they had dragon monsters with them! So of course we ran from the vaults. Then so many monsters on the ground floor, so we ran up here, to the battlements. That dragon thing down in the courtyard kept us from getting away! It wanted to eat us!” If the PCs have already killed the gauladon, Helba thanks them profusely for this additional service the PCs have provided.

How can we get down to the vaults? Helba looks at the PCs gratefully and then nods. “Yes, of course, we’ll tell you. You’re friends. There’s a secret door just down the hill to the west. It’s not hard to find when you look, but I can show it to you! It goes right to the vaults, where we used to live; we used the door all the time to go out and hunt for food.” As long as Helba tells the PCs this, they do not need to succeed at a Perception check to find the secret door that leads to area B1.

What do you know about Alseta’s Ring? Helba looks honestly confused. “Never heard of an Alseta ring. Is it shiny? I bet it is. Rings are always shiny. But there were no shiny rings in our vaults, I can say. But there’s rooms even deeper, and crypts too. We never go there, but maybe the ring is hidden in there?”

That awful man was threatening you! Why didn’t you just tell him how to get downstairs? “We would have! Was going to! What do we care if he runs downstairs to get slashed by cultists? But he grabbed me too fast and started screaming, and waving that knife, and we couldn’t get a word in edgewise. We froze! I froze! He’s awful! Don’t let him near us again!”

Can we deliver a message to Warbal? “Warbal, yes! Cousin Warbal! My good friend. Good cousin! Such a smart lady; now she lives in the big city. Please, new friends, if you could tell her that we’re alive—and that you’ve saved us!—the Bumblebrashers would be most grateful. We’ve still lost our home down below, but maybe not forever—right?” Helba looks at the PCs hopefully at this last comment.

Once the gauladon is defeated and Calmont is taken care of, the Bumblebrashers consider the threat to their lives ended and stop sending distress signals via the fires on the citadel’s battlements. If the PCs ask Helba about the dangers they might face in the underground levels, see the Goblin Intelligence sidebar on page 33. The goblins quickly make their way out of the citadel and hunker down in the nearby hills, waiting patiently for word that the cultists have been cleared out of the dungeons before they brave a return to the citadel. Of course, in the end, the Bumblebrashers’ fate is left to the PCs to decide.

XP Award: For rescuing the Bumblebrashers, award the party 120 XP. (Note that over time, other Bumblebrashers who still dwell in secret clearings and hidden caves in the nearby wilds might come forward to augment the few survivors of those who dwelt below Citadel Altaerein, especially if the PCs encourage such growth in the future as part of their role in the adventures to come as caretakers of the citadel.)



Helba

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CHAPTER 3: THE CITADEL BELOW

The PCs are certainly free to begin exploring the lower level of Citadel Altaerein as soon as they discover the hidden door leading to the surviving stairwell, but before they take this plunge, they may wish to regroup, secure supplies back in town, or have further conversations with NPCs such as Warbal the goblin ambassador or Greta Gardania, the council president of Breachhill.

The PCs are likely eager to return a captured Calmont to town to bring him to justice and collect their reward. Greta and the other council members are easily found in Breachhill's town hall, and the PCs can secure an audience with them immediately, though the meeting takes place in a different portion of the building than the charred chambers. How the PCs report their success to the council is up to them, but as long as they report any conversations they had with Helba or any of the other Bumblebrashers, they fulfill that aspect of their quest and Greta gladly pays them what she promised.

When it comes to Calmont, the PCs may have decided to take him captive and bring him back to Breachhill. In this case, the PCs can find any member of the town guard immediately upon returning to Breachhill, at which point the guard escorts the PCs, with their captive, to the town hall. Alternatively, the guard can deliver Calmont to the authorities and have the council notified, or make any other arrangement the PCs see fit. In this case, Greta gladly pays the PCs what she promised for this aspect of the quest.

If the PCs do not bring Calmont back alive, they can report his death to the council, who express condolences on the town's behalf to the apprentice's family. Since the PCs did not fulfill the specifics of this quest, Greta considers this job incomplete and declines to pay what she offered for this task.

With the goblins rescued and Calmont brought to justice, the PCs control the pace of the rest of

this adventure. Now that the PCs have established their names as capable adventurers, they'll be able to take advantage of the "adventurer's discount" for purchasing equipment and services like healing in town (as detailed in the *Age of Ashes Player's Guide*). If you're not using the *Age of Ashes Player's Guide*, simply give the PCs a 5% discount on gear and healing in town.

Into Altaerein's Vaults

Eventually, the PCs should turn their attention to the dungeons below Citadel Altaerein. These rooms are entirely underground, and unless otherwise noted in specific room descriptions, are pitch dark. The ceiling height in hallways is 10 feet, rising to 15 feet in larger rooms, and the doors are unlocked unless otherwise noted.

B1. VAULTWAY

MODERATE 2

This wide, empty stone hallway is oppressive and dark. To the east, the hall ends at three separate open doorways, while six additional corridors branch off to the north and south. A mass of rubble spills out of a clogged archway in the northeastern portion of the room.

The secret door to the west opens to a short hallway that leads to a second secret door, which exits the dungeon on the slopes of a steep hill just west of the Citadel. It is via this entrance the PCs are likely to come and go during this adventure. From inside the secret tunnel, the doors leading out and into area **B1** are obvious, but those within area **B1** who don't know of the door require a successful DC 25 Perception check to notice it.

The rubble in the northeast corner comes from the collapsed stairs and battlements directly above. Clearing the debris out is a downtime activity—one that the PCs are unlikely to manage until later—but once the rubble is cleared and the stairs rebuilt, these stairs will once again connect the vaultway to the courtyard above and Alseta's Ring below.

If the PCs examine the open door to area **B2**, a successful DC 15 Perception check reveals a strange pasty caking of dried slime along the door's frame. A PC who succeeds at a DC 18 Occultism check confirms the slime was left by the passage of some sort of ooze several weeks ago; one who critically succeeds confirms it was left by a gelatinous cube.

Creatures: While the Cinderclaws have settled into the northern wing, they've placed two trained guardians here in the vaultway as both a defense and an alarm. These are brightly colored emperor birds—natives of the Mwangi Expanse that are cranky and frustrated at the confined area, but too well-trained to wander far from the hall. The birds shriek loudly if either notices the PCs, alerting the Cinderclaws to the north and the denizen of area **B2** at the same time, but none of those creatures come to investigate the sound of battle. As with the gauladon in area **A12**, a successful DC 18 Nature check reveals that these tropical birds are far from their natural habitat. They fight to the death.

EMPEROR BIRDS (2)

CREATURE 2

Page 87

Initiative Perception +8

CHAPTER 3 SYNOPSIS

In this chapter of the adventure, the heroes must foray deeper into the bowels of Citadel Altaerein to investigate the dangers that drove the Bumblebrasher goblins from their home. As they do, they discover the fragments of a dangerous cult lurking in the keep, whose stronger presence in the lower levels spells an even larger threat to the region. Finally, a secret tunnel leading back to Breachill from the citadel's crypts looks to have been used recently by an unknown visitor—it seems that even more sinister forces might have caught wind of Alseta's Ring and could be about to harness its power for nefarious purposes!

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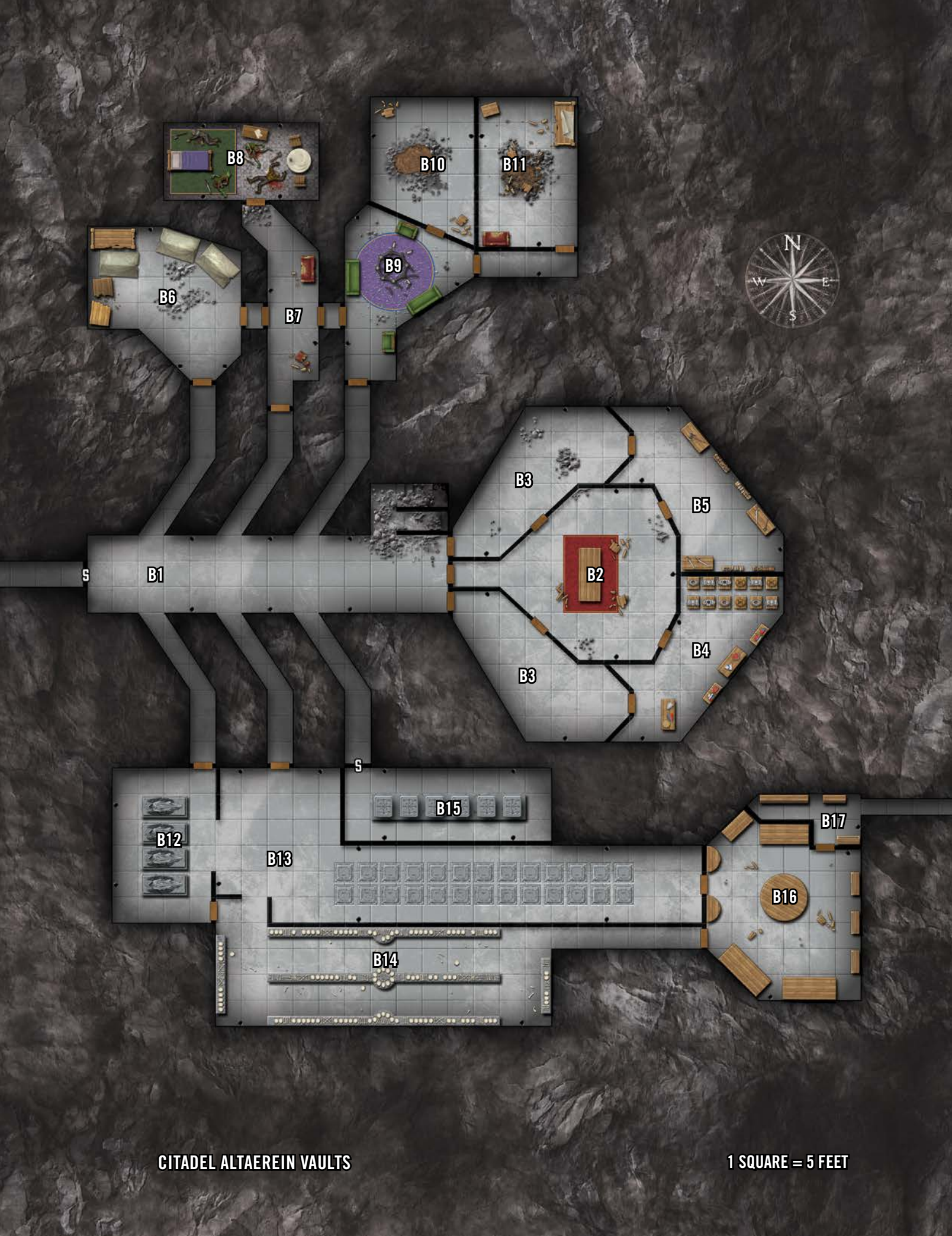
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B2. WAR ROOM

Low 2

A splintered table stretches across the center of this room, while broken chairs, moldy books, and general detritus litter the floor. Two bodies that appear to be frog-like humanoids lie sprawled on the floor near the center of the room. Of the several doors that provide exits from this room, the ones to the west and southeast hang wide open.

This room was once an elite war room where Order of the Nail leaders planned complex or far-off missions in greater Iger and beyond. The place has since been torn apart by the cultists lurking in the vaults' northern wing. The war room also has a more permanent resident: a soulbound doll (see the Creature section below) that has killed two of the cultists. These dead boggards can be identified with a successful DC 15 Society check, while a DC 18 Society check made while investigating their ruined gear reveals that they are dressed in a style similar to boggard tribes found in the western Mwangi Expanse. Finally, the unusual talon-like insignia they wear on their ruined armor can give an additional clue; see the Cinderclaws sidebar on page 34.

The open door to area **B4** has the same dried slime encrusting its frame as the door between areas **B1** and **B2**.

Creature: A forgotten remnant from the Hellknight's time continues to guard here, left behind by a Hellknight signifier who had grown tired of it. This creature is a 2-foot-tall soulbound doll empowered by a fragment of a soul harvested from a bitter Order of the Nail Hellknight who died of sepsis. Appearing as a miniature Hellknight itself, the soulbound doll once served the Order of the Nail signifier as a lackey, but when the Order moved to Varisia, its creator was ordered to either leave the creepy little construct behind or destroy it. The soulbound doll wandered the ruins for a time after it was abandoned, eventually settling in this room, where it has spent the last few years simply waiting for a chance to lash out. Bitter at being discarded, the doll shrieks with fury at anyone it encounters but is particularly outraged at the sight of anyone wearing any Hellknight insignias or gear. The soulbound doll is lawful evil and speaks only Infernal—when it attacks, it repeats, "Take me with you!" over and over, yet in its anger won't allow itself to be consoled, and the doll fights until it is destroyed.

ELITE SOULBOUND DOLL

Pathfinder Bestiary 6, 304

Initiative Stealth +8

CREATURE 3

GOBLIN INTELLIGENCE

If the PCs let Helba and the Bumblebrashers know that they intend to explore the vaults and drive out the cultists, the goblins are delighted. If asked, they can scribble a crude map of the northern wing of the dungeon. The goblins don't know the layout of the east and south wings, but do know that "monsters" and "dead people" can be found there. As for their own prior lair in particular, Helba warns the PCs that the Bumblebrasher mascot, Big Bumble, is probably still stuck down there, and probably very hungry. And thus really angry. Asked for further details, she reveals that Big Bumble is a grizzly bear the goblins tricked into the dungeon with the intent to keep it as a pet, but after it ate a few of them, they locked it in a room and kept it fed from afar. Helba suggests letting Big Bumble out of his pen to run rampage through the cultists, but warns them that he has trouble telling friends apart from enemies.

Treasure: There is nothing of value on the cultists' bodies, but some polished obsidian figurines scattered throughout the debris in the room are worth some coin. If the PCs succeed at a DC 15 Perception check to notice one or more of the figurines, they can spend 20 minutes collecting all of them. The figurines are shaped like Nail Hellknights in full plate, Hellknight signifier spellcasters in robes, and more general featureless humanoids. Altogether, the figures the PCs collect here are worth 20 gp.

B3. HALLS OF GLORY

Both of these chambers have similar contents.

This entry hall is still decorated with the remnants of homages to the Order of the Nail's most storied deeds. Tall oil paintings, many of which are damaged but still recognizable, depict Hellknights gaining the upper hand in clashes with bandits, opposing armies, and terrible monsters.

Treasure: Most of the paintings in these halls are damaged to the point that they've lost all monetary value. However, if the PCs stop to examine the paintings in the northernmost hall, they notice one painting that is a little water damaged at its edges, but still entirely intact—a successful DC 17 Crafting or Society check reveals that the painting is worth 25 gp. With 20 minutes of careful work, the PCs could remove the painting from its frame, roll it up, and sell it to any art dealer or private collector for

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CINDERCLAWS

All of the Cinderclaws wear their cult's insignia prominently, a symbol of a smoking dragon's claw. The Cinderclaws themselves are a relatively unknown cult, but a PC who looks the symbol over and succeeds at a DC 20 Religion check recognizes it as an unusual symbol sometimes associated with the cult of Dahak, the god of evil dragons. His more well-known symbol is that of a falling burning scale, but this successful Religion check confirms that the smoking claw is one used by those of his worshippers who focus more on his aspect as a god of destruction than of evil dragons or greed.



its full value (as long as the painting isn't further damaged during the PCs' adventures).

The painting depicts three Hellknights battling a black dragon in an ominous swamp. A fourth Hellknight leaps from a rise behind the dragon with her halberd raised, ready to bear down on the dragon's back, while a robed Hellknight in the background attends to a wounded knight. In the corner of the painting, the artist has signed their work: "R. Stagram."

The painting is the work of a forebear of Alak Stagram, the armiger the PCs might have met on Altaerein's upper floor (see area A10). Specifically, Alak's great-great-uncle was a talented painter as well as a Hellknight of the Order of the Nail, and he recorded many such heroic scenes for the order's posterity.

Alak assumed that all his forebear's works had been destroyed in the looting that took place in the citadel once the Hellknights abandoned it, but he would be delighted to know that this painting survives. If the PCs either give this preserved painting to Alak or point out its existence so that he can retrieve it himself, they improve the Hellknight's attitude toward the PCs by one step, if he's not already helpful toward them.

XP Award: If the PCs return the painting to Alak, award them 80 XP.

B4. WEST ARMORY

Low 2

Toppled armor racks are scattered throughout this wide room, as well as anvils, hammers, tool sets, and other supplies that were once used to repair the Hellknight's iconic armor.

This armory is both where the Hellknights stored the order's spare suits of armor and where they worked to repair their armor when it became damaged. The room is now badly ransacked, however, and the large fallen racks and scattered equipment make this entire area difficult terrain for Medium or Small creatures.

Creature: Several weeks ago, a gelatinous cube wandered up from the caverns below before the stairs linking this level to the caverns became clogged with rubble.

The strange ooze has been living here ever since, snacking on vandals, looters, and cultists who wander by without the proper defenses. The gelatinous cube lurks behind a pile of debris near the eastern end of the room, waiting for an unsuspecting PC to wander by so it can attack.

GELATINOUS CUBE

CREATURE 3

Pathfinder Bestiary 254

Initiative Perception +5

Treasure: The gelatinous cube has not had many meals recently, but it has managed to engulf an errant cultist who learned the hard way how dangerous this portion of the vaults are. After the PCs defeat the cube, they can claim all that remains of the cultist apart from a few undigested bones—a +1 *battleaxe*. (Consider changing this into a different weapon preferred by one of your PCs, if a battleaxe isn't a good fit for any of them.)

B5. EAST ARMORY

Moderate 2

Empty weapon racks line the walls of this room. Repair forges long abandoned and cold sit in a lonely row toward the back, along with a crude lean-to seemingly made from bits of rope and ripped leather.

This room once housed the Order of the Nail's spare weapons and other martial equipment, though most of the usable items are long gone.

Creatures: This room is slightly tidier than the West Armory (area B4), as it is the temporary domain of Pib and Zarf, two kobolds who have taken up residence here. They once lived in the vaults' eastern wing (area B11, specifically) in relative harmony with the Bumblebrashers, but the Cinderclaw cultists chased them out.

The kobolds are incredibly hungry, as they have been rationing the small amount of food they were able to take with them when they fled the eastern wing.

When the PCs enter this area, after a round or two, the kobolds rush at them, screeching, “We are dragons and we want your meats!”

Pib and Zarf are hungry, but they are also cowardly. Once one of the kobolds is reduced to half of their Hit Points or fewer, both kobolds attempt to surrender. If the PCs speak to them, Pib and Zarf reveal that they once lived in the eastern wing next to the goblins, but that the Cinderclaw cultists chased them from their home. The kobolds are indifferent towards the Bumblebrashers, who never bothered them but also weren’t their explicit allies.

Curiously, the kobolds are less angry about the fact that they’ve lost their homes than they are about the Cinderclaws’ refusal to take them seriously as actual dragons. Pib and Zarf are enraged about this insult, and as the PCs talk to them, the kobolds insist that they are mighty dragons to be respected and feared. They believe that the Cinderclaws, as dragon worshippers (or at least the kobolds’ rudimentary understanding of such) should be in awe of them. If the PCs humor this opinion and similarly denigrate the Cinderclaws, Pib and Zarf share details about the cultists in each of the rooms in the eastern wing. Further, if the PCs are sympathetic to the kobolds and succeed at a DC 17 Diplomacy check to Make an Impression, the kobolds agree to help the PCs against the Cinderclaws. How this help manifests is up to the GM, though it might come in the form of distracting the Cinderclaws, making outright attacks on the cult, trying to steal from them, or any other creative method the PCs might suggest.

PIB AND ZARF CREATURE 2

Kobold dragon mages (2;
Pathfinder Bestiary 213)

Initiative Perception +5

Resistances (Pib) poison 5, (Zarf)
fire 5

Treasure: There are no more functional weapons remaining in the racks here. However, if the PCs dig through the detritus for 10 minutes and succeed at a DC 15 Perception check, they find three jars of lesser alchemist’s fire.

XP Award: If the PCs secure the kobolds’ help, award XP as though they had defeated the creatures, plus an additional award of 30 XP.

B6. MASTER OF BLADES MODERATE 2

A broken bed frame, splintered drawers, and a smashed desk mark this chamber as a long-abandoned bedroom. Greasy tents and moldy piles of cloth reveal that someone has recently been squatting here.

This room was once reserved for the private quarters of the Order of the Nail’s senior-ranking Master of Blades, though it has long since been looted.

Creatures: This area is now home to two of the Cinderclaw cultists who became trapped in the vaults when the stairs in area **B1** collapsed. They are the boggards Krikk and Roak, and like the others on this floor, they are among the cult’s lowest-ranking members. These boggards are good at using their terrifying croaks to unnerve unsuspecting creatures—they and the other cultists in this wing of the vaults used this ability to chase out the resident Bumblebrasher goblins. However, the boggards are not terribly smart, and without the presence of their leader, Malarunk (who is trapped in the caverns below; see Chapter 4), they are growing restless and eager for a fight. As soon as Krikk and Roak see the PCs, they attack and fight to the death.

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Pib and Zarf

KRIKK AND ROAK

CREATURE 2

Boggard warriors (2; *Pathfinder Bestiary* 44)

Initiative Perception +8

Languages Boggard, Draconic

Special: If the PCs manage to capture either of the cultists, they find that the boggards are hateful creatures that taunt them even in the face of their own imminent deaths. Their voices are croaky and unsettling, and when the PCs begin to question them, their laughter rings out with a disgusting burping quality.

When the PCs begin to question the cultists, they say, “There are many Cinderclaws—many! We came through the glorious portal. We invade your lands! We dig into your homes! We destroy all! And when Malarunk unleash Dahak—glorious, glorious Dahak! You cannot stop Cinderclaws!” The boggards’ mention of the portal is a reference to Huntergate in the caverns below (see Chapter 4), which Malarunk hopes to restore to full functionality so that more cultists can pour into Iger. Their mention of digging to the town is a reference to the rather inept “tunnel” the low-ranking cultists have begun in area **B11**.

If the PCs push further, the boggards tell them that Malarunk is lurking below this level, and it’s clear to the PCs that there’s no Cinderclaw leader in this area. The boggards also tell the PCs that the cultists below soon will activate an elf gate called Huntergate, which they say will allow an overwhelming force of Cinderclaws from the Mwangi Expanse to pour into Iger and release Dahak into the world.

If the PCs are skeptical of the cultists’ claims and succeed at a DC 15 Perception check, they can tell that the boggards believe what they’re saying, but that it’s unlikely that the cultists on this level of the keep can accomplish much. However, the boggards have a terrified reverence for Malarunk—this foreshadows the final encounter of this adventure in Chapter 4.

Treasure: The Bumblebrasher goblins used the furniture in this room normally while living here, but the cultists smashed it all to bits and erected the greasy tents here once they chased the tribe away. The goblins escaped with most of their more useful possessions; however, each of the boggards possesses a dirty purse with 19 sp in it. Additionally, Krikk is in possession of an *onyx dog*, though he is unaware that the figurine is magical.

XP Award: For learning what the cultists know (whether in this encounter or another), award the party 120 XP.

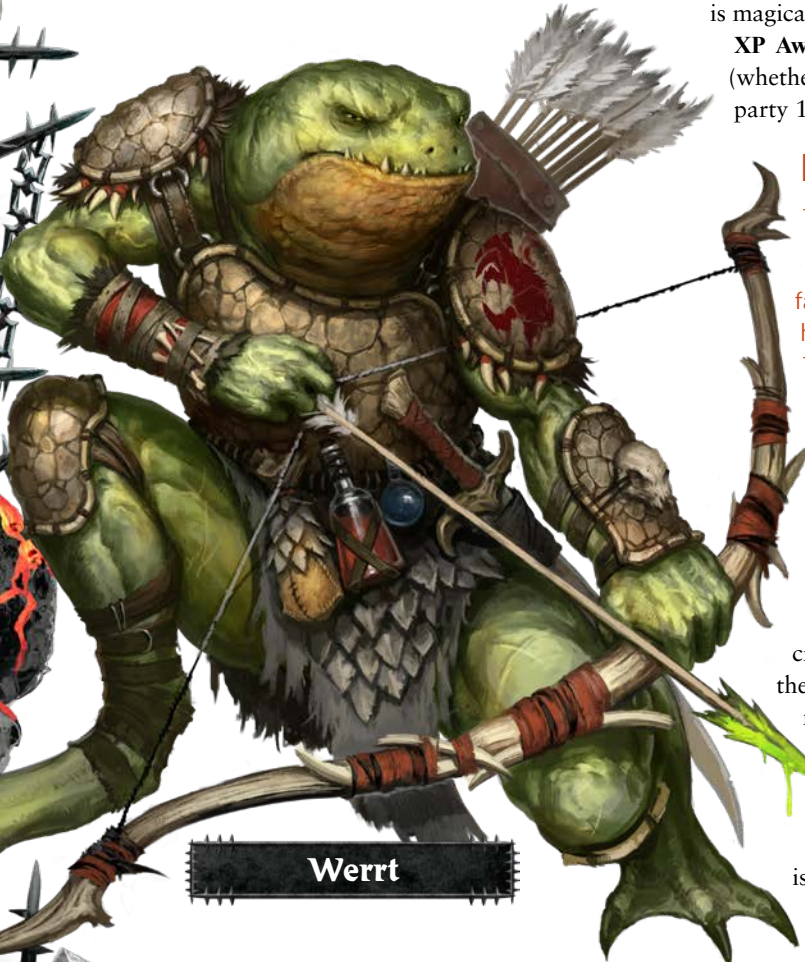
B7. ANTECHAMBER MODERATE 2

Once-fine seating made from mahogany and velvet has been broken to pieces and used to fashion crude shelters. To the north, a door is heavily barricaded with debris.

This area was once an antechamber for the Order of the Nail’s leader, or lictor, who held important meetings in his personal chambers (area **B8**). After the Hellknights left, the Bumblebrashers moved in, though the Cinderclaw cultists have since chased them out.

The door to the north is heavily but crudely barricaded to protect the cultists from the grizzly bear trapped there (see area **B8** for more). If the PCs stand next to the barricaded door, they can easily hear the angry roars of the bear behind it. The barricade has Hardness 10, 40 Hit Points, and a Broken Threshold of 20. The door behind it is unlocked.

Creatures: Three more Cinderclaw cultists have taken up residence here since



Werrt

chasing out the Bumblebrashers. One of them is a lanky boggard named Werrt, while the other two, Venak and Skorp, are violent simians known as charau-kas. The charau-kas hail from the Mwangi Expanse. Until relatively recently, they were minions of the Mwangi Jungle's self-proclaimed Gorilla King, but the defeat of their ruler several years ago threw their society into chaos. Numerous charau-kas sought out cults to join in the absence of a leader to follow; many fell in with the Cinderclaws. One of these was the priest Malarunk, who is now trapped in the level below. Venak and Skorp are of mixed feelings over this fact, for while they much prefer the company of their own kind over boggards, Malarunk is an abusive and cruel taskmaster. For now, the two charau-kas are quietly plotting their escape from the cult. When Venak, Skorp, and Werrt notice the PCs, Venak and Skorp hang back to throw debris while Werrt engages in melee. As soon as Werrt is defeated (or as soon as only one of the two charau-ka remain standing), the charau-kas give up and beg for mercy. Venak and Skorp can't speak Common, unfortunately, but if the PCs can establish communication, either charau-ka cultist can reveal the information about the cult detailed in area B6, hoping to be allowed to flee in exchange. The repercussions of letting them go, if any, are left to you to determine.

WERRT

CREATURE 2

Boggard warrior (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 44)

Initiative Perception +8

Languages Boggard, Draconic

SKORP AND VENAK

CREATURE 1

CE SMALL CHARAU-KA HUMANOID

Charau-kas (2)

Perception +6; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Draconic, Mwangi

Skills Athletics +6, Religion +4, Stealth +6

Str +3, **Dex** +3, **Con** +2, **Int** -1, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

AC 18; **Fort** +7, **Ref** +8, **Will** +4

HP 18

Equipment hide armor, sickle, whip

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ sickle +8 (agile, finesse, trip), **Damage** 1d4+3 slashing

Melee ♦ whip +8 (disarm, finesse, nonlethal, reach, trip), **Damage** 1d4+3 slashing

Ranged ♦ thrown debris +8 (deadly d6, thrown 20 feet), **Damage** 1d6+3 bludgeoning

Shrieking Frenzy ♦ (primal, transmutation); **Trigger** The charau-ka's turn begins. **Frequency** Once per hour;

Effect The charau-ka is quickened until the end of its turn, and can use the extra action to Stride or Strike. Due to its loud wailing while in a shrieking frenzy, the charau-ka can't speak and automatically critically fails all Stealth checks.

Thrown Weapon Mastery When a charau-ka throws a weapon, the weapon gains the deadly d6 weapon trait. When it throws an improvised weapon, it doesn't take the -2 penalty for using an improvised weapon, nor does it take the penalty for using that weapon to make a lethal attack instead of a nonlethal attack.

Treasure: The cultists have little of value beyond their gear, but if the PCs spend a few minutes digging around this area's debris and succeed at a DC 20 Perception check, they find a lesser comprehension elixir.

B8. LICTOR'S CHAMBERS

LOW 2

This stately bedroom looks like a horrific crime scene. Sprawled haphazardly everywhere are half-mauled humanoid bodies lying in pools of blood, splintered furniture, bed curtains and rugs torn to shreds, and massive piles of dung.

This bedroom once belonged to the Order of the Nail's lictor, and later housed the Bumblebrasher goblins, but it has since become a makeshift cage for a massive grizzly bear that lumbered up from the caverns below shortly after the Cinderclaw cultists infiltrated the area. The half-eaten bodies of four cultists are scattered about: two boggards and two charau-kas.

Creature: Big Bumble the grizzly bear was a poorly considered attempt by the Bumblebrashers to secure a clan mascot; they lured the bear back to their base, realizing it was a bad idea only when the bear ate some goblins. They barricaded the beast in the room and for several weeks tossed food in, calling it a win, but they were forced to leave Big Bumble behind when the Cinderclaws invaded. The Cinderclaws tried to kill the bear so they could loot the room, but when that attempt went poorly, the surviving cultists hastily repaired the barricade and cut their losses. Big Bumble has been eating what remains of the cultists left behind, and is just now finishing up the last of them; as the PCs enter, the bear looks up with a boggard leg hanging out of its mouth, drops the limb, then roars in anger as he charges.

Big Bumble is maddened by hunger and confusion, but if the PCs don't attack and keep away from the door once it's opened, the bear is indifferent toward them. There's a 50% chance each round it tries to squeeze through the door to rampage through

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the dungeon. A PC can convince the bear to ignore the PCs and move out of the room to attack cultists with a DC 18 Nature check to Command an Animal. A PC with wild empathy can Make an Impression on Big Bumble with the same DC, but gets a +2 circumstance bonus since the bear is so rarely treated kindly (or a +4 circumstance bonus if they also offer food). You can run a combat between the bear and cultists as you see fit, or simply assume that the bear kills half of the cultists in the north wing before it is itself defeated.

BIG BUMBLE

CREATURE 3

Grizzly bear (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 40)

Initiative Perception +10

Treasure: The cultists' bodies are so mauled they're barely recognizable, but if the PCs search them, they find a tanglefoot bag on one of the boggard corpses and a vial of alchemist's fire on a mangled charau-ka.

If the PCs search through the debris on the north side of the room, they find a collection of tattered books strewn among the wreckage. These books are damaged and don't have any inherent value, but they do contain reams of historical information about the Order of the Nail. If the PCs spend an hour or more reading, they learn any of the Order of the Nail's history outlined in the adventure background on page 5 that they didn't previously know without needing to attempt a skill check. Further, the PCs learn everything presented so far in this adventure about Alak Stagram's parents and accomplished Nail forebears, since they were all prominent and noteworthy members of the order, as outlined in areas **A10** and **B3**.

The books also contain key information about the ceremonial burials that have taken place in the crypts, found in the southern wing of these vaults. Notably, the books state that valuables were interred along with several past high-ranking Hellknights in the Sepulcher of the Nail (area **B12**) and the Hall of Lictors (area **B15**). The records note that the following honored Hellknights were interred in the sepulcher with possessions that were of personal significance to them: Mistress of Blades Xera Dalphine (*bracers of missile deflection*); Master of Blades Renten Viselli (*feather step stone*); Paravicar Yenesta (*monkey pin*); and Paralictor Loreen Sinelle (*doubling rings*). The records about the Hall of Lictors don't name the former leaders, but they do suggest that Order of the Nail tradition requires each lictor to be interred with a +1 *magic weapon* of the type they favored in life.

XP Award: If the PCs manage to get Big Bumble to fight the cultists, award them XP as if they'd defeated

the bear and all the cultists it defeats. Finding the information about the vaults earns the group 30 XP.

B9. LOUNGE

MODERATE 2

Pieces of furniture are still intact here, although hanging from the ceiling's rafters in the center of the room is a strange structure made from ripped and knotted curtains.

This area was once a living space for two Order of the Nail maralictors, whose personal chambers were nearby (areas **B10–B11**), and then it served as a space for the Bumblebrasher goblins. Recently, three charau-ka Cinderclaw cultists have torn the curtains from the bedposts in those areas and have used them to make a makeshift "trash-jungle."

Creatures: The three charau-ka cultists are hiding high up in the knotted curtains. If the PCs don't see them and move adjacent to the curtains, the charau-kas drop down to attack. They fight to the death, though if the PCs manage to capture one or more cultists, they relay the information presented in the Special section of area **B6**.

BRECKEZ, SCKREEP, AND ZORT

CREATURE 1

Charau-kas (3; page 37)

Initiative Perception +6

B10. NORTH CHAMBERS

Low 2

A steady dripping from the stone ceiling in this ruined bedroom has created a deep, bog-like puddle in the middle of the broken floor. Ringing the puddle are splintered pieces of wood stuck into the flagstones' rubble, rising up like bizarre foliage.

This damaged area, along with area **B11**, was once a stately bedroom for a high-ranking Order of the Nail maralictor. Its leaky roof made it unpleasant for the goblins but a perfect squatting zone for three boggard cultists. The puddle is 5 feet deep and is treated as a shallow bog.

Creatures: As soon as the PCs enter this area, they hear the subtle croaking of frogs—these are two boggards hiding submerged in the puddle. When a PC gets within 5 feet of the puddle, the boggards jump out and attack. They fight to the death, but can reveal the information presented in the Special section of area **B6** if the PCs capture any one of them.

GRETCH AND MROAP

CREATURE 1

Boggard scouts (2; *Pathfinder Bestiary* 44)

Initiative Perception +7

Treasure: If the PCs spend a few minutes wading and searching through the puddle in the center of the room and succeed at a DC 17 Perception check, they find an *invisibility potion* at the bottom.

B11. SOUTH MARALICTOR'S CHAMBERS

The furniture in this former bedroom is all askew, revealing a mountain-like pile in the center made up largely of garbage such as filthy cloth, chunks of rubble, and bent nails, though there are a few shining glints in the mix. On the southern wall, scrawled in a chunky substance in a childlike hand, are several words that might be gibberish.

Once a bedroom for a high-ranking Order of the Nail maralictor, up until recently this room was the lair of Pib and Zarf, the egomaniacal but inept kobolds now found in area **B5**. The kobolds fancied this area to be their treasure room, with the center pile of junk comprising their “dragon hoard.” The scrawling on the wall is written in Draconic and says, “BEWARE: MITEY DRAGONS!” The kobolds thought themselves fierce and invincible until the Cinderclaws showed up, disrespected them, and drove them out of their homes.

Treasure: There is little of actual value in the kobolds’ “hoard,” but if the PCs spend 20 minutes searching through it, they can find bits of dented coins and precious metals worth 15 gp total.

Special: If the PCs look at this room’s eastern wall, they notice that the stones here have been smashed and that a rudimentary tunnel stretches about 3 feet into the earth beyond. On the floor next to this pathetic tunnel are bent lengths of metal and pipe, as well as smaller pieces of metal that look like rusty spoons.

If the PCs spoke to any of the cultists in this wing’s other rooms, they recognize this as the “tunnel to town” the Cinderclaws are supposedly digging. Since creating this tunnel was clearly a bust—and indeed, most of the cultists digging it were slaughtered when the grizzly bear in area **B8** attacked—it’s apparent the cultists on this level are not a significant threat, though the same cannot be said for the larger portion of the cult found in the Mwangi Expanse.

B12. SEPULCHER OF THE NAIL

Four monuments loom in this dark and somber room,

each with prominent carvings of black-winged angels and various stylized pentagrams. Burnished plaques along the floor next to each sepulcher bear the names of those interred within, while atop the northern wall near the ceiling the words “Sepulcher of the Nail” are carved in prominent relief.

This is the honored final resting place of four high-ranking, highly important Hellknights in the Order of the Nail’s history: Mistress of Blades Xera Delphine, Master of Blades Renten Viselli, Paravicar Yenesta, and Paralictor Loreen Sinelle. Each completed an astoundingly noteworthy deed or made an incredible sacrifice on behalf of the knights to earn their place here, and each was interred with the highest honors and with personal magic items of significance to them.

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Charau-ka

VOZ'S VISIT

The necromancer Voz (page 80) paid a recent visit to the crypts, traveling here via a secret escape tunnel from Breachill to follow up on rumors she'd uncovered regarding Alseta's Ring. Upon her arrival, she performed a vile necromantic ritual to extract information from the bodies laid to rest in the crypt. She learned plenty (including the fact that a series of caves from the Breachill hinterlands served as a back door to the lower level), but at the same time the ritual also triggered an old necromantic ward the Order of the Nail placed on the crypts, causing several of the interred Hellknights in areas **B13**, **B14**, and **B15** (who had volunteered for such service) to rise as undead guardians. Voz was forced to flee from the unexpected opposition, but she had learned enough to bypass this level of the dungeon in her pursuit of Alseta's Ring, and the undead guardians in this area remain. See area **B15** for more information about the necromantic ward.

Treasure: As noted in area **B8**, each of these Hellknights' sepulchers contains their remains as well as a special magic item. Xera Dalphine's sepulcher contains *bracers of missile deflection*; Master of Blades Renten Viselli's contains a *feather step stone*; Paravicar Yenesta's contains a *monkey pin*; and Paralictor Loreen Sinelle's contains *doubling rings*. Each sepulcher is sealed tight, but can be opened with a successful DC 20 Thievery check to Pick a Lock or a DC 22 Athletics check to Force it Open.

Special: If Alak Stagram is traveling with the PCs and they decide to try to open the sepulchers, he winces, but doesn't stop them, especially if they carry the proof from area **B8** that there is useful treasure stored within. "Just don't desecrate the bodies," the armiger requests. "Much as it pains me to disturb these tombs, I understand that any magical treasures you find here will help your cause."

B13. HALL OF GRAVES MODERATE 3

Along the southern wall here is a large relief carving of a sunburst made of nails. Instead of typical flagstones, the floor is made up of headstones with names and dates. Curiously, six of the headstones seem to be pried open to reveal empty graves within.

This is another honored resting place for deceased Order of the Nail Hellknights, though it doesn't reflect quite as high a degree of honor as being interred in the

Sepulcher of the Nail does. The headstones here are just as heavy to pry open (see area **B12**), but none of the tombs contain treasure.

Creatures: When the necromancer Voz meddled with the vaults' dead and triggered the necromantic ward (see the Voz's Visit sidebar and area **B15** for more details), six of the bodies interred here rose as undead guardians. They linger here and immediately attack anyone who enters the room, save for those who openly wear Hellknight regalia, whom the undead attack only if they are themselves first attacked.

These undead consist of six animated skeletons—five skeleton guards and one clad in a partial suit of Hellknight plate (which functions as half plate armor). This skeletal Hellknight retains enough of its living memories and knowledge of strategy to direct the other five skeletons in combat—if it's destroyed, the other skeletons no longer flank enemies, coordinate their attacks on a single foe, or make Attacks of Opportunity.

Until the PCs investigate area **B15**, they're unlikely to realize why there are undead in the crypt. However, if Alak is traveling with the party, the surprising presence of undead guardians reminds him of a now-out-of-vogue method Hellknights used in the early days to ward their crypts against necromancy, and he can inform the PCs of the necromantic ward that seems to have been triggered. See area **B15** for more details on this ward.

SKELETAL HELLKNIGHT

CREATURE 2

UNIQUE LE MEDIUM SKELETON UNDEAD

Perception +7; darkvision

Languages Common, Infernal

Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +7

Str +4, **Dex** +2, **Con** +3, **Int** -1, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +1

Items +1 halberd, half plate

AC 20; **Fort** +9, **Ref** +8, **Will** +4

HP 25, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, unconscious

Attack of Opportunity ⤴

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ halberd +11 (reach 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d10+4 piercing plus Invoke Reckoning

Melee ♦ claw +10 (agile), **Damage** 1d6+4 slashing

Command Skeletons (divine, necromancy) The skeletal Hellknight can direct the actions of the nearby skeleton guards, commanding them to perform tactics such as flanking foes and focusing their attacks on specific targets. As long as the skeletal Hellknight is active and commanding the skeletons, they gain the Attack of Opportunity reaction.

Invoke Reckoning ⤴ (divine, enchantment, mental)

Trigger The skeletal Hellknight hits a foe with a Strike.

Effect The skeletal Hellknight causes the creature struck to endure the pain of an Order of the Nail's reckoning—a rite of mortification Hellknights of that order use to focus their minds. The creature struck feels as if nails are being driven into their body, and must succeed at a DC 17 Will save or be stunned 1 from the pain. On a critical failure, the pain manifests as actual puncture wounds, dealing an additional 2d6 points of piercing damage to the victim.

SKELETON GUARDS (5)

CREATURE -1

Pathfinder Bestiary 298

Initiative Perception +2

Alak and the Undead: If Alak hasn't been traveling with the PCs, he has already moved through this area and can be encountered again in area **B16**—note that the undead guardians of the area do not rise against him, as he is protected by openly wearing Hellknight regalia.

If Alak is traveling with the PCs, the undead still rise up as detailed above, but they do not attack him until he attacks them first. Alak will attack the undead and help the PCs defeat them only if his attitude toward the PCs is helpful; otherwise, he agonizes over the decision to fight his order's ancestral remains. In further battles against the undead, he won't hesitate to provide aid to the PCs, as long as he's at least friendly. After the fight, if the PCs begin prying open graves, Alak strongly discourages them from disturbing any more headstones after the first two efforts prove fruitless, and his attitude toward the PCs worsens by one step should they ignore him and continue to desecrate the graves.

B14. OSSUARY

MODERATE 3

Narrow stone walls filled with coffin-sized compartments stretch from the floor to the ceiling in this dark, claustrophobic chamber. Most of the compartments are occupied with shroud-covered bodies, though some of them are conspicuously empty.

Creatures: The triggering of the necromantic ward (see area **B15** and the Voz's Visit sidebar) resulted in the animation of four unusual undead monsters in this room—a set of hellcrowns. These haunted Hellknight helmets each rise up from compartments along the room's southern wall, and they immediately attack any intruders who don't openly wear Hellknight regalia. The hellcrowns fight until destroyed.

HELLCROWNS (4)

CREATURE 1

Page 90

Initiative Stealth +7

Treasure: Although few of these Hellknights were entombed with valuables, in some cases loved ones have left valuable mementoes here. If the PCs spend 30 minutes searching the ossuary and succeed at a DC 20 Perception check, they find a *wand of heal* (1st level), plus mundane rings, amulets, bracelets, and other trinkets worth 12 gp total.

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Skeletal Hellknight

B15. HALL OF LICTORS MODERATE 3

The secret door that provides access to this room can be discovered with a successful DC 20 Perception check.

Six looming, raised daises stretch from east to west in this chamber, each bearing a massive stone coffin with a carving of a fully armed and armored Hellknight lying in stately repose. Upon closer inspection, the details of the various weapons and minor variations in the armor of the figures distinguish these tombs. Two of the coffins loom ominously open. The east wall bears a complex series of inscriptions composed of faintly glowing pale blue runes.

This is the final resting place of several of the Order of the Nail's past lictors (leaders of the order). Six lictors were interred here; three of the name plates on the sepulchers are so old and tarnished that they're unreadable, but the other three are still legible and bear the names Lictor Serafina DiViri, Lictor Rexinald Harvenskein, and Lictor Yorick Mellano.

Creatures: As in area B13, undead guardians rose here to defend the room's contents, but Voz never encountered this particular horror—wights who were once the Lictors Serafina DiViri and Yorick Mellano. The two undead now stand ready to attack any intruders. As in area B14, the wights do not instigate attacks on anyone who openly wears Hellknight regalia, but otherwise fight until destroyed.

WIGHTS (2)

CREATURE 3

Pathfinder Bestiary 332

Initiative Perception +10

Treasure: As the PCs might have discovered from the books in area B8, Order of the Nail tradition dictates that former leaders are interred with a magic weapon of the type they favored in life. As such, three of the Hellknights here were interred with +1 *halberds* (two of these once contained bodies that are now animated as wights—these coffins are open and empty save for their halberds), one is interred with a +1 *morningstar*, one with a +1 *greatsword*, and one with a +1 *war flail*. The carvings on the tops of the coffins reflect which weapon is in which tomb. (You should consider swapping out some of the non-halberd weapons to match those favored by PCs in your group.)

The weapons are inside the coffins, however, and the PCs must open the other four lids to retrieve them. Opening each coffin requires a successful DC 20 Thievery check to Pick a Lock, or a successful DC 22 Athletics check to Force Open the lid. (If he's alongside them, again Alak Stagram winces, but understands the PCs' need for a good arsenal to face their foes.)

Necromantic Ward: The runes on the wall are a manifestation of the necromantic ward the Order of the Nail placed long ago. These runes can be interpreted with Identify Magic (DC 23, or DC 21 if the PC already witnessed reanimated wights); on a success, a character understands that the ward caused several bodies in the crypt to animate as undead guardians in response to an attempt by someone else to use necromancy to despoil the dead—a sort of necromantic “fight fire with fire” tactic. A successful DC 22 Society check confirms some Hellknight orders used this practice in the early days but most have long since abandoned it. No indication of who or what triggered the ward can be discerned, but the number of active undead in the crypts is apparent (there may be as many as 12, subtracting any the PCs have already defeated). Once all undead in the crypts (found in areas B13–B15) are destroyed, this glowing set of runes vanishes.

The ward can also be dismantled, but doing so is difficult and unlikely to be something the PCs can currently accomplish. A successful *dispel magic* against the ward (which functions as a 4th-level spell) destroys it. Otherwise, Thievery can be used to disarm the ward via Disable a Device (DC 23). If a critical failure sets off the ward, the character attempting to disable the ward takes 3d6 negative damage.

XP Award: If the PCs all wear Hellknight regalia and avoid the wights' attacks, award them XP as if they had defeated the wights in combat.

If the PCs undo the necromantic ward, all remaining undead in this wing are destroyed, their spirits released back to the Boneyard. In this case, award the PCs 120 XP, plus the full XP for each undead destroyed this way.

B16. VAULT OF THE NAIL

Rows of large, metal-and-stone lockboxes line the winding walls of this storeroom, as do occasional shelves and what look like filing cabinets intended for the storage of documents. The lockboxes hang ajar, having been opened and emptied long ago. A set of obvious tracks in the dusty floor suggest someone recently moved about in here. A pile of ashes and a few melted candle stubs lie atop a low table in the center of the room.

The tracks on the floor were left by Voz during her visit. No check is needed to note that they are present at the door to area B17, throughout the room (particularly near the central table), and also near the door to area B13. With a successful DC 15 Survival check to Track, a PC can piece together the mysterious visitor's movements—they entered from area B17 and

went to the center of the room where the ashes and melted candles are, before moving to the door to **B13**. At that point, the tracks retreat to area **B17**'s door—these tracks indicate the unknown person was running (Voz wasted no time fleeing when she looked into area **B13** and saw the undead rising as a result of the triggered necromantic ward).

An examination of the ashes and melted candles with a successful DC 20 skill check to Identify Magic reveals that someone likely performed some sort of necromantic ritual here to communicate with lingering spirits of the dead.

Alak's Heirloom: When the PCs enter this area, if he's not traveling with them, armiger Alak Stagram is here searching for his family's heirloom signet ring. If the PCs have not met him yet, they can converse with him as noted in area **A10**. If the PCs have met him before or he's traveling with them, Alak makes his way carefully around the vaults, looking in a few key places. After a few moments, he reverently pulls a small box out from a vault with a false bottom. He pulls a key from his belt, unlocks the box, and finds his family's signet ring placed carefully there on a bed of crushed velvet. The armiger slips the ring on a finger and is quiet for several minutes, though if the PCs attempt conversation, he smiles with wistful charm and thanks them softly for their part in helping him locate his heirloom. "I remember sitting on my father's lap and turning this ring on his finger when I was but a boy," the maralictor says, his voice solemn, rich, and deep. "Thank you for reuniting me with those memories, my friends. You have the Order of the Nail's gratitude—and mine."

At this point, Alak will continue to travel with the PCs throughout the citadel. However, once the PCs begin Chapter 4, the armiger takes his leave.

Without Alak's aid, discovering the ring in the false bottom requires a successful DC 25 Perception check, and a successful DC 22 Thievery check to unlock.

Treasure: Alak's heirloom ring is a non-magical silver and garnet piece of jewelry worth 16 gp. Apart from the ring, most everything else of value in this room was taken long ago, but if the PCs spend 10 minutes searching through the vault and succeed at a DC 20 Perception check, they find under loose papers on a shelf in the corner four magical items: a *scroll of darkness*, a *scroll of darkvision*, a *scroll of heal*, and a *scroll of magic missile*. A silver religious symbol of the goddess Alseta—two faces in profile—sits atop these scrolls like a paperweight. This religious symbol is non-magical, but finely crafted and worth 8 gp. Its presence in a Hellknight keep might confuse the PCs (as it does Alak if they ask him his opinion), but it was

kept here as a sort of key to bypass the guardian of area **D8** below.

XP Award: If the PCs help Alak retrieve his heirloom, award the party 120 XP.

B17. REGALIA STORAGE

Various storage racks and cabinets clutter this long, narrow space. Some are empty, though others still contain dusty banners with the Order of the Nail's sunburst insignia, stylized Asmodean paraphernalia, and other trappings clearly designed for formal funerals. Curiously, in the back of the room, a dirt-walled tunnel opens in the wall and stretches into the gloom; and a set of tracks leads from this tunnel to the door leading back into the vaults.

This small storage room was once used to hold important pieces of regalia used in formal Hellknight funerals conducted in the crypts, though most of the valuables here were taken with the Hellknights when they moved to Varisia.

Treasure: If the PCs spend 10 minutes looking through this room and succeed at a DC 15 Perception check, they find a large banner with tiny golden Nail insignias sewn into its patterns. The PCs can sell the full banner, which weighs 10 pounds, for 30 gp, or they can spend a few minutes pulling the insignias from the cloth; they can sell these for the same total amount.

Special: The tunnel that opens in the east end of the room was originally built as an escape tunnel by the Hellknights, and winds a mile underground all the way back to Breachill. A successful DC 20 skill check to Identify Magic made while examining the tunnel walls confirms that the tunnel was crafted via magic long ago. The far end of the escape tunnel leads to a hidden trap door in the basement floor of a dive bar called the Pickled Ear, located in a rundown and out-of-the-way part of Breachill. Voz Lirayne discovered the tunnel early in her pursuit of information about Alseta's Ring, but few in town know that it exists.

Traveling down this tunnel is fairly uneventful for the PCs, but it's reasonable for them to be cautious as they make their way down a mysterious path without knowing what lies ahead. When the PCs enter the tunnel, allow them a DC 17 Survival check to determine that the tunnel heads straight in the direction of Breachill. Allow them to attempt Perception checks to check for monsters, but regardless of the results, the route back to town is safe. Following the tunnel to Breachill kicks off the fourth and final chapter of this adventure.

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CHAPTER 4: BREACHILL'S SECRETS

Once the PCs have explored Citadel Altaerein, they should be intrigued by the escape tunnel to Breachill—and by the mysterious person who appears to have been using it. Asking around town won't reveal much, since the only person who knows about the tunnel is Voz (and she's no longer to be found in town at this point). The easiest way the PCs can learn more is to simply follow the tunnel back from Hellknight Hill. Doing so is a mile-long eerie (if ultimately uneventful) journey that ends at a small underground room with a single old wooden ladder leading up to a trap door in the ceiling. Clambering up the ladder and opening the trap door reveals to the PCs that they've entered the Pickled Ear, one of Breachill's taverns.

The Pickled Ear

Once the PCs travel the tunnel from area **B17**, they find that they have emerged from a hidden door in

the floor of a basement storeroom of the Pickled Ear, a rough-and-tumble tavern in a run-down part of Breachill. The Pickled Ear has several basement storerooms where the establishment keeps cleaning supplies, spare kegs of ale, ingredients for greasy but hearty food, and, yes, pickles of all types.

The Pickled Ear's basement storerooms aren't open to the public and are empty throughout the long business day, from 11 A.M. until 1 A.M., except for the occasional employee bustling in to retrieve supplies. They're more attended during the hours from 10–11 A.M., before the tavern opens, and from 1–2 A.M., just after the tavern closes. The storerooms are entirely abandoned—just like the rest of the tavern—between 2 A.M. and 10 A.M.

The PCs emerge in a storeroom where jars upon jars of pickles are kept. Pickled cucumbers, beets, radishes, onions, cauliflower, chicken's feet, and—

the tavern's specialty—pickled pig's ears line shelves along the walls. If the PCs emerge from the hidden door in the floor during the business day, about 30 minutes pass before a member of the waitstaff bustles in to retrieve a jar. In this case, the staff member assumes the PCs are drunks who have wandered into the "employees only" area mistakenly and rudely tries to shoo the PCs back into the common area, but the PCs should have no problem explaining the truth to the waitstaff, particularly once the tunnel is pointed out. If the PCs ask about the tunnel, the staff member has no knowledge of it, and if the PCs show them the trap door, they simply shrug and tell them to report it to Roxie if they're concerned. This is a reference to **Roxie Denn** (CN female human tavern keeper), the owner of the Pickled Ear.

If the PCs emerge into the store room while staff members are present but the bar is closed (from 10–11 A.M. and from 1–2 A.M.), several staff are in the room and demand to know what's going on. If the PCs emerge into the store room while the tavern is entirely abandoned, they can easily slink out of the room and tavern without being noticed.

SPEAKING WITH ROXIE

There are several ways the PCs might learn who has been using the secret tunnel from the Pickled Ear to Citadel Altaerein. The most obvious method is by speaking with Roxie, the tavern's owner, or by Gathering Information, but GMs should allow their players to be creative when coming up with ways to find out this information.

Talking to Roxie: Roxie is a tall, rough-spoken woman, but she's not outright rude in her denial of any knowledge about the tunnel's existence. However, if the PCs succeed at a DC 18 Perception check, they can tell that Roxie's not quite being forthright in this statement.

Roxie's attitude toward the PCs starts out as indifferent, but if the PCs improve it to at least friendly, she'll tell them what she knows. In addition to using Diplomacy to Make an Impression (DC 20), there are a few ways to improve Roxie's attitude toward the PCs. The tavern proprietor shares that her regular crowd, while reliable, frightens off new customers with their reputation for drunken rowdiness and intimidation. If the PCs agree to organize an event—whether it's an arm-wrestling contest, a drinking contest, a live music performance, or otherwise—to attract new customers and such an event actually takes place, Roxie's attitude improves to friendly. The PCs can organize and execute an event like this in one day, as it's not difficult to pull in passersby on the street to attend. (As long as the event happens, Roxie will share the information below with the PCs; it doesn't matter how well the event goes or whether any of the PCs are the winners of any contests they might devise.)

If Roxie is friendly, she confides to the PCs that Voz Lirayne, the half-elven proprietor of the Reliant Book Company, a local bookshop, paid her handsomely to keep quiet about the tunnel's existence as well as Voz's comings and goings. Voz is a little strange, Roxie admits, and dabbles in what she calls "weird magic, like with skulls and bones and stuff." Roxie knows nothing else about Voz's plans, but is not surprised to hear that they might be nefarious. Roxie can direct the PCs to the Reliant Book Company, which is both the location of Voz's shop and where the half-elf lives.

Gathering Information: The PCs might want to chat with the regulars in the Pickled Ear and elsewhere to find out whether anyone has seen

CHAPTER 4 SYNOPSIS

The PCs determine that Voz Lirayne has been using the escape tunnel that leads from the crypts of Citadel Altaerein back to Breachill, then investigate her bookshop, only to learn she's relocated to an abandoned military station in the wilds. There, they must contend with the bandits that Voz hired to protect the outpost and her trail, all while staying on the necromancer's heels. With Voz defeated, the PCs are free to explore the cave complex that leads to the lowest level of Citadel Altaerein—and the elf gate ring that both the necromancer Voz and the sinister Cinderclaw cult want to restore, each for their own nefarious ends. As they near Alseta's Ring, the PCs face Malarunk, the Cinderclaw cultist who is working to reactivate Huntergate and open the way for the rest of his cult to invade!

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someone suspicious regularly emerging from the pickle storeroom or tavern, or even inquire about Voz. Allow the PCs to spend as much time Gathering Information in this way as they like. If they spend 2 hours, allow them to attempt one Diplomacy check; if they spend 4 hours, two Diplomacy checks; and if they spend all day, four Diplomacy checks. The DC is 16.

On a success, the PCs learn that a suspicious-looking half-elf has been regularly emerging from the back rooms of the Pickled Ear. She's not a regular patron, and she and Roxie, the tavern's owner, have occasionally shared conspiratorial glances.

On a critical success, the PCs learn this half-elf is Voz Lirayne, owner of The Reliant Book Company, and find out the location of her shop. She hasn't been seen in town for the past several days—so she might be up to something!

XP Award: For determining the link to Voz and the Reliant Book Company, grant the party 60 XP.

The Reliant Book Company

The Reliant Book Company is a small bookshop that buys and sells rare tomes, and therefore is of specific interest to only a few individuals. The bookshop is small, obscure, and tucked into an out-of-the-way corner of Breachill, so by design it receives little foot traffic, and for good reason—its owner, operator, and chief manuscript expert is Voz Lirayne, a half-elf who is secretly a cultist of Norgorber. Voz is also a necromancer, though she takes pains to hide her dabbling in the dark arts from prying eyes.

Voz typically conducts her shop's workload alone, although her obsessive research into Alseta's Ring and her time-consuming correspondence with the Scarlet Triad (see below) has forced her to recently take on an apprentice to attend to the shop's daily business. That apprentice is Calmont, the villainous young man who set off events at the beginning of this adventure. When Voz learns about Calmont's arson, she immediately considers him to be fired and, in an attempt to distance herself from his recent criminal actions, tells anyone who asks that she had already fired him a few days ago.

When the PCs come to the Reliant Book Company, they find the shop locked up tight and abandoned, since Voz has left town by this point. The shop's front door is locked (Thievery DC 20 to Pick the Lock), as are its three windows (Thievery DC 20 to open them), each of which is on a different wall of the four-sided structure. If the PCs can't open either the door or a window, they can always smash through one of them (DC 16 Athletics check to Force Open, or Hardness 3, 12 HP, 6 BT). The store's secluded location means that attempts to Pick a Lock won't be noticed even during

the day, but attempts to Force Open a door or window without attracting notice require a DC 25 Stealth check; on a failure, a passerby comes to investigate in 2d4 rounds. Law-abiding PCs might seek the aid of the town council in getting into the shop. Securing this aid is actually quite simple, provided the PCs are still in good standing with Greta and the other councilors—simply presenting their evidence about Voz and succeeding at a DC 18 Diplomacy check is enough to gain permission to investigate the closed-up shop. No skeleton key for the shop exists, but the PCs are given permission to force entry into the building as long as a town representative is present during the search to ensure that the PCs don't take advantage of the situation to loot the place (although if the PCs managed a critical success on the Diplomacy check, they are allowed to search without such supervision).

Once the PCs are inside the shop, they find that it has three primary areas: a public book display and merchandise area, a room with a sign that says "Staff Only" (this is Voz's research room), and Voz's personal chambers.

If the PCs investigate the public book display and merchandise area, they find shelves upon shelves of old books written in myriad languages. At the front of the room is a counter with a ledger of sales as well as an empty till box (Voz took all of the funds from this box when she left town). The PCs can examine the ledger, but they see nothing strange in it beyond the names of locals, boring-sounding names of books bought and sold, and reasonable prices connected to the transactions. Only one of the final entries is of interest—a few days before this adventure began, Voz notes the purchase of a magical parchment that could be used to summon a fire mephit, along with a note next to this entry, dated the day before this adventure began, indicating the magic parchment had gone missing. (This was the parchment Calmont stole to conjure the fire mephit the PCs fought at the start of the adventure.)

Voz's Research Room

This room is marked with a sign reading "Staff Only."

Hazard: The door to Voz's research room is closed and unlocked, though it is cleverly trapped.

SPIKED DOORFRAME

HAZARD 4

MECHANICAL TRAP

Stealth DC 25 (trained)

Description Spikes lance out of the doorframe to skewer anyone who attempts to open the door.

Disable Thievery DC 20 (trained) to deactivate a trigger built into the door's handle

AC 21; **Fort** +12, **Ref** +8

Hardness 11; **HP** 44 (BT 22); **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage

Spikes ♦ (attack); **Trigger** The door is opened.

Effect The trap makes an attack against the creature that opened the door.

Melee spikes +17; **Damage** 4d6+3 piercing

Once the PCs have accessed Voz's research room, they find the chamber in complete disarray, as Voz left town in a hurry once she realized Calmont was causing trouble and the PCs were going to investigate the Citadel.

Clues: If the PCs spend 20 minutes searching the room or succeed at a DC 20 Perception check, they notice some notes on the cluttered desk that Voz forgot to destroy or take with her when she left town. These notes are scribbled in a rushed hand, but clearly read, "Aha! Entrance to Alseta's Ring—Guardian's Way."

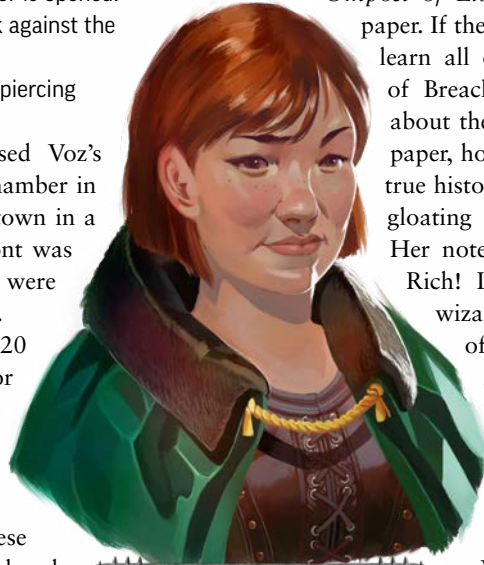
A successful DC 17 Society or appropriate Lore check reveals that Guardian's Way is the name of a long-abandoned military outpost that was used during the Goblinblood Wars (any NPC in Breachill also knows this information, if the PCs decide to ask others about it). Any PC who succeeds at a DC 22 Society or Lore check knows that the location of Guardian's Way is about 6 miles northwest of town in a wooded enclave. The station's location is also general knowledge, if the PCs choose to ask anyone around town, as is the fact that the outpost consists of three treetop observation platforms in addition to a single ground-level building, all located in a clearing in a heavily wooded area.

XP Award: For discovering the link to Guardian's Way, grant the PCs 60 XP.

Voz's Personal Quarters

Unlike Voz's research room, the half-elf's personal quarters are not trapped, but the door is closed and locked (DC 20 Thievery).

Upon entering Voz's bedroom, they find an untidy living space that reflects its owner's rush to grab a few supplies and leave town for Guardian's Way. The bed is unmade, a modest chest of drawers has been ransacked, the wardrobe is missing about half its contents, and a small desk in the corner is covered with miscellaneous personal effects such as archivist's gloves, dented reading glasses, and several alarmingly large balls of lint.



Roxie Denn

Clues: Next to the disheveled bed is a small nightstand, on which lies a book titled *Breachill, Outpost of Liberty* and several loose leaves of paper. If the PCs page through the book, they learn all of the perfectly sanitized history of Breachill, as presented in the section about the town on page 62. The leaves of paper, however, are Voz's research into the true history of the town, peppered with her gloating and darkly gleeful commentary. Her notes on this material include, "Ha! Rich! Idiot humans trusting that lying wizard," and "The fools put up a statue of that duplicitous charlatan—hilarious!" If the PCs read Voz's notes, they learn the real history of Breachill, as presented in the article "Breachill, Outpost of Secrets" on page 64, with one notable bit of misinformation: Voz never discovered that Lamond Breachton was Mengkare in disguise. Her research suggests he was nothing

more than an egomaniacal wizard who was trying to build a society of servants to appease his needs, and when he failed, he wiped the townsfolk's memories before helping them establish Breachill. That he did so out of a sense of guilt, though, Voz got right—her notes here include commentary like, "Fool should have just left them to die—guilt gets you nothing!" The research also indicates that Voz has hit nothing but dead ends in trying to find out what happened to Lamond Breachton after he left the area—she suspects he is long dead, though.

Treasure: If the PCs look further around the room, 20 minutes of searching or a successful DC 22 Perception check reveals a stash of scrolls hidden behind the remaining clothes in the wardrobe. The scrolls are *acid arrow*, *false life*, *obscuring mist*, and *touch of idiocy*.

XP Award: For learning about Breachill's secret history, grant the party 100 XP.

Guardian's Way

Twenty years ago, the Goblinblood Wars raged and vicious goblins and hobgoblins poured from all corners of Isger's foothills to slaughter humans, claim territory, and burn any villages they found. Many of the goblinoid hordes were overwhelming in number but lacked any structure or leadership, but some smaller groups benefitted from the brilliant charge of shrewd hobgoblin commanders. During the height of the wars, the clearing that became known as Guardian's

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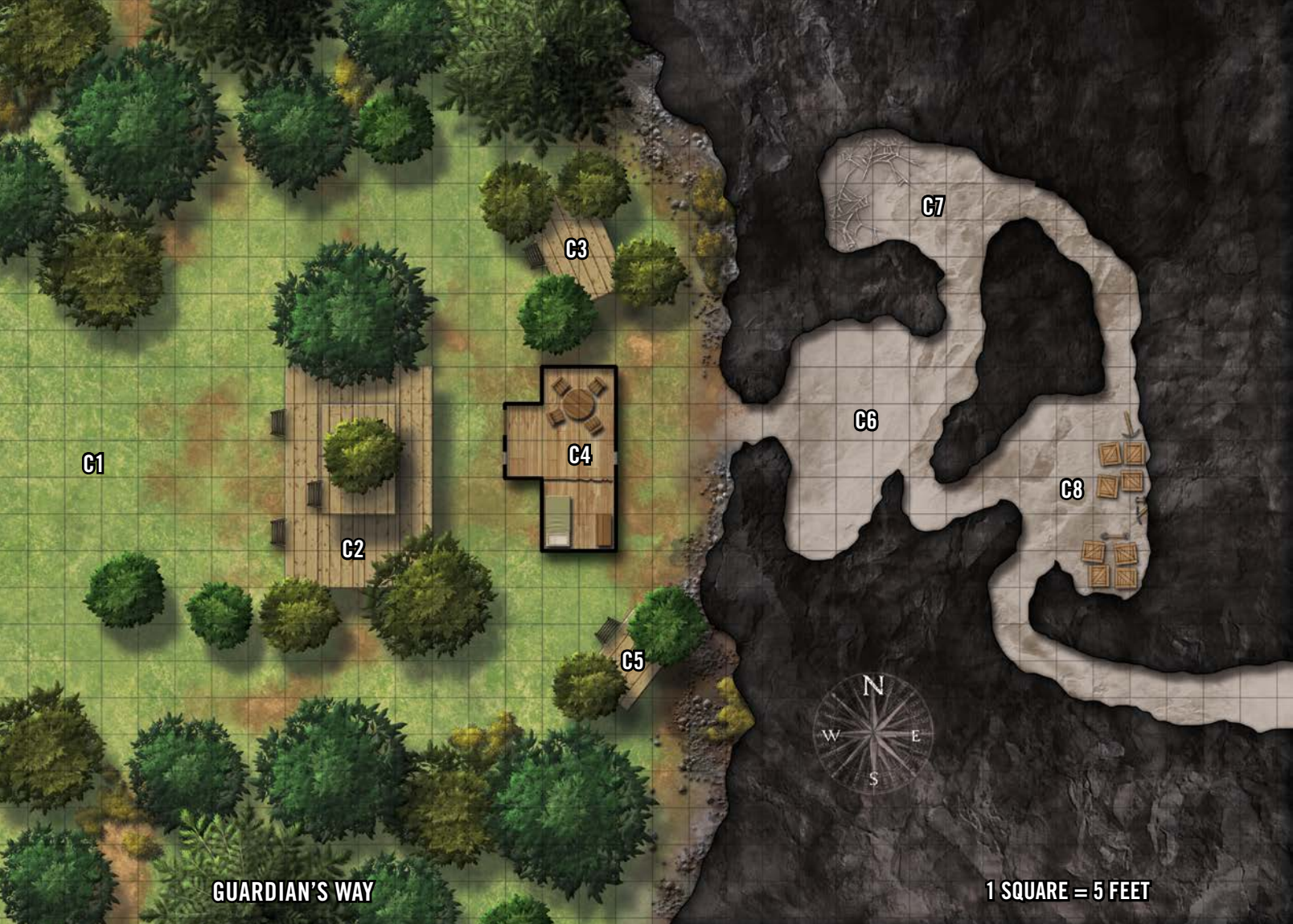
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GUARDIAN'S WAY

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

Way was one major place where goblinoids emerged to muster their numbers and attack the settlements beyond, including Breachill.

Located about 6 miles northwest of town, Guardian's Way was once a heavily fortified outpost built to try to stem the tide of goblinoids before they could rampage into more populated areas beyond. Companies of elite human soldiers lived and fought here, and their bravery saved many lives during the 4 years of conflict. However, 18 years ago, the wars ended and there was no longer a military need for soldiers to live here in isolation, and so Isger's military abandoned the station. The military left the complex's four structures intact, though, and over the years, the out-of-the-way station became a haven for bandits, monsters, and other troublemakers in the wilderness.

Very recently, the station became the home to a mercenary band called the Bloody Blades, led by one Dmiri Yoltosha, a wily hobgoblin commander. Dmiri didn't serve in the Goblinblood Wars, but she grew up hearing the grand and vicious stories of family members who did, and so she carries a burning hatred

for the humans of Isger who she believes unfairly robbed her kin of victory.

When Voz Lirayne arrived in the area to explore the nearby caverns in hopes of finding Alseta's Ring underneath Citadel Altaerein, she found the mercenaries camping here and hired them to occupy the station and make sure no one followed her into the caves.

THE BLOODY BLADES

The mercenary band called the Bloody Blades consists of five half-orcs led by a hobgoblin named Dmiri Yoltosha. Voz has alerted the mercenaries that there's a strong chance do-gooders will come by, and areas C2–C5 proceed as detailed in their individual entries. If the PCs have been particularly obvious or particularly subtle in their activities, though, adjust the encounters here as follows.

Note that if the PCs tackle all of the Bloody Blades at once, the resulting encounter is an Extreme one for 3rd-level characters.

Overt Heroics: If the PCs confronted Voz in person

already, are obvious about the Bloody Blade's intentions toward the camp, or are returning to make a new assault after they retreated from a first attack previously, the Bloody Blades don't waste time talking—they attack the PCs on sight. From the hours of 8:00 P.M. to 8:00 A.M., guard shifts at area C2 last for 5 hours, with two mercenaries on duty while the others sleep.

Subtle Heroics: If the PCs have avoided contact with Voz, approach the camp within a week of first visiting the Reliant Book Company, and haven't assaulted the camp before, then the Bloody Blades are unprepared and take a -4 penalty to Perception checks until they realize the PCs are here to cause trouble. One of the five half-orcs stands guard during the night shift.

Bloody Blade Tactics: Once the alarm's raised, the Bloody Blades use their shortbows during the start of a fight, firing on the PCs as soon as they come into view. Dmiri remains inside area C4 but observes the battle through that structure's narrow wall gaps, and she steps out to join the fight as soon as one of the Bloody Blades is defeated, or as soon as any PC attempts to enter area C4 or C6. If the PCs defeat the half-orcs, Dmiri retreats to area C6 to make a last stand while calling to Voz in area C8 to come to her aid.

Interrogations: If the PCs manage to capture Dmiri alive, she initially refuses to talk or give any information about Voz, though if the half-elf's name comes up, a PC who succeeds at a DC 15 Perception check notices her glance toward the entrance to the cave complex (area C6). If a PC gets her cooperation through Diplomacy (DC 21) or Intimidation (DC 19), she admits that Voz can be found in the caves, although she attempts to use Deception to guide the PCs toward area C7 and the monster that dwells there if she can.

The Bloody Blade half-orcs are more talkative if captured, and eagerly tell the PCs that a half-elf hired them to guard the cave complex located on the eastern side of this area so she could use it to flee the region. Further, they say that the half-elf mentioned that she might camp in the caves while she completed some final research, before she heads off to claim what she called her "great reward."

Bloody Blade Bounties: A successful DC 18 Society check reveals that the Bloody Blades are a regional small-time mercenary bands known for taking part in highway robbery and other disreputable endeavors. If Armiger Alak Stagram is still traveling with the PCs, he realizes this automatically and reveals the information to the party. If any Bloody Blades are captured alive and brought back to Breachill, they're held until they can be transported west to Isgar's capital, Elidir, for sentencing. If they're all slain, proof of their death can be obtained by either hauling the bodies back to town or leaving them here

to be identified by the authorities later. In any event, the PCs will receive bounties once paperwork is processed in Elidir, about 1 week after the Bloody Blades' capture or defeat is reported. For each live half-orc mercenary, the party earns 10 gp, and for delivering Dmiri alive for justice, the PCs earn 50 gp. A slain member of the Bloody Blades earns only half the bounty.

C1. THE OUTPOST CLEARING

The thick forest gives way to a meadow, where three sturdy outposts have been built in the trees. A fourth building stands on the ground in the meadow's center. Behind it, a vine-covered rocky cliff rises up fifty feet to a barren bluff above.

Make sure you're familiar with all of the occupants of area C2–C5 before proceeding with this set of encounters, as once they notice the PCs, chances are high that all four areas' inhabitants join the fray!

C2. CENTRAL WATCHTOWER LOW 3

The lower portion of this large, two-tier wooden platform is supported twenty feet off the ground by the trunk and branches of three large trees. A pair of rope ladders provides access to the platform's lower tier, while another rope ladder provides access to the upper one, ten feet above. The branches of the central tree hang down low, obscuring the contents of both platforms.

The rope ladders can easily accommodate Medium creatures. A creature can use 3 Interact actions to pull up a ladder, denying access to those below, but lowering a raised ladder takes only 1 Interact action.

The upper platform holds three bedrolls—this is where three of the mercenaries sleep. A brass bell, which hangs from a branch near the central ladder leading to the upper platform, can be rung as a single Interact action to raise the alarm.

Creatures: Three of the Bloody Blades—Coulsen, Spiro, and Mariel—keep watch here during the day. At night, the guards watch in shifts, each one keeping watch for 4 hours while the other two sleep. If the mercenaries notice the PCs approaching, Coulsen and Spiro use Stealth to hide amid the branches hanging down over the tree platform while Mariel steps forth to stand near the alarm bell and warn the PCs that they're trespassing and should turn back immediately. If the PCs try to talk to Mariel, they have one chance to attempt a Diplomacy check or Intimidation check at DC 16—on a success, she calls out to Dmiri to come speak to the PCs. Otherwise, if the PCs don't turn back

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(or if they approach closer), Mariel rings the alarm bell and the mercenaries attack.

BLOODY BLADE MERCENARIES (3) CREATURE 1

NE MEDIUM HALF-ORC HUMAN HUMANOID ORC

Human (half-orc) ranger 1

Perception +6

Languages Common, Orcish

Skills Acrobatics +6, Athletics +7, Intimidation +2, Nature +4, Stealth +6, Survival +4, Thievery +6

Str +4, **Dex** +3, **Con** +1, **Int** +0, **Wis** +1, **Cha** -1

Items longsword, shortbow (20 arrows), studded leather, 15 sp

AC 18; **Fort** +6, **Ref** +9, **Will** +4

HP 19

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ longsword +9 (versatile P), **Damage** 1d8+4 slashing

Ranged ♦ shortbow +8 (deadly 1d10, range increment 60 feet, reload 0), **Damage** 1d6 piercing

Hunt Prey ♦

Hunted Shot ♦ (*Pathfinder Core Rulebook* 171)

Precision The first time the mercenary hits their hunted prey in a round, they deal 1d8 additional precision damage.

C3. NORTHERN PLATFORM TRIVIAL 3

Four smaller trees support this wooden platform ten feet off the ground. A rope ladder hangs from the side to the ground below.

The ladder leading up to this platform functions the same as those in area C2.

Creature: A single half-orc named Aleeson stands guard here during the day, and he generally sleeps here at night unless the camp is on high alert. He remains hidden and thus uses Stealth for initiative.

BLOODY BLADE MERCENARY

CREATURE 1

See above.

Initiative Stealth +6

C4. OLD SUPPLY SHACK

LOW 3

This old log cabin has a gently sloped shingled roof and a single door set in its western face. There are no windows in the walls, which are crusted with patches of moss.

With a successful DC 18 Perception check, a PC notes that while there are no windows in the building's walls, several narrow gaps at eye level between the wall's logs would function perfectly as peepholes through which anyone inside could keep an eye on the surroundings.

This building was once used by Isgar's soldiers to store supplies, but nowadays it's used as personal quarters for the bandits' leader, Dmiri Yoltosha. A rickety, round table on the north side of the room within is used for meals, while Dmiri's bed and footlocker sit beyond a ratty curtain along the southern wall.

Creature: The leader of the Bloody Blades, a hobgoblin named Dmiri Yoltosha, spends most of her time in this old shack. Once she hears an alarm or the sound of combat, she watches through gaps in the walls and is ready to join the fray as detailed above under "The Bloody Blades."

Dmiri Yoltosha

DMIRI VOLTOSHA

CREATURE 4

UNIQUE LE MEDIUM GOBLIN HUMANOID

Female hobgoblin ranger 4

Perception +14, darkvision

Languages Common, Goblin

Skills Acrobatics +10, Athletics +9, Deception +5, Nature +7, Stealth +10, Survival +7, Thievery +10

Str +3, **Dex** +4, **Con** +1, **Int** +0, **Wis** +1, **Cha** -1

AC 22; **Fort** +10, **Ref** +12, **Will** +9

HP 52

Items composite shortbow (20 arrows), dagger, key to chest (see Treasure), +1 leather armor, +1 striking rapier

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ rapier +13 (deadly 1d8, disarm, finesse), **Damage** 2d6+3 piercing

Melee ♦ dagger +12 (agile, finesse, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+3 piercing

Ranged ♦ composite shortbow +12 (deadly 1d10, range increment 60 feet, reload 0), **Damage** 1d6+1 piercing

Ranged ♦ dagger +12 (agile, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+3 piercing

Flurry Dmiri's multiple attack penalty against her hunted prey is -3 (-2 with an agile weapon) on her second attack and -6 (-4 with an agile weapon) on her third or subsequent attacks.

Hunt Prey ♦

Hunter's Aim ♦♦ (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 172)

Twin Parry ♦ (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 172)

Twin Takedown ♦ (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 171)

Treasure: When the Bloody Blades took up residence here, they gathered what treasure remained behind in this building and secured much of it in a chest Dmiri keeps near her bed. This chest is locked—without the key she carries, a successful DC 25 Thievery check is required to open it. Inside is a 50-foot length of rope, a pair of grappling hooks, four *lesser healing potions*, and an *everburning torch*. In addition, Voz's payment of 400 sp to the Bloody Blades still sits in a silk pouch here—Dmiri uses these funds to pay her team of mercenaries weekly, and hopes to keep for herself what remains once this assignment is over (something Voz has promised won't be much longer than a few more weeks).

C5. SOUTHERN PLATFORM TRIVIAL 3

Four smaller trees support this wooden platform ten feet off the ground. A rope ladder hangs from the side of the ground below.

This platform is identical to the other one (area C3).

Creature: A half-orc mercenary named Trenk stands

guard here; his tactics are the same as his counterpart in area C3.

BLOODY BLADE MERCENARY

CREATURE 1

Page 50

Initiative Stealth +6

C6. CAVE ENTRANCE

A thick sheet of mossy vines hangs along the side of this hilltop, which somewhat conceals the entrance to these caves. A successful DC 15 Perception check is required to notice the cave entrance at a distance of farther than 10 feet from the entrance—at close quarters, though, the cave mouth is obvious.

This cavern has a layer of dirt strewn about its floor, soaked muddy in places by moisture and disturbed, it would appear, by the passage of feet. Two tunnels lead farther in—one to the north, and another to the south.

The footprints on the floor were left by Voz, but they're somewhat obscured. A successful DC 15 Survival check to Track the prints confirms they were left by a Medium humanoid and head toward the southern exit—no tracks lead north. On a critical success, the tracker can tell that the tracks were likely left by a human, or perhaps a half-elven, woman.

This cave, as well as the neighboring chambers (areas C7–C8) have 15-foot-high ceilings and are unlit.

C7. TIXITOG LAIR

LOW 3

The corners of this cavern are filled with thick strands of spider webs. In the center of the western wall, a pouch of thick webbing trembles in occasional vibration. A thin stream of minerals drips slowly from the center of the ceiling, slicking the floor here and creating treacherous footing.

The webbing all along the northwestern and southwestern walls is incredibly sticky. Any creature who ends their turn adjacent to the webbing (with the exception of the tixitog; see the Creatures section below) must succeed at a DC 16 Reflex saving throw or spend an action on their next turn pulling themselves free.

The trembling pouch of webbing in the middle of the western wall is actually an egg mass that's about to hatch into a spider swarm (see the Creatures section).

Creatures: This cave is the home of a strange creature known as a tixitog. This spider-like aberration tried to infiltrate the hunting spider lair in area D1 only to be driven away, then decided to make her home here. Occasionally, the tixitog creeps into the larger

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spider nest to steal morsels of food and other bits that interest her.

Recently, the spider-obsessed creature absconded with a large egg sac of spiderlings, which she has embedded into the webs in the middle of the western wall. If the PCs move adjacent to that space, the spiders hatch, unleashing a spider swarm.

Rather hungry and thinking the PCs might make an easy meal, the tixitog awaits the PC's arrival from her hiding place on the ceiling near the cave's center. If two or more PCs enter the area, the creature drops down and attacks. She can trigger the egg mass to hatch with an Interact action if she's adjacent to it. If the PCs reduce her to 20 Hit Points or fewer, though, the creature might surprise them by attempting to surrender, speaking in a weirdly chittering voice. If the PCs question the tixitog, she introduces herself as Balka and begs to be let go—promising the PCs her treasure in payment for their mercy. She also warns them about the “unpleasant spiders” who live deeper in the caves and seem to be under the influence of a “strange spider lady” (this is a reference to Renali in area D2). Asked about Voz, the tixitog eagerly points the PCs south toward area C8, noting that she's come to an agreement of sorts with her: “I don't bother her and she doesn't bother me.”

BALKA

CREATURE 3

Female tixitog (page 91)

Initiative Stealth +10

SPIDER SWARM

CREATURE 0

Pathfinder Bestiary 306

Initiative Perception +4

Treasure: In the cavern's northeastern corner, webbing covers a large pile of bones. This is refuse from Balka's most recent meals, and the bones are largely those of small animals who wandered nearby. However, if the PCs spend 10 minutes digging through the pile and succeed at a DC 20 Perception check, they notice a small, half-chewed humanoid corpse among the mix. This is the body of an adventurer who Balka has recently snacked on—an unfortunate gnome who fell asleep next to his party's campfire while supposedly

on watch. On his body is a suit of +1 *splint mail* and a +1 *returning striking starknife*.

C8. VOZ'S CAMP

SEVERE 3

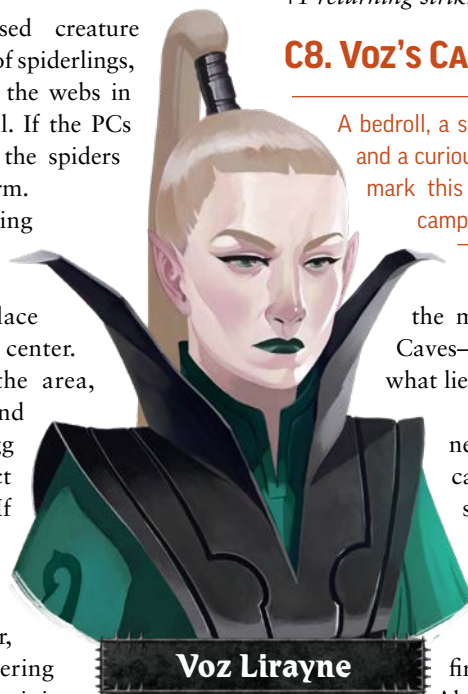
A bedroll, a small fire, a stack of books and papers, and a curious array of equipment covered in a tarp mark this as a spot where someone has been camping for several days.

The tunnel leading south off the map leads toward the Goblinblood Caves—see page 54 for more details of what lies beyond.

Creatures: Voz Lirayne, a half-elven necromancer, has been using this cavern as a safe place to stay while she plotted how to access Alseta's Ring, since her Bloody Blades mercenaries patrol in the clearing and she managed to arrange a truce with the tixitog. Since she first discovered this path to Citadel Altaerein a few days ago, she's been making periodic forays into the length of caverns between here and Citadel Altaerein, but progress has been slow, as she's had to deal with several pockets of vermin and other cave denizens along the way. When the PCs first confront her here, she's cleared the path all the way to the spider lair in area D1 and has just recovered fully from her latest fight with a nest of cave centipedes.

Regardless of how the PCs enter this area, Voz has likely heard the sounds of combat in the meadow outside and has readied herself for a fight. She positions herself in an advantageous spot to hit the PCs with offensive spells as soon as they enter the area, and she has two undead minions already at her beck and call. Voz stays out of melee for as long as possible, hitting the PCs with area-of-effect spells and staying as mobile as she can to avoid taking damage from the heroes' ranged attacks and spells. Her skeletal champions bear down on the PCs and try to flank them if possible, grouping them together to make Voz's area-of-effect spells hit as many PCs as possible.

If the PCs manage to incapacitate or capture Voz instead of killing her, see her entry on page 80 for additional information on presenting her character. If Alak is with the PCs, the armiger volunteers to take her into custody and escort her back to Breachill to face her crimes in court; otherwise, it's up to the PCs to decide what to do with her if she's captured alive.



VOZ LIRAYNE

CREATURE 5

Page 81

Initiative Perception +7

SKELETAL CHAMPION

CREATURE 2

Pathfinder Bestiary 298

Initiative Perception +8

SKELETON GUARD

CREATURE -1

Pathfinder Bestiary 298

Initiative Perception +2

Treasure: In addition to Voz's gear, she also carries a knapsack containing her journal and papers—which includes her correspondence with the Scarlet Triad. The correspondence doesn't make it clear exactly what sort of organization the Scarlet Triad is, but the group promises to sponsor Voz's plans to found an assassination guild and necromancy laboratory in the basement of Citadel Altaerein. Before they'll initiate this patronage and proved her support, though, the Scarlet Triad correspondent tells Voz that she must first confirm the existence of Alseta's Ring, find a way to secure it, and then activate as many of the portals as possible. Once she proves to this shadowy group that she's done this, the Scarlet Triad has promised hefty compensation, more than enough for her to get started setting up her guild and laboratory under Hellknight Hill. Voz signs all of her letters "By Norgorber's hand," a phrase that a DC 15 Religion check reveals marks her as a dedicated follower of the Reaper of Reputation.

A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Society check to Recall Knowledge knows that the Scarlet Triad is a minor merchant's guild based in Katapesh, far to the south. Voz has been careful to avoid writing much about them in her journal, but she might be motivated to reveal more about them if she's captured alive and the PCs successfully interrogate her, as detailed in her write-up on page 80. One key clue is the name "Laslunn," the name of Voz's mysterious Scarlet Triad correspondent (the PCs will learn that Laslunn is one of the Scarlet Triad's commanders in the third adventure—for now, her name should remain a mystery). The Scarlet Triad is, of course, much more than a mere merchant's guild, but it has taken great pains to hide its true nature and power—finding out more about it is one of the ongoing themes of the Age of Ashes Adventure Path. For now, the name of the guild should be little more than a tantalizing mystery to the PCs.

If the PCs examine Voz's journal, they find the pages within are written in Necril. Once translated, the journal's contents are mostly about Voz's plans

for an assassin's guild and necromancer's school, but several pages near the back contain her research and notes about Alseta's Ring. The bulk of the information comes from old reports from the time of the Goblinblood Wars, when a group of soldiers confronted a clan of goblins who'd taken up residence in a series of caves near Breachill. These reports indicated that at the deepest portion of the caves, an entrance into a much older ruin that the goblins feared to enter was discovered. The soldiers explored a bit further, discovered a "ring of strange archways," but were ultimately driven away by powerful animated statues that "emerged from nearby doors" to attack.

Voz's additional research, which includes copious notes on the necromantic ritual she performed recently to interrogate the spirits of the dead in the crypt below Citadel Altaerein, seem to confirm her theories that this ring of portals is an ancient elven ruin called Alseta's Ring. Her research suggests that Alseta's Ring was among the first of the *aiudara*—ancient portals created by the elves before Earthfall—and that the six portals that made up the ring linked six different sites. One of these she has confirmed as having once linked to Kyonin, but this section of Alseta's ring has fallen into ruin and now leads to the goblin caves (providing a back door into the dungeons below Citadel Altaerein), but observations from soldiers in the Goblinblood Wars suggested the other five portals still stood at that time. Voz's research indicates that for a portal to be activated, a key item has to be used. Where the remaining five portals might lead and what keys are required to activate them, alas, Voz has not yet been able to determine, but in her notes she is optimistic that, once she secures the site and has the chance to study the portals in person, clues as to their function will present themselves.

The final few pages of the journal cover Voz's last several days spent exploring the caverns between here and the deeper Goblinblood Caves she suspects links to Alseta's Ring itself. Her notes on the giant spiders and centipedes and other vermin slain, along with notes on her own undead minions expended, make it clear that much of the journey through the caves should be safe until the PCs are quite close to Alseta's Ring. The final entry mentions an encounter with a "strange woman who seemed to be able to manipulate spiders as easily as I command my undead minions," and that Voz was able to slay a few spiders before being forced to flee. This woman was the anadi Renali (see area D2).

XP Award: For finding Voz's research, the PCs receive 60 XP.

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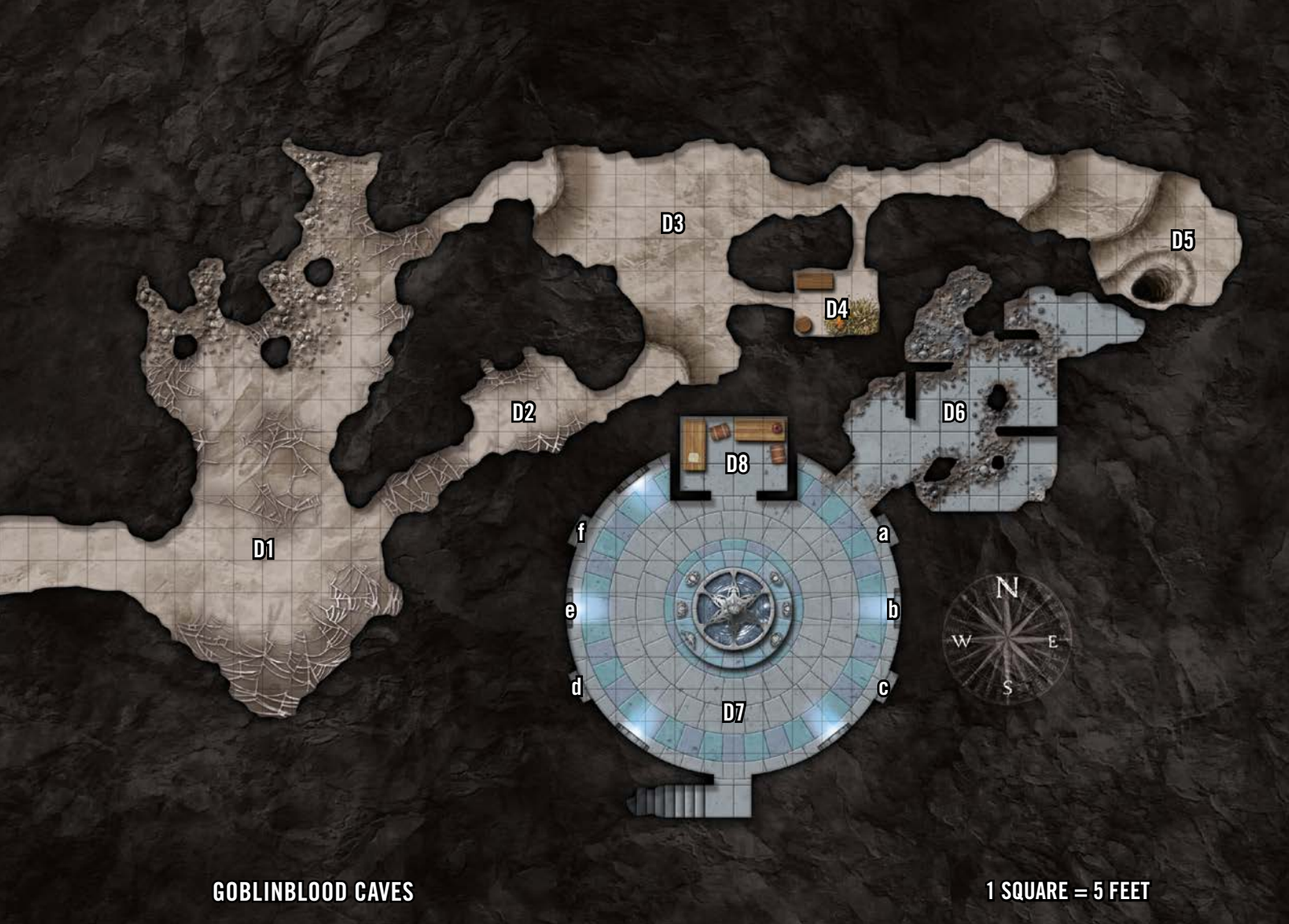
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GOBLINBLOOD CAVES

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET

Goblinblood Caves

Once the PCs venture further southeast from area C8, they enter a winding length of caverns that heads back toward Hellknight Hill. This long twisting tunnel is relatively safe for its length, apart from being completely dark. As the PCs travel along 6-1/2 miles between area C8 and D1, describe to them some small caverns in which the dead bodies of giant spiders, giant centipedes, and other minor cave threats lie sprawled about. Here and there lie the broken remains of skeletons as well. As detailed in Voz's journal, these are threats Voz defeated over the course of several forays into the caves as she cleared a route to Alseta's Ring. The PCs also pass less recent signs of goblin inhabitants who were chased off, leaving behind ruined stone huts and crumbling homes in which nothing of value or interest remains. These caves make an excellent place for you to expand upon this adventure with encounters of your own design, particularly if your players could use a bit more experience to get further into 4th level and to ensure that they complete "Hellknight Hill" as 5th-level characters.

D1. SPIDER NEST

MODERATE 4

Although the tunnel opens wide into a sprawling cavern here, it seems even more claustrophobic, for viscous spiderwebs crisscross nearly every inch of the place. Along the northern wall, several human-sized lumps in the webs are thickly wrapped in silk webbing, while the entire floor is covered in sticky goop.

The floor of this chamber is covered in sheets of tangled spiderwebs, creating a sticky mess that turns the floor of this cavern and the tunnels leading out of it into difficult terrain. The webs that cover all of the walls here are similar to those in the corners of area C7. As a result, any creature who ends their turn adjacent to a wall must succeed at a DC 18 Reflex saving throw or spend an action on their next turn pulling themselves from the sticky webbing.

The cave ceiling here is 20 feet high. The rubble to the north completely blocks an entrance to what was once a much larger cave that has long ago collapsed (see the Optional Foreshadowing sidebar on page 57).

Creatures: Six hunting spiders make their homes here, picking off native cave dwellers and unfortunate passersby alike. As soon as the hunting spiders notice the PCs, they drop from their perches on the ceiling and attack. These spiders are unaffected by the webbing on the walls and floors of the cave.

HUNTING SPIDERS (6)

CREATURE 1

Pathfinder Bestiary 306

Initiative Perception +7

Treasure: If the PCs investigate the human-sized lumps in the webs along the northern wall, they find that most of these sacs are full of rot and decay when punctured. However, one of the lumps reveals a recently deceased human adventurer whose body is desiccated beyond recognition but still intact. If the PCs remove the dead adventurer from the webbing, they find a +1 *striking scimitar* on the body—sadly, the weapon couldn't save the hero from the spiders.

D2. RENALI'S REFUGE

TRIVIAL 4

The gloom and tunnels snaking away from each end of this open cavern make it seem like merely a corridor rather than a proper chamber. Thick sheets of spiderwebs hang from the northern wall.

The cavern is almost entirely nondescript, but with a successful DC 18 Perception check, a PC notes that the sheets of spiderwebs along the north wall are in fact the walls of a cleverly disguised tent-like structure. The ceiling here is only 10 feet high.

Creature: Living in the hut is an unusual visitor from Garund—an anadi woman named Renali (see page 84 for information on anadis and page 78 for Renali in particular). The spider-like anadis avoid contact with other humanoid races, for while they are themselves peaceful, they understand well most other humanoids' swift and emotional reaction to anything even remotely arachnid in shape. Still, when Renali noticed the Cinderclaws, a group she's long detested, becoming interested in an old shrine to the elven god Ketephys down in the Mwangi Expanse, she put aside her fears and took a more active stance against them, an act that led to her becoming stranded here when Huntergate closed. After fleeing Malarunk and his minions and managing to avoid the barghest in area D3, Renali has sheltered here in this cave for several weeks. She's somewhat befriended the spiders in area D1, to the extent that neither bothers the other, and has been living on vermin, fungus, and water dripping from the walls for some time now. Her first encounter

with Voz a few days ago turned violent, and she's only now recovered from the fight.

Renali is a peaceful woman who hides in her spidersilk tent when she hears the PCs fighting in area D1. She prefers to avoid the PCs entirely until she hears them fighting the barghest in area D3, in which case she comes to their aid as detailed there. She'll fight the PCs only if attacked first, and she would much prefer to talk to them.

If the PCs notice her tent for what it is and seem about ready to either enter or damage it, Renali steps out to greet them, disguised as a human woman. Fortunately, she speaks Common, thanks to the time she spent exploring beyond her home—she maintains a non-hostile stance when she greets the PCs, so that communication can be established.

Since Renali followed the Cinderclaws through Huntergate but found herself trapped in these caverns after the portal shuttered and the cave-in blocked the way back to Alseta's Ring, she knows quite a bit about how to get to the ring's chamber as well as about the cultists trapped there now. If the PCs agree to speak with her and don't immediately attack her, she can inform them not only of the barghest that dwells in area D3, but of the cultists and their leader Malarunk in area D6, and the ring of portals in area D7. Her primary hope is to find a way back through Huntergate to return to her homeland in the Mwangi Expanse. See her NPC entry on page 78 for more details on how she can help the PCs.

If the PCs force a fight, Renali defends herself as best she can. If reduced below 30 Hit Points, she retreats toward area D6 and tries to lure the PCs into a fight with the barghest or Malarunk, hoping to slink away and hide while her mutual enemies defeat each other.

RENALI

CREATURE 4

Female anadi (page 78)

Initiative Perception +12

XP Award: For befriending Renali, grant the party 10 XP for a minor accomplishment.

D3. GOBLIN-GOD'S THRONE SEVERE 4

A massive throne constructed of old bones and broken furniture tied together with ropes and chains and draped with moth-eaten velvet is the overwhelming centerpiece of this wide-open cave. Arrayed in concentric circles around the throne are the skeletal corpses of small, oblong-skulled humanoids—each posed with their head inclined reverently toward the throne's seat.

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This oddly built throne takes up a 15-foot circle in the center of the cavern. The throne itself rises 10 feet and can be climbed with a successful DC 10 Athletics check. The tunnels from the west open into this room a good 10 feet above the cave floor—a successful DC 15 Athletics check is required to clamber down from a ledge to the cave. The cave ceiling rises another 10 feet above the ledges, arching to 20 feet over the floor below.

Creature: For nearly a century, this cave has been home to Ralldar, a greater barghest who the goblinoids of the area worshipped as a god during the Goblinblood Wars. During those years, the vain

and evil creature soaked up the goblinoids' fear as well as their tribute. Fealty made Ralldar cruel, and when the local goblinoid tribes failed to bring him the increasingly outlandish gifts he desired, he casually murdered them and lashed their corpses to his throne as a warning to all others. The worship they gave him also made Ralldar complacent and comfortable, so that rather than venture to the Abyss upon feeding enough to become a greater barghest, he instead remained in this world to wallow in goblin adoration. But then, when heroes swept in and slaughtered his goblins, Ralldar hid in his treasure room (area **D4**) like a coward, only emerging days later to discover his tribe gone forever.

Since then, Ralldar has had a break with reality. He gathered up the bodies of the slaughtered goblins, arranged them around his throne in properly worshipful positions, and for the decades ever after has ruled a silent collection of perfectly compliant adoring minions. Ralldar knows the goblins are dead, but also believes they're still "here" and able to adore him. With very few visitors to his realm and with his immortal nature preserving him from starvation, Ralldar has wiled away the decades as a self-styled goblin god.

Today, Ralldar mostly just sits on his throne and torments his long-dead goblin minions, demanding gifts and bizarre shows of fealty (which the goblins corpses, of course, cannot provide) until he flies into a fit of rage and scatters their bones. These periods are followed by days or weeks of calm, during which Ralldar rebuilds the skeletons and poses them anew. He's just finishing up such a period of redecoration when the PCs arrive, and he moves about the room in the form of an industrious but filthy goblin.

As soon as Ralldar notices the PCs, he scrambles up onto his throne and then shouts: "Mongrel cave-things! You dare enter Ralldar's kingdom? Bestow upon your god proper tribute, or be consumed by misery and death!"

If the PCs attempt to talk to Ralldar, he begins by demanding the most expensive magic item that he can see on any of the PCs as tribute. If the PCs give it to him, Ralldar then demands "the skull of a spider mounted on the skeleton of a man" as his next gift.

If the PCs do anything other than flee immediately to retrieve this outlandish gift or succeed at a DC 27 Deception check to fool him into thinking they're loyal subjects, Ralldar flies into a rage. He leaps down from his throne and assumes his true form to attack, but if reduced to fewer than 25 Hit Points, he assumes goblin form and



Ralldar

flees to his treasure room (area D4). If confronted there, he reverts to his true form and fights to the death.

RALLDAR

CREATURE 7

Male greater barghest (*Pathfinder Bestiary* 36)

Initiative Perception +16

Mutation fangs

D4. GOBLIN-GOD'S TREASURE ROOM

The entrances to this chamber are narrow—a Small creature can move through them but treats them as difficult terrain, while a Medium creature must succeed at a DC 15 Acrobatics check to Squeeze through them.

Although dingy and moist, this constructed room is more a cellar than a cave, though lumpy mounds covered in oilcloth tarps still lend it an unpleasant air.

Treasure: If the PCs look under the tarps, they see stacks and stacks of bones and skulls. A PC who succeeds at a DC 12 Medicine check can tell that most are goblinoid in origin, with some human, elf, and orc bones included in the mix. Most of the bones are loose, although there are a few rib cages that still wear armor in the pile, including a +1 *breastplate* and a +1 *chain shirt*. Further, if the PCs sift through the mounds and succeed at a DC 18 Perception check, they find a *fan feather token*, a *fear gem*, a pair of *healer's gloves*, and a *wand of web*.

D5. FUNGUS PIT

The tunnel widens, then drops away in a series of ten-foot-high cliffs into a chamber filled with fine, hair-like filaments and mushrooms. The filaments look like bleached grass and wave erratically with the cave's natural air currents. The mushrooms glow slightly, giving the cave a strange, dreamlike feel. To the south, a seven-foot-wide hole in the floor drops down into a chamber below.

The pit to the south drops 20 feet down into area D6. The anadi Renali was able to escape up into this cave from below by climbing in her spider form, but Malarunk and his minions haven't yet figured out how to reach this hole from below. Plenty of stalagmites nearby could serve as anchors for ropes dropped down into the hole, and of course brave PCs can simply leap down the 20-foot drop and endure the falling damage, but from below, it's very difficult to climb up out of the pit. It requires a DC 35 Athletics check to climb unless the creature is capable of easily navigating a smooth inverted surface (such as a spider). If the PCs get stranded below and have no way to escape on

AGE OF ASHES

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OPTIONAL FORESHADOWING

When Mengkare was manipulating the fate of the villagers who went on to found Breachill, he spent most of his time in human form, yet he still enjoyed relaxing in his true form as a gold dragon. He used a much larger cave once located north of area D1 as his lair, but when he abandoned the region, he collapsed the cave in an attempt to leave no trace behind (he could always come and go from Promise via Vengegate, after all). If you wish, and if your PCs are diligent in searching the rubble in the northern section of area D1, feel free to allow them to find a single golden scale amid the ruins—a tiny hint toward Mengkare's presence in the region. A successful DC 30 Arcana check is enough to note that the scale is from a gold dragon, and a critical success at this check confirms it is from an ancient gold wyrm. Such a clue foreshadows Mengkare's role in the campaign, and you might feel it's too strong a clue to drop at this early point in the campaign—so whether or not the scale is here for the PCs to discover is left entirely up to you.

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their own, you can always have Renali intervene from above to help PCs escape back up through the hole.

Hazard: This tunnel is home to a field of dangerous gloomglow mushrooms.

GLOOMGLOW MUSHROOMS

HAZARD 5

ENVIRONMENTAL FUNGUS

Stealth DC 26 (expert)

Description A field of grass-like fungal filaments amid clusters of softly glowing, long-stalked mushrooms.

Disable Survival DC 22 (expert) to remove a 5-foot-patch without triggering the mushrooms.

AC 21; **Fort** +13, **Ref** +9

HP 52; **Immunities** critical hits, object immunities, precision damage; **Weaknesses** cold 10

Glowing Spores ➤ **Trigger** A creature moves into the mushrooms' space or damages the mushrooms. The mushrooms can't use this reaction if the damage was cold damage. **Effect** The triggering creature and all creatures within 10 feet are sprayed with itchy, distracting, glowing spores and must attempt a DC 22 Reflex save. On a failed save, the creatures become sickened 1 and stupefied 1 (or sickened 2 and stupefied 2 on a critical failure) and take a -4 penalty to Stealth checks until the spores lose potency in 24 hours or are removed. This requires washing them off by bathing in water for a minute, a *prestidigitation* spell, or a similar measure allowed by the GM.

D6. LOTUSGATE WAYSTATION SEVERE 4

This area seems to have once been a small complex of rooms, but their original use is anyone's guess today, for some ancient catastrophe seems to have melted the walls in places, leaving behind a half-demolished complex. In the few places where the walls are still intact, however, the delicate carvings indicate that whoever once built these rooms was a skilled artisan. Far to the southwest, a partially melted stone archway opens into a larger room.

Each of the six *aiudara* that make up Alseta's Ring was also associated with a set of small rooms called a "waystation" that served as a place where travelers could rest, learn, and prepare for the often quite different environment or culture that awaited on the far side. These waystations existed in tiny little demiplanes between the entrance and exit of the *aiudara*, and in the cases of the five remaining gates, these demiplanes exist still. As the Age of Ashes Adventure Path continues, the PCs will need to explore and deal with a wide range of secrets and ancient wards left behind in these places.

But when the Ekujae elves trapped Dahak's manifestation inside of Huntergate, the backlash of fiery energy lanced across Alseta's Ring and destroyed the portal on the far side of the room from Huntergate—Lotusgate. This severed Alseta's Ring from its link to Kyonin, but also caused the waystation to phase back into the Material Plane, manifesting physically even as the blast of dragonfire destroyed it. This ruined complex of half-melted walls and ancient rubble is all that remains today of the Lotusgate waystation. A PC who examines the walls and rubble and succeeds at a DC 30 check to Identify Magic learns that whatever destroyed the walls of this site was an extremely powerful effect beyond that which most mortals could create. On a critical success, this check suggests that the effect that melted and destroyed these walls may well have been from an incredibly powerful dragon. Note that it's unlikely that any of the PCs can currently learn this, but in time, they should be high-enough level to succeed at this check.

A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Society check while examining some of the few remaining portions of walls confirms that the carvings are of an ancient elven style—a critical success reveals that this style of carving dates back to the Age of Legend, a time before Earthfall.

Creatures: Stuck on this level, desperate, and running out of supplies are the Cinderclaw sub-commander Malarunk and his four loyal minions, the charau-kas Retchskree and Yash, and the boggards Yroack and Oobak. Malarunk had grand plans to lead a large number of cultists through Huntergate,

claim the surrounding region, and present this new frontier ripe for conquest to his commander back in the Mwangi Expanse, a half-dragon boggard named Belmazog. What the Cinderclaws didn't anticipate was that Dahak's influence still haunted the Huntergate waystation, and as the cultists came through, the same energies that so long ago destroyed Lotusgate now damaged Huntergate, rendering it inoperable. Malarunk still carries the magical arrowhead key required to activate Huntergate, but lacks the skill and ability to repair the portal. Then, when the gauladons caused part of the central structure of Citadel Altaerein to collapse, the only easy method back out of Alseta's Ring became clogged with rubble.

After an attempt to dig out the rubble blocking the southern stairs resulted in further collapse that crushed a charau-ka cultist, and after a fight against the guardian of area **D8** nearly cost him his life, Malarunk and his remaining minions have been rattling around these ruined chambers, growing increasingly stir-crazy and desperate. With nothing to eat or drink but sustenance created by magic, their only hope has rested upon the rest of their cult in the Mwangi Expanse repairing the portal at the far side. He has communicated with Belmazog a few times via *dream message* and knows that the Ekujae elves are preventing the Cinderclaws from accessing Huntergate for now, yet he still hopes to receive a *dream message* every night announcing that his cult has regained control of the portal's far side and have repaired it enough for him to reactivate Huntergate and return home.

The arrival of the PCs gives Malarunk a much-needed distraction. He eagerly orders his few surviving minions to attack the PCs, hoping to secure supplies or, even better, a way to get out of this area. As he rushes with abandon toward the PCs, he continually taunts the heroes with vicious insults and claims that "The Sorrowmaker will taste your blood!" and "Kill me you might, but the rest of the Cinderclaws shall come, and they shall feed your flesh to the Endless Destruction!" He and his minions look to keep PCs alive if they can, so that they can use the PCs' resources and abilities to help them escape up into area **D5**. Once Malarunk and his minions make it out of the caves, they may well decide to kill off their PC captives, but you should present captured PCs with several opportunities to turn the tables on their captors before this endgame event occurs.

MALARUNK

CREATURE 5

UNIQUE CE SMALL CHARAU-KA HUMANOID

Male charau-ka cleric 5

Perception +13; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Boggard, Draconic, Mwangi

Skills Athletics +10, Dragon Lore +11, Intimidation +11, Religion +13, Stealth +8

Str +3, **Dex** +2, **Con** +2, **Int** +0, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +2

Items +1 chain shirt, Cinderclaw gauntlet (page 77), gold religious symbol of Dahak (worth 20 gp), hatchet, hunter's arrowhead (page 77)

AC 22; **Fort** +11, **Ref** +9, **Will** +13

HP 63

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ Cinderclaw gauntlet +13 (agile, free-hand, versatile S), **Damage** 2d4+5 piercing plus 1d6 fire on a critical hit

Melee ♦ hatchet +12 (agile, sweep), **Damage** 1d6+5 slashing

Ranged ♦ hatchet +12 (agile, sweep, thrown 10 feet), **Damage** 1d6+5 slashing

Ranged ♦ thrown debris +11 (deadly 1d6, range 20 feet), **Damage** 2d6+5 bludgeoning

Divine Prepared Spells DC 23, attack +13; **3rd** *dream message*, *fireball*, *harm* (×3; deals d10s for damage instead of d8s); **2nd** *create food*, *sound burst*, *spiritual weapon*; **1st** *create water*, *heal*, *sanctuary*; **Cantrips** *detect magic*, *guidance*, *prestidigitation*, *shield*

Channel Smite ♦♦ (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 122)

Shrieking Frenzy ♦ As charau-ka; see page 37.

Thrown Weapon Mastery As charau-ka; see page 37.

RETCHSKREE AND YASH

CREATURE 1

Charau-kas (page 37)

Initiative Perception +6

OObAK AND YROACK

CREATURE 1

Boggard scouts (Pathfinder Bestiary 44)

Initiative Perception +7

D7. ALSETA'S RING

The walls and domed ceiling of this large circular chamber are elegantly carved in spiraling designs. To the north, a double door stands in the side of a squared-off column protruding from the wall, while to the south an open archway leads to a stairwell leading up that's been blocked by rubble. In the center of the room stand six statues of elves, all facing outward and arrayed around a dry fountain. Empty benches sit in four alcoves to the east and west, nestled between six stone archways built into the wall. Each of these archways bears a different type of decor, but with the exception of the northeastern archway (which is partially collapsed and opens into a ruined chamber beyond), each archway leads nowhere—they are filled with plain, featureless walls of polished stone.

The opening to the south leads to a 5-foot-wide stairwell leading up to the west that's been choked off by rubble. The remains of a charau-ka cultist lie crushed under some of the rubble, a victim of an ill-advised and poorly executed attempt to dig out the rubble while it was still unstable. It'll take tools, time, and expertise to properly and safely clear these stairs and restore access to area **B1** above (see next volume's Adventure Toolbox for more details).

A PC who succeeds at a DC 20 Society check while examining the walls can confirm their ancient elven style—a critical success reveals that this style of carving dates back to the Age of Legend, a time before Earthfall.

The fountain in the middle of the room



Malarunk

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was once magical and constantly filled with fresh water, but that magic faded long ago. The six statues that surround it depict six deities associated with the elven pantheon—they each look outward from the room toward the elf gate they’re associated with. Starting with the most northeastern statue and going clockwise, these statues (and the Religion check DC required to identify them) are as follows: Alseta (DC 15, goddess of doors and transitions), Yuelral (DC 15, goddess of crystals and magic), Findeladlara (DC 15, goddess of architecture and art), Ketephys (DC 15, god of hunting and the moon), Calistria (DC 10), and Desna (DC 10).

Aiudara: The six archways these statues face are incredibly ancient *aiudara*. They can be recognized as such with a successful DC 22 check to Identify Magic—with a critical success, a PC also notes that these *aiudara* seem even more ancient than those used today by elves elsewhere in the world. If identified, the PC knows that to activate an *aiudara*, one need only touch that portal’s key to the stone within its arch—doing so will cause the archway to turn to swirling mist and allow passage to the far side of the magical gateway.

The PCs will visit this chamber multiple times in the campaign to come, as they discover additional keys to unlock the other portals. Further details for each portal, their keys, and what dangers and treasures await discovery within each of their waystations appear in future chapters of the Age of Ashes Adventure Path, but the information below is something that a PC can determine by studying a portal and succeeding at a DC 20 Arcana, Religion, or Society check. Information in parentheses cannot be learned by the PCs at this time via skill checks—it is presented for the GM’s use only and will be revealed to players as the Age of Ashes Adventure Path plays out.

D7a. Lotusgate: This *aiudara* is destroyed, but what remains is still decorated with designs of lotuses and icons sacred to Alseta. The far side of Lotusgate is known to be located in the elven nation of Kyonin, but this side of the portal is irreparably damaged. (This portal plays no additional role in Age of Ashes; see the inside back cover of this volume for more information on Lotusgate.)

D7b. Jewelgate: This *aiudara* is decorated with images of crystals, and its upper arch bears designs like those of stalactites. Icons sacred to Yuelral adorn the *aiudara*. (This portal leads to the Darklands, near the outskirts of the dwarven city of Kolvar and the ruins of Saggorak, and will be open to the PCs at the start of the fourth adventure, “Fires Down Below.”)

D7c. Duskgate: Decorated with images of sunsets and beautiful architecture in what appears to be a desert or savannah, this *aiudara* is devoted to

Findeladlara. (This portal leads to the outskirts of Finderplain in the nation of Katapesh, and will be open to the PCs at the start of the fifth adventure, “Against the Scarlet Triad.”)

D7d. Huntergate: Images of hawks and moons, interspersed with jungle vegetation and trees, decorate this *aiudara*, along with icons sacred to Ketephys. (This portal leads to the depths of the Mwangi Jungle, and is open to the PCs to use at the start of the next adventure, “Cult of Cinders.” If the PCs touch the *hunter’s arrowhead* to this portal, the stone within the arch shimmers and wavers for a moment, but then flashes with fiery radiance before it returns to solid stone. At this point, a successful DC 20 skill check to Identify Magic confirms that the portal is malfunctioning—but that it could be repaired. The start of the next adventure contains details on how the PCs can open the portal and travel through its dragon-haunted waystation.)

D7e. Vengegate: This *aiudara* is adorned with images of wasps, whips, and the waves of the open sea, along with icons sacred to Calistria. (This portal leads to Hermea, and is open to the PCs for use at the start of the final adventure, “Broken Promises.”)

D7f. Dreamgate: Butterflies, stars, and images sacred to Desna adorn this final *aiudara*. (This portal leads to the coastline of Ravounel near the town of Cypress Point, and is open to the PCs to use at the start of the third adventure, “Tomorrow Must Burn.”)

XP Award: For each of the six *aiudara* the PCs examine and identify, award them 30 XP, to a maximum of 180 XP for examining all six.

D8. ALSETA’S VAULT

Low 4

One side of the double door that bars entry into this chamber is in fact an ancient construct built by the elves—a doorwarden. It immediately animates if anyone tries to enter area D8, as detailed in the Creature section.

Creature: The doorwarden has disguised itself as the eastern half of the chamber’s double door. As soon as anyone attempts to enter this room, the door seems to open as the doorwarden steps forward to bar entry into the room. It immediately speaks in a sonorous voice in Elven, saying, “The custodian of Alseta’s Ring dwells beyond. Only those who carry her blessed sign may pass.” The doorwarden steps aside if anyone displays the religious symbol of Alseta (such as the one the PCs may have discovered in area B16) and does not further interfere with the PCs until they leave and return. Without a religious symbol, a character who knows of Alseta’s symbol (note that it appears at the base of her statue to the south) can even create a

drawing of the symbol with a successful DC 15 Craft check. Feel free to allow other creative solutions to work as well.

If the PCs attempt to enter the room without showing Alseta's symbol, or if they attack the doorwarden at any time, the construct immediately attacks them. It does not pursue foes beyond area **D7** or **D8**, but otherwise fights until it is destroyed.

DOORWARDEN

CREATURE 5

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Initiative Deception +11

Once the PCs have defeated or bypassed the doorwarden, they can freely enter the room.

This plain rectangular room contains several empty chests, old wooden tables, and mostly barren shelves. It may have once been used as a vault or records room, but today, only a few scraps of paper remain.

In pre-Earthfall times, this chamber served as a place for the caretaker of Alseta's Ring to live. More recently, though, the Order of the Nail Hellknights used it as a place to store the order's historically significant valuables and paperwork, once they figured out how to placate the doorwarden that guarded the entrance to the chamber.

Treasure: This is the vault where the Order of the Nail kept its historically significant artifacts and documents. The Hellknights took all of the most important and powerful items with them when they moved to Citadel Vraid but deliberately left behind one important piece of paperwork—the deed to Citadel Altaerein. The licitor at the time had no interest in retaining a presence in Isger, but he had a mercurial and whimsical streak in him that compelled him to leave the deed behind, so that anyone brave and resourceful enough to find their way to this deepest part of the fortress would be rewarded.

A successful DC 15 Society check (or automatic confirmation from Alak, if he is asked) confirms that possession of this deed grants legal rights and ownership of the citadel to the deed's possessor, by local, national, and Hellknight law. Technically, the Order of the Nail could contest this ownership, but if Alak is consulted, he can confirm that his order has little interest in Citadel Altaerein or Isger today, and that it is unlikely to contest the PCs' claim to the ruined castle. After all, the cost for repairing Citadel Altaerein and maintaining it is not something the Order of the Nail is eager to front—whether or not the PCs themselves are prepared to foot this bill is something

that they'll have to decide for themselves. The next volume of Age of Ashes has additional information for how the PCs can use downtime to rebuild and repair Citadel Altaerein, and eventually use it as their own base of operations.

In addition to approving of the PCs taking possession of the keep, Alak offers to inform the Order's leaders of this development and speak to them on the PCs' behalf, assuring them that the PCs are responsible and trustworthy owners, should they wish to take possession of Citadel Altaerein. "It's best for the citadel to fall into hands capable of restoring and respecting it," he says. "Far better you own Altaerein than for it to persist in its role as home to monsters and hooligans, I'd say."

If the PCs wish to use Citadel Altaerein as their base of operations, they can show this writ of ownership to any artisan, builder, or similar contractor in Breachill. Those professionals will gladly complete paid work to help fix up the keep to the PCs' liking. For more information about how the repair and rebuilding of Citadel Altaerein works, see *Pathfinder Adventure Path #146: Cult of Cinders*.

XP Award: PCs who bypass the doorwarden gain XP as though they had defeated it. Grant the PCs 160 XP for recovering the deed to Citadel Altaerein.

Concluding the Adventure

When the PCs have stopped Voz's machinations, eliminated Malarunk and the Cinderclaw threat, and recovered the deed to the citadel itself, they are victorious and this adventure comes to an end. However, there is still much to do when it comes to Citadel Altaerein. The PCs own the keep now and are free to use it as their home base, but its structure is in sad shape, and the stairways that connect the citadel's levels are still destroyed—including the stairway that leads from Alseta's Ring to the upper basement and ground level. What's more, the Cinderclaw cultists that the heroes defeated in the citadel are only the tip of the iceberg of that threat from Garund, which now lurks on the other end of a damaged elf gate.

The PCs, of course, are free to jump right from Alseta's Ring to Garund through Huntergate, and doing so kicks off the next adventure in this path, "Cult of Cinders." Before they tackle that challenge, however, allow the PCs time the return to Breachill, clear the rubble from Citadel Altaerein's stairways, and generally make any improvements to the castle or purchase any gear that they wish. After all, as the PCs soon will learn, they'll need to restock and regroup before they discover that the Cinderclaw threat in Garund is far greater than they ever feared!

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BREACHILL, OUTPOST OF SECRETS

For weeks, we were disheveled and confused, shivering in the shadow of winter as it crept into the mountainous valley. We barely managed to forage for food and build rickety shelters. A few of us carried swords to fend off wild beasts, but we had no memory of how we found those measly weapons, or of who might have put them into our hands. And that was the worst of it: we knew we all had lives before this bleak state of affairs, but to a one, we barely remembered our own names. Our spirits were broken, and our hope for surviving the winter seemed slim. Then a miracle happened: a benevolent wizard stumbled across our valley. His name was Lamond Breachton, and it is with his kindness that our town's story begins.

*—Opening except from Breachill, Outpost of Liberty,
by Veraline Rhasolde, author and first Breachill town council president*

The town of Breachill is nestled in the foothills of the Five King Mountains in the wilds of eastern Iser, about 50 miles from the Druman border. Compared to the region's other settlements, this small town is young—just shy of 170 years old—though it has a deep and fascinating history that rivals those of many far older places. Breachill began with the humblest of origins, as a barely functional outpost of human amnesiacs, but the aid and mentorship of a powerful wizard led these shivering and dying unfortunates to found the hardy and thriving town that exists today.

Many of Breachill's 1,300 residents are humans who trace their ancestry to one of these original pioneers, leading to the townsfolk's identity as people who persevere and are self-sufficient by birthright. As a result, the residents of Breachill are brave and community minded. Unlike the insular inhabitants of many Iseri towns, they welcome adventurers of all stripes. After all, the townspeople owe their existence to the benevolence of that powerful wizard adventurer—Lamond Breachton—whose legacy is so beloved that it might be almost be considered a religion. Practically without exception, harsh words against Breachton here are taken as a challenge to most residents' honor.

Town History

Breachill traces its founding to 4520 AR. That fall, 50 humans found themselves mired in a threadbare outpost in a valley at the foot of the Five Kings Mountains. They had little shelter, provisions to survive for just a few weeks, few skills among them, and almost no defenses against the area's dangers. Even stranger, they had no idea how they ended up in their hovels, nor why they were there in the first place. Most barely remembered their own names. As winter encroached, the flimsy outpost's vulnerabilities were clear, and the desperate survivors felt hope fading.

And then an act of serendipity saved their lives. Lord Lamond Breachton, a wandering adventurer, scholar, and wizard, was returning from a lucrative trading trip to Druma when he stumbled upon the amnesiacs' meager outpost. Even with his powerful magic, kindly Lord Breachton couldn't solve the mystery of the humans' origins or restore their missing memories. He took pity upon the villagers, and spent much of his recently acquired wealth on building proper shelters along the banks of what became known as Breach Creek. Further, Breachton helped the amnesiacs acquire food and establish farms, brought in experts to teach them trades, and used his magic and know-how to aid their day-to-day affairs while the townspeople became self-sufficient.

In less than a year, the outpost was thriving, and the leaders of the burgeoning hamlet named their settlement Breachton's Hill. This name was soon shortened to Breachill.

Despite his monumental place in the town's history, very little is known about Lamond Breachton himself. The wizard's origins are a mystery, and details of his life before arriving in town are conspicuously missing from the extensive local texts written about the town's founding. The townspeople know only that Breachton had distinctive, golden-colored eyes, the rich voice of an angel, and flowing white hair that reached past the magnificent robes he always wore. Curiously, the wizard made it clear to those early town pioneers that he was indeed a human, as opposed to an aasimar or other celestial-touched being. History books describe Breachton's demeanor as exceedingly paternal; he treated each of the town's pioneers as wayward children regardless of an individual's actual ages. His kindness and willingness to expend his own resources to help the outpost seemed without limit, however—he made the humans' survival and well-being his entire focus for an entire year. Then one day, as quickly as he had arrived, Breachton disappeared. The townspeople never heard from him again, but they understood the wanderer's need to move on. As a final tribute to the wizard, the townspeople erected a statue of him that stands in the center of town to this day.

Breachill's population swelled and came to include dwarves, half-elves, half-orcs, and even goblins. Though it remains a comparatively small settlement, Breachill quickly became known as a perfect place for adventurers in the region to stop for a hearty meal, a decent inn, and an enthusiastic audience for their tales from the road. Early on, the town established a tradition of formally employing adventurers for duties that concerned its citizens but fell outside the purview of the town's guard. And in time, the town caught the eyes of the Hellknights, a strictly lawful mercenary group dedicated to protecting order at all costs.

In 4638 AR, the newly formed Hellknight Order of the Nail pledged themselves to fighting lawlessness in the untamed wilds. Impressed with Breachill's peaceful and efficient functionality, they chose a spot outside Breachill for their inaugural home, Citadel Altaerein. The order built its single-tower keep high on a low-rising hill about 10 miles northeast of town. For decades, Breachill served as a supply juncture for the Hellknights, and many townspeople took jobs as laborers or staff members attending to the keep's needs. But then, in 4682 AR, only 44 years after building Citadel Altaerein, the Order of the Nail pulled

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up stakes from what had become known as Hellknight Hill. Lured to the west by Queen Domina, then ruler of Korvosa, the Order of the Nail relocated to a far more expansive home in Citadel Vraid. For many years, it maintained a skeleton crew of Hellknights to watch over the essentially empty citadel atop Hellknight Hill, but in 4711, the Hellknights abandoned Citadel Altaerein entirely.

BREACHILL'S SECRET

Most everyone in Breachill fully believes in their town's saccharine origin as the beneficiary of the kind and selfless wizard Lamond Breachton. But the truth, like so much of sanitized history, is far darker. Lord Breachton was not a big-hearted philanthropist. He was, in fact, the gold dragon Mengkare in disguise. To Mengkare, there's no mystery in the origin of the amnesiac humans he "discovered" at the foot of the Five Kings Mountains: they were individuals who Mengkare himself had chosen to establish a utopian society—one that he quickly deemed a failure. And Breachill was not the first settlement founded by that group; it was the second.

Just six months before the dragon left the humans defenseless and amnesia-riddled in the valley where Breachill exists today, Mengkare had recruited them for his utopian project dubbed Paragon. Each had agreed to the Golden Contract—a set of strict behavioral and moral guidelines that Mengkare believed would lead to civic, social, and political harmony, and to the ultimate course of human perfection. The gold dragon used magic to create a perfectly suitable humanocentric environment deep in the heart of the Five Kings Mountains, in an isolated valley where his work would not be disturbed, and that was conveniently near to a well-hidden portal to his lair on distant Hermea. Then he plucked his test subjects from their lives and families all over Isgar and brought them to Paragon.

Although his recruits valiantly tried to fulfill the dragon's wishes, when he told them that his plan would require their self-sacrifice, discontent quickly festered in the new society. Mengkare swiftly grew frustrated with the squabbling and declared the entire project a failure. He ended the experiment, magically uncreating Paragon so that no trace remained of it.

As for Mengkare's chosen humans, he now considered them wayward children in breach of the Golden Contract. To the dragon, this group represented not only humanity's inherent weakness but also Mengkare's own shameful failure to mold them into something better. Instead of returning his former subjects to their previous lives, the gold dragon

dumped them into a nearby valley and gave them only the barest training to start life anew. He wiped their minds not only of their experiences in Paragon but also of their entire former identities save for their own names. This, the gold dragon believed, was a fitting punishment for the humans' failure, and it ensured that his own shameful shortcomings as master of the experiment would remain hidden.

Yet soon after, Mengkare realized that he had essentially committed the former citizens of Paragon to slow deaths in the wilds of Isgar, whether from hostile goblinoids, roving monsters, or the harsh winter that threatened to set upon the region. And so the wizard returned to the people he had failed, presenting himself as a savior in the form of a powerful human wizard named Lamond Breachton, and in that guise he helped them achieve self-sufficiency, not just with respect to food, shelter, and defense, but even in government and economy. Once his conscience was sufficiently soothed, Mengkare abandoned the humans yet again, content that the residents of Breachton's Hill would at least not immediately perish at his irresponsible hand.

Breachill's official records, and the reports the Hellknights collected about the area, contain no obvious hints of this cruel truth. The townspeople of Breachill buy deeply into the falsehood of their origins, and those who question the accepted facts can expect public ridicule at the very least. Thus, a seemingly idyllic lifestyle persists in Breachill, isolated as it is between the hordes to the west that emerged in force during the Goblinblood Wars and the dangers of the mountains to the east. For his part, Mengkare went on to establish Promise, his new human utopian society, which survives to this day on the island of Hermea. Never again has the gold dragon visited the town that's evidence of his past failure. In truth, he has all but forgotten that it exists.

Government

Breachill has a tradition of governance through democratic council that stretches all the way back to its founding, when Lamond Breachton helped create the town's charter and officiated its first governmental vote. Back then, the wizard took a vote of the outpost's people, allowing them to vote for three candidates they believed would best serve their interests in a decision-making capacity. In the town's very first election, the top three vote recipients—Veraline Rhasolde, Agabe Owu, and Tilda Halversson—became Breachton Hill's first town councilors, with Veraline Rhasolde becoming council president by virtue of receiving the most votes overall.

Every 2 years, the town holds a new election under those strictly democratic terms, with the top vote receivers landing spots on the council. This tradition has persisted for six generations, though the number of council seats has swelled to five, given the town's far larger current population, and its councilors have included every ancestry that has called the region home, from dwarves to elves to half-elves to half-orcs to goblins to even a few with more uncommon ancestries. For more about Breachill's current town councilors, see the section below.

Breachill's town council is responsible for every aspect of municipal government, from administration to public services to taxes. The council meets monthly to discuss its current business and to hear from its residents, and council meetings are known for the lively, polite, and usually quite friendly debates that unfold. Only rarely do politics flare into outright hostilities, which is likely due to the town's open voting process and the short terms its councilors serve.

In addition to its municipal duties, the town council is also responsible for overseeing and paying the members of Breachill's town guard, which typically consists of about 50 members. Currently, the head of the town guard is **Wilford Lavendil** (LG male half-elf soldier), a jolly yet militaristic man whose human mother's family traces its heritage to a founding Breachill pioneer. The town guard concerns itself with crimes committed inside Breachill's town limits, and it regularly patrols Breachill's perimeter roads for active, large-scale threats to the town's peace. However, limited as the guard's personnel is, there is much that falls outside of the organization's purview, including small threats to travelers on nearby roads, crimes committed against citizens outside the town's limits, and petty anonymous crimes that don't actively threaten citizens' safety. For these jobs, the town council regularly

employs trusted adventurers to keep the peace and help its residents feel safe and happy.

Breachill takes pride in its legacy as a haven for both burgeoning and established adventurers. And so, in the organized tradition of most of the town's functions, its town council holds a monthly Call for Heroes. At these meetings, Breachill residents present their cases for wishing to hire adventurers to the council, the councilors decide whether to expend municipal funds on these problems, and then they hire heroes for the approved jobs out of those in attendance. Most months, one or two jobs go to adventurers who have either proven themselves to the councilors in the past or who appear to be trustworthy after presenting themselves at a meeting.

Breachill's leaders hire adventurers for three main purposes. First, it provides the townspeople with an official way to obtain help when they've exhausted all other options. Second, it allows the salaried town guard to focus on mundane crimes and threats to the town. And third, it provides experience to local adventurers and allows the council to vet out-of-town mercenaries, so that if the need arises again, the town will have heroes ready to come to its aid, just as Lord Lamond Breachton did years ago.

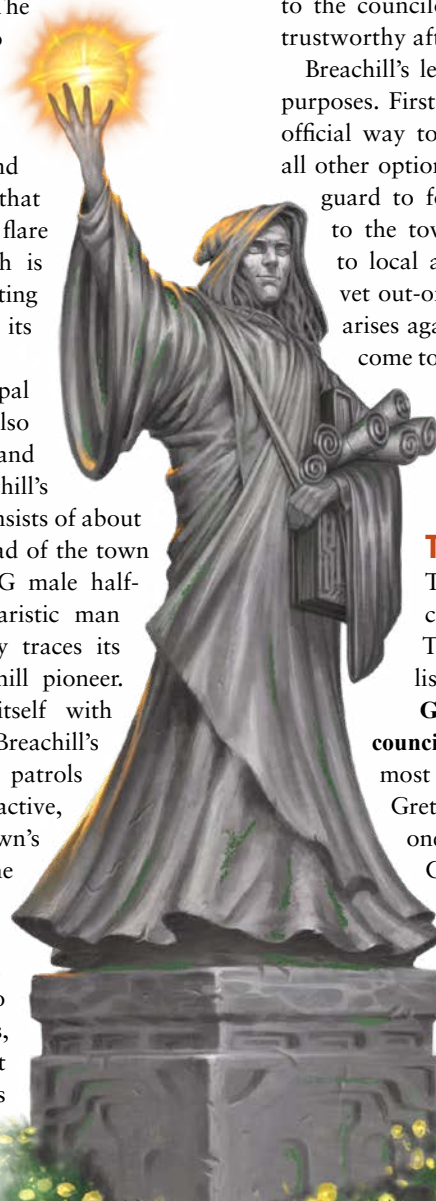
A depiction of a Call for Heroes meeting starts in this volume's adventure on page 8.

THE TOWN COUNCILORS

The members of Breachill's town council are elected for 2-year terms. The council's current members are listed below.

Greta Gardania (LG female human councilor): The daughter of one of the most prominent families in Breachill, Greta Gardania traces her lineage to one of Breachill's founders, Rennold Gardania. From a very young age Greta passionately aspired to public service, tirelessly studying the town's civic history and diving into every text she could find about the philosophy and strategies of governance.

Jorsk Hinterclaw (NG male dwarf councilor): The son of silver miners from Kraggodan in Nirmathas, Jorsk was a smith's apprentice in his hometown before he left for a life of adventure.



Lamond Breachton

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He traveled all around the region completing various jobs with crews of mostly kind-hearted adventurers, and he garnered a very positive reputation in Breachill long before he settled there and began to dabble in public service.

Quentino Posandi (N male human councilor):

One of the most inscrutable members of Breachill's town council, Quintino Posandi is nonetheless the owner of one of the most successful businesses in town, the Posandi Bros. masonry company. Quintino is the business's fifth-generation owner and manages it himself, and despite the significance of handling those tasks alone, the business has never thrived more. Out

of all the council members, Quintino speaks the least, but when he does weigh in publicly on a decision, his shrewdness and problem-solving ability are remarkable.

Melma Ann Sendari (LN female human councilor): The scion of a Chelish family who fled the nation after the Thrune Ascendancy, Melma Ann carries the pedigree of old nobility whose legacy ended with the political upheaval of the Chelish Civil War. Nonetheless, she carries herself with impressive self-assurance, and she understands diplomacy and statesmanship better than perhaps any other politician on the council.

Trini Sprizzlegig (CG female gnome councilor): A first-generation resident of Breachill, Trini Sprizzlegig immigrated as a baby from her parents' hometown of Bristlewark in Cheliah. Trini is a deeply kind and empathetic woman, if a little manic, and her propensity for helping others led her to earn a spot on the council. Perhaps one of its flightiest members, Trini nonetheless is one of its staunchest voices for helping those in need—and for welcoming adventurers from far-off locales or unusual backgrounds.

Religion

Religion is not a particularly prominent part of daily life in Breachill; its residents are more focused on community and communal survival. However, there are pockets of faithful here.

One of the most prominent religions is that of Cayden Cailean, the Accidental God of freedom, ale, wine, and bravery, and more than a few taverns regularly engage in traditional rounds of rousing

hymns while hoisting flagons to the Adventuring God. Another popular religion is that of Desna, the

Song of Spheres and the goddess of dreams, luck, stars, and travelers. Shelyn, goddess of art, beauty, love, and music, is also popular among the town's artisans and tradespeople; in fact, the town's artisans' guild doubles as a temple to the Eternal Rose.

Far less common but still worth mentioning is the Church of Asmodeus—while there is no Asmodean temple in Breachill, the faith rose in prominence several generations ago with the arrival of the Hellknights at Citadel Altaerein. Worshippers of the Dark Prince aren't always trusted around town, but they're accepted, partially because Breachill

Asmodeans don't tend to practice much in public and partially because the town has never experienced problems with violent diabolism, unlike other

towns in Isger.

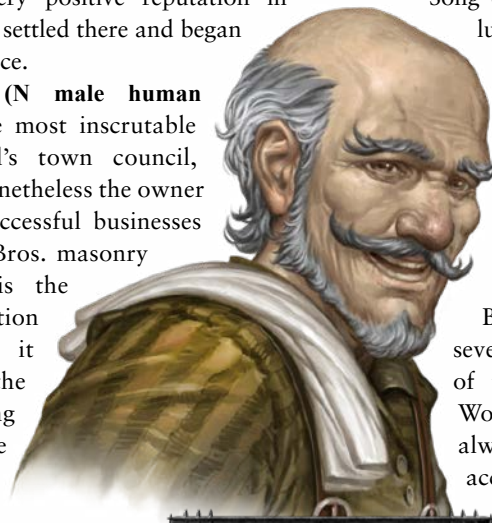
Among the scions of the town's oldest families, the closest thing to a widespread religion might be veneration of Lamond Breachton. However, a schism is slowly forming between the more tradition-minded residents and newer citizens, who sometimes question how the town's amnesiacs arrived in the region at all and why Breachton just happened to come upon them at just the right time.

In general, Breachill residents are welcoming to worshippers of any good- and neutral-aligned god. In fact, given the number of adventurers who pass through, there is a general laissez-faire attitude toward faiths of almost all stripes. Many residents don't even mind adventurers who openly worship evil gods, so long as those adventurers don't do anything to disturb the public peace. The town guard is known to casually shadow such adventurers, however, just to make sure they don't cause trouble in public areas.

Gazetteer

Breachill's townsfolk are hardy, and the town is focused on self-sufficiency and creature comforts. However, the town's tight-knit nature means that its residents are friendly and tend to help each other, and their origins keep them open-minded toward outsiders. Breachill's citizens tend to play as hard as they work, hence the town's high number of tradespeople as well as taverns.

Breachill's citizens include every manner of professionals needed to build and maintain homes and



Quentino Posandi

public infrastructure, including bakers, blacksmiths, brewers, brickmakers, butchers, coopers, excavators, leatherworkers, lumberjacks, masons, wainwrights, weapon and armor smiths, and weavers. These tradespeople are happy to sell their services to established residents and newcomers alike, and anyone with enough coin and at least the semblance of a friendly smile might be able to outfit nearly any home or traveling party with but a few visits to key professionals around town.

Breachill's notable locations are described below; its map appears on the inside front cover of this volume.

1. BREACHILL ARCHIVES

Kept in a sprawling (if stuffy) facility just across the fence from Breachill Town Hall, the town archives consist of official records and historical accounts dating back to the settlement's founding. Chief archivist **Jorell Blacktusk** (LN male human half-orc librarian) traces his lineage on his human mother's side back to Breachill's original pioneers, and he is one of the most knowledgeable citizens in the settlement about the town's history. Jorell is happy to assist any visitors with finding even the most obscure records here, though the fact that he is woefully understaffed means that he is often preoccupied and distracted while doing so. Jorell sees the historical figure Lamond Breachton as a personal hero; he suffers no rude comments about Breachton and has in fact banned visitors who've shown less than a healthy respect for the wizard.

The archives began with Lamond Breachton's own meticulous notes detailing the year during which the wizard worked with the valley's foundlings to create a self-sufficient hamlet. Official first-person accounts from town residents also are stored here; they begin shortly after Breachton's departure and continue to be regularly added to. Military records from the town's involvement in the Goblinblood Wars and documents related to the Order of the Nail's official presence on Hellknight Hill are found here, too; these archives all have a rather formal and official feel compared to the more personal recollections of the main repository. The archives contain no suggestion of the town's secret history as detailed on page 64.

2. BREACH CREEK LUMBER

This facility on the edge of Crimson Tide Wood serves as a logging mill and a carpenter's shop. One of the largest logging companies in Breachill, the business provides lumber for much of the town's construction needs and regularly sends contingents of lumberjacks into the nearby wood—though the aggressive boars,

cougars, and even wargs and owlbeats often make this a dangerous prospect. As a result, chief logging forewoman **Narine Howerdell** (N female half-elf lumberjack) often hires adventurers to accompany these contingents. Payment might come in the form of gold pieces, choice selections of lumber, or wood worked into graceful furniture or other pieces in the carpentry shop attached to the mill. The shop enjoys a reputation as employing some of the best artisans in Breachill; the eccentric **Xandel Rynearsohn** (CG male human carpenter) oversees it.

3. BREACHILL TOWN HALL

In addition to the chamber used for Breachill's public meetings—including town council meetings and the Call for Heroes—Breachill Town Hall includes the offices of all staff members who support the town's government and its myriad municipal functions, as well as its town guard and courts. For more about the government functions that take place here and the town's officials, see Government on page 64.

4. CAYDEN'S KEG

This rousing, well-kept tavern is one of Breachill's most popular places to enjoy a hearty meal and a pint of ale, and it doubles as a temple of Cayden Cailean, the freewheeling Accidental God. The proprietor, primary bartender, and head priestess is **Bryenne Taithe** (CG female human cleric of Cayden Cailean 5), who loves little more than when adventurers tell rousing tales of their daring exploits and deeds, preferably in conjunction with frequent purchases of ale. The priestess particularly loves when a good story holds the entire tavern rapt, and she has been known to provide entire rounds on the house when that happens as an offering to her god. It's also a good business practice, though, since a captivated and tipsy audience is usually willing to purchase more food and ale as the evening progresses.

5. CRIMSON WOOD FURS

Despite the specificity of its name, Crimson Wood Furs is a comprehensive haberdashery known for its high-end tailoring, gorgeous cold-weather outerwear, and fine cobbling. The establishment takes pride in its origins as a luxury supplier to high-ranking Hellknights, and portraits of early Order of the Nail leaders wearing the shop's fine clothes line the store's mahogany walls.

Current owner and chief tailor **Winthrop Finney** (NG male human tailor) is a relative newcomer to Breachill, having moved here from Elidir as a very young man, but he is passionate about his craft and

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about outfitting his customers in exquisite finery. Winthrop began working at Crimson Wood Furs more than a dozen years ago and worked his way up the business's ranks until he eventually purchased the operation from the previous owner. He is particularly impressed by self-made adventurers, and he can be convinced to offer discounts or even free articles to adventurers who promise to publicly and prominently wear his clothes and speak highly of his wares.

6. THE GREAT DREAMHOUSE

One of the few dedicated temples in Breachill, the Great Dreamhouse is a monastery-like establishment dedicated to the goddess Desna. About 30 priests and acolytes call the place home, living, working, studying, and praying in the temple's peaceful lounges and verdant indoor gardens. The Great Dreamhouse offers a place for weary travelers of all stripes to rest, and most of its resident faithful are willing to provide healing at a reasonable price. On clear nights in the summer, head priest **Kellen Carondil** (CG male elf cleric of Desna 5) invites the public into the temple's observatory to gaze at the stars and ponder the callings of the goddess of travelers.

7. LAMOND'S LAMENT

Located in one of the most hardscrabble parts of Breachill, Lamond's Lament is a soup kitchen and place for the downtrodden to rest. The operation is funded through a mix of public money and donations, and its staff consists of volunteers from throughout the community. Council President Greta Gardania once worked here and administrated its operations. Since she joined the town council, oversight of Lamond's Lament has fallen to **Renatta Gilroy** (LG female human chef), a quiet but deeply kind woman who often helps guests of the operation at her own personal expense.

8. MONUMENT CIRCLE

This marble-paved circle is the visual centerpiece of Breachill. Around it stand six deep wells that the nearby residents and businesses rely on for fresh water. In the center of the ring is an elegant, 15-foot-tall bronze statue of the wizard Lamond Breachton, Breachill's founder and the town's most important historical figure. For more about how this ring of wells might be used in the adventure, see page 10.

9. MORTA'S MORTUARY

This imposing, black-painted building with heavy onyx-colored curtains serves as the home and place of business for **Morta Valaskin** (N female human

mortician), an eccentric woman whose daily fashions include elaborate mourning gowns, gauzy black veils, and elbow-length satin gloves. Morta views death as both a business and a lifestyle. Though her flighty mannerisms and morbid outlook toward funerals and the dead might seem macabre, to Morta, death is just a part of life, and a fascinating one at that. Naturally, Morta worships Pharasma, the Lady of Graves, so various images of psychopomps—particularly the birdlike nosoi—decorate the mortuary in the form of paintings, sconces, floor statues, and the like. Morta is also one of most informed gossips about town, and she knows the secrets of everyone from prominent citizens to ordinary townsfolk.

10. PICKLED EAR

This rough-and-tumble dive bar and tavern is frequented by locals and hardscrabble adventurers alike—many of whom clash in rowdy and sometimes vicious brawls that take place far too regularly for the town guard's liking. Proprietor **Roxie Denn** (CN female human tavernkeeper) is always looking for ways to expand her customer base. For more about the Pickled Ear, see page 44 in this volume's adventure.

11. POSANDI BROS.

Located on the shores of Breach Creek for more than five generations, this masonry business has provided most of the bricks for new construction in Breachill for the past 50 years. Posandi Bros. is a family-owned business, and all of its employees are somehow connected to its titular clan, whether they're direct scions, cousins, or have married into the family. Town councilor Quentino Posandi is the business's owner and manager. As he's often at town hall handling his duties, Posandi cousin **Amera Lang** (LE female human mason) currently administrates day-to-day duties. The family is notoriously tight-lipped about its business practices, and for good reason: the Posandis have been secret Asmodeus worshippers for generations. They often seek the guidance and aid of devils when they feel it's necessary, sometimes even summoning them in their secret diabolic underground chambers.

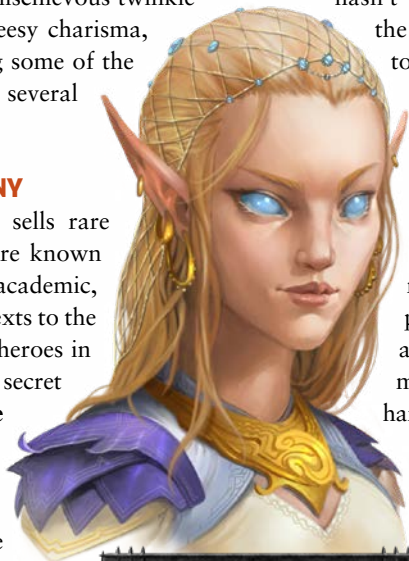
12. QUARTERS AND BITS

This dual storefront is home on one side to a general store called Bits, and on the other, a weapon and armor smith called Quarters. From the outside, the businesses seem separate—until it becomes clear that both are the effort of proprietor **Crink Twiddleton** (CN male halfling merchant) a fast-talking halfling whose sales skills often see him selling outlandish items to

customers who never knew how much they needed his wares. Crink is known for wearing a smart suit and a jaunty hat, and for having a mischievous twinkle in his eye, but beyond his cheesy charisma, he's also known for importing some of the finest goods and employing several highly skilled smiths.

13. RELIANT BOOK COMPANY

This niche retailer buys and sells rare tomes, though its selections are known for being rather stuffy and academic, ranging from ancient history texts to the personal diaries of long-dead heroes in myriad languages. Owner and secret necromancer **Voz Lirayne** (page 80) runs this shop with the help of her new apprentice **Calmont Trenault** (page 27); for more about the Reliant Book Company, see page 46 in this adventure's volume.



Tarindlara Vallindel

14. SHELYN'S SMILE

This segmented building on Breach Creek is both the headquarters of Breachill's artisan guild and a temple to Shelyn, goddess of art, beauty, love, and music. In one wing, the faithful worship the Eternal Rose through sculpture and painting classes as well as via choirs and orchestral performances, and priests offer healing to those in need. In the other wing, representatives for Breachill's artisans and tradespeople are available on most days of the week, and customers can pay a small fee to be matched with the right proprietors for all their renovation, building, and decorating needs. Guild president **Tarindlara Vallindel** (NG female elf cleric of Shelyn 5) is an immaculate professional representative, the picture of sartorial splendor and class, and a prominent Shelynite herself.

15. TUSKHEAD STONEMWORKING

A new venture in the last decade, Tuskhead Stonemworking does brisk business building limestone foundations and walkways, installing landscaping stonework, and carving gravestones. The business is known for importing large barges of quarried stone straight into its building on the banks of Breach Creek, and management's strong relationship with the town council has ensured that all permit requests are readily approved. In recent years, however, Tuskhead has poached a few prominent clients from the Posandi Bros. masonry company—a coup for owner **Rorsk Axebane** (LG male dwarf mason), who

has always suspected that his rivals dabble in shady business practices. So far, the masonry company hasn't turned its sights on Tuskhead, but when the Posandis eventually take notice, no doubt town councilor Quentino Posandi could make life difficult for the company.

16. VUSKER'S CARTS & WHEELS

Located just inside the Breachill town limits, Vusker's Carts & Wheels is the go-to wainwright for the many traveling merchants and adventuring caravans that pass through the town. Chief wainwright and business owner **Fadelby Vusker** (LN male human wainwright) is clever and hardworking, and he has built up a robust business from the small mom-and-pop store that his father opened just before he was born. He's also a shrewd businessman, and when his customers return to him complaining that wayward bandits or roving monsters damaged their wagons, Vusker simply shrugs, charges them

for repairs, and recommends that they petition the town council for adventurers to address any recurring dangers to themselves or other travelers. Occasionally, when a threat outside town has scared enough of his customers, Vusker himself quietly looks for heroes to help address the problem and keep the heat off his business affairs.

17. WIZARD'S GRACE

Owing to its proximity to Breachill Town Hall, the Wizard's Grace tavern is the favored establishment of many adventurers who wish to seek work from the council in the town's monthly Call for Heroes. Here, adventurers and municipal workers regularly mingle, exchanging stories and generally enjoying the atmosphere created by the diverse clientele. In the days leading up to each council meeting, the tavern is particularly busy, as adventurers schmooze with town officials and even the occasional council member who might show up for a drink and a meal. Before each meeting, the inn's tavern has a long-standing tradition of holding toasts and serving meals of boar stew with lentils—a practice owner **Trinil Uskwold** (NG female human innkeeper) highly encourages, as her grandfather, himself a prominent local adventurer, loved eating that meal before embarking on his own many daring journeys. Because of the politics of socializing here, the crowd tends to be both well-mannered and chatty, though occasionally a brash adventurer or two gets rowdy.

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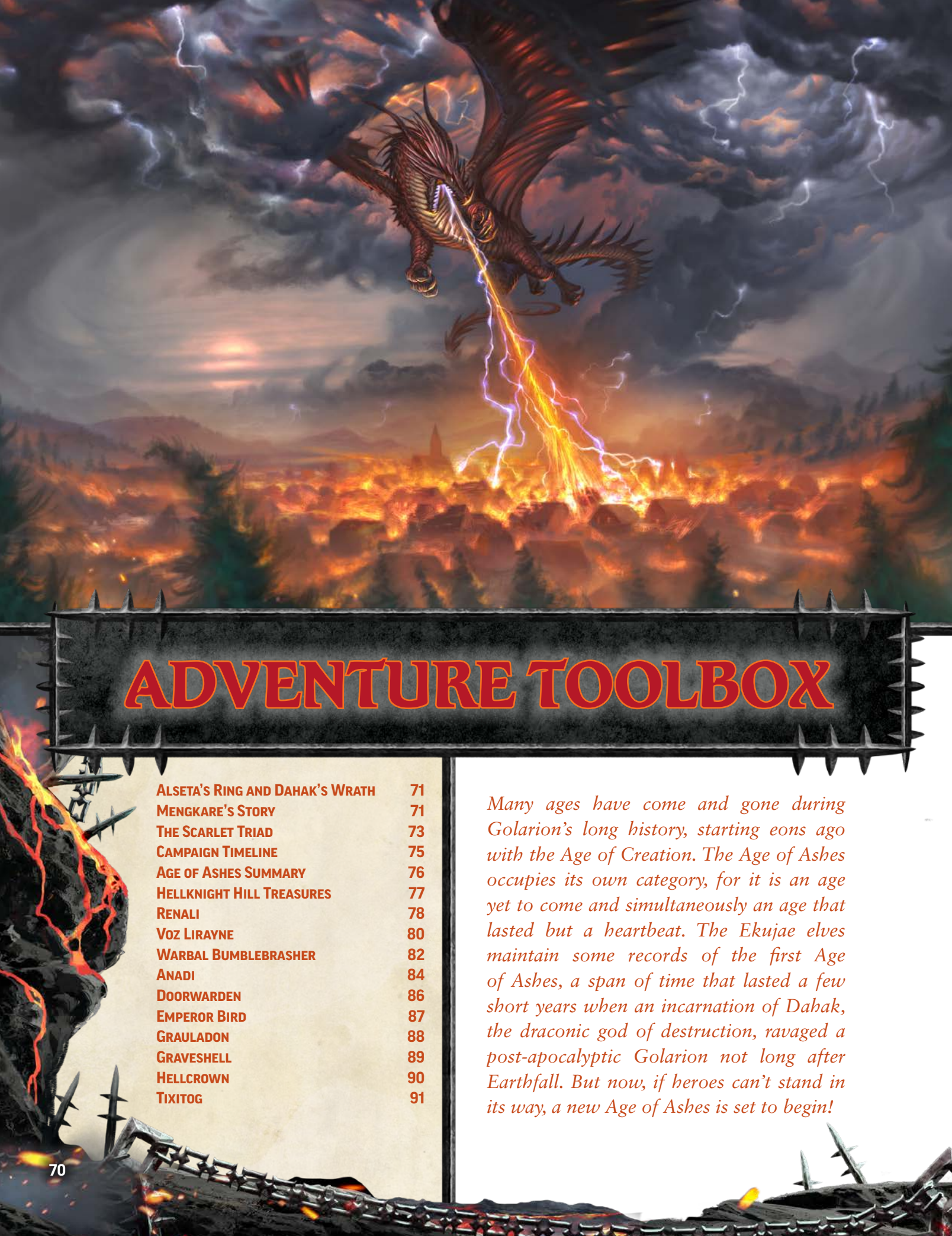
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Many ages have come and gone during Golarion's long history, starting eons ago with the Age of Creation. The Age of Ashes occupies its own category, for it is an age yet to come and simultaneously an age that lasted but a heartbeat. The Ekujae elves maintain some records of the first Age of Ashes, a span of time that lasted a few short years when an incarnation of Dahak, the draconic god of destruction, ravaged a post-apocalyptic Golarion not long after Earthfall. But now, if heroes can't stand in its way, a new Age of Ashes is set to begin!

Many events over the past several thousand years have led to the current situation that faces the heroes in the Age of Ashes Adventure Path. The following pages explore the details of this history, summarizing key events for the GM to help contextualize what is to come in the next six volumes.

Alseta's Ring and Dahak's Wrath

The ring of six *aiudara* located below Citadel Altaerein in Iger are known as Alseta's Ring, and they were among the first of these magical portals created on Golarion—fashioned long ago in the Age of Legends by the elven spellcaster and hero Candlaron. He arranged these portals in a ring, placing them as close together as was possible without their individual portal energies interfering with one another. His work on these closely placed portals would prove instrumental in a breakthrough that, in the years to follow, allowed him to create *aiudara* hubs capable of linking between more than two locations. While Alseta's Ring would always retain a special nostalgic place in Candlaron's heart, the more efficient hub mechanic ensured that travel through these first *aiudara* was less frequent. By the time the elves fled Golarion on the eve of Earthfall, the *aiudara* of Alseta's Ring had become little more than underused curiosities.

AN AGE OF ASHES

When Earthfall struck Golarion and nearly brought about the world's end, Dahak, the destructive god of evil dragons, took note. Amid the overwhelming devastation on both physical and spiritual levels (with continents and gods alike being destroyed), Dahak saw his chance to creep into the world without arousing the wrath of his father, Apsu. Dahak explored the metaphysical boundaries separating his realm in Hell and the world of Golarion and, after several years of searching, discovered a flaw in one of the first-constructed portals of Alseta's Ring. Using this flaw, Dahak was able to ease a sliver of his essence through the boundaries of reality to manifest a powerful incarnation of himself in the postapocalyptic world.

By taking care to invest his manifestation with just enough power so as to avoid Apsu's attention, Dahak's incarnation was able to ravage the world for years, allowing the god of destruction to live and destroy vicariously through his incarnation's actions. The results of the incarnation's destructive power came to be known as “dragonstorms”—long-lasting events akin to thunderstorms that incorporated the five chromatic dragon breath weapons: lightning strikes, fiery tornados, freezing blasts of cold, acidic rain, and clouds of poisonous fog. Furthermore, these

dragonstorms drove all dragons within them mad, reverting them to a primal frenzy as they sought each other out, adding further devastation as they violently clashed with one another.

Golarion was already horribly wounded, and Dahak could have eventually damaged it enough to finish the job that Earthfall started, were it not for the Ekujae elves, who had stayed behind hoping to ride out the disaster. With their partial knowledge of how the *aiudara* worked, these elves were able to enact a powerful ritual to defeat Dahak's incarnation and stop the god's devastating dragonstorms. In doing so, the elves were forced to sacrifice many of their own great heroes, a sacrifice that managed to turn Dahak's power back in on himself, slaying the incarnation's body and banishing its spiritual essence into the metaphysical space between portals in Alseta's Ring. This trapped the incarnation beyond reality and without a body, but the magical backlash from the ritual blasted through the portals to destroy Lotusgate, the ring's connection back to Kyonin. In so doing, this cut Alseta's Ring off from the *aiudara* network entirely. By the time descendants of Kyonin's elves returned to Golarion thousands of years later, Alseta's Ring had been truly forgotten.

Mengkare's Story

The gold dragon Mengkare hatched in 3469 AR in the eastern foothills of the World's Edge Mountains. For the first 191 years of his life, Mengkare studied history, magic, and philosophy, tutored by his parents and, periodically, trusted scholars from across the world who were allowed to visit the lair. This idyllic life came to a devastating end in 3660, when a conspiracy of anarchists led by a cleric of Dahak used a powerful artifact called the *orb of gold dragonkind* to dominate metallic dragons throughout Taldor, driving them to commit devastating atrocities that threw the nation into chaos—this event came to be known as the Dragon Plague. Mengkare and his parents were among those dragons dominated by the conspirators. In time, Mengkare's parents were killed by a group of dragonslayers, while Mengkare himself was banished to the Wastelands of Axis by the violet ray of a *prismatic spray*. Mengkare remained in exile on Axis for over a century, and it was during these years that his alignment shifted from lawful good to lawful neutral, and he first began to philosophize upon the nature of racial perfection.

Mengkare returned to Golarion in 3773 and spent many years traveling the land in the guise of a human philosopher, intrigued by humanity's paradoxical capacity for great good and great evil. Everywhere he traveled, he studied and observed. In 3819, as he

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wandered along the front of the Shining Crusade in Lastwall, he was approached by a fascinating woman who seemed to realize he was something more than a mere wandering philosopher. This woman was none other than Iomedae (before she ascended to divinity), a passionate and powerful crusader, and she convinced Mengkare to aid humanity in opposing the Whispering Tyrant and joining the crusade.

Mengkare's time as a crusader was short, for only 4 years later, he once again experienced humanity's capacity for great evil when he witnessed Tar-Baphon's defeat of Arazni. Demoralized further by what he took to be a lost cause, Mengkare quit the field of battle and left the mainland of Avistan, settling in for a hermit's life on a remote and wilderness island in the Steaming Sea: Hermea.

In 3980, Mengkare learned of a deeply troubling rumor that finally drew him out of hiding—news that a human wizard named Ilgreth had recovered the *orb of gold dragonkind* and had been using it to enslave dragons dwelling in and around the Five

Kings Mountains. Infuriated and blinded with a need for vengeance, Mengkare foolishly challenged Ilgreth, hoping to defeat him, gain control of the *orb of gold dragonkind*, and keep it from human hands forever. But the *orb of gold dragonkind* warned Ilgreth of Mengkare's approach. He confronted the gold dragon and, only a moment later, Mengkare became dominated by the *orb of gold dragonkind* for the second time in his life.

Ilgreth retreated back to his hidden workshop deep within the volcano then known as Torag's Crag and put Mengkare to work, but his plans to harness the dormant volcano's energy collapsed when a group of powerful human heroes tracked him down and confronted him. The wizard threw his dominated dragons at the heroes, but a lucky *greater dispel magic* managed to counteract the *dominate monster* effect controlling several of the dragons, including Mengkare. The furious and shamed gold dragon seized his chance—and discovered in that moment a heretofore unknown fact of his ancestry: Mengkare was a direct descendant of the original gold dragon whose soul had been bound, eons before, into the *orb of gold dragonkind*.

While Ilgreth had protected himself from fire, he had no defense against Mengkare's weakness-inducing breath. Already feeble, the wizard was rendered unconscious by the blast, but this mattered little, for the breath also caught the *orb of gold dragonkind* in its wake. The result was instantaneous. The *orb of gold dragonkind* exploded, overloaded the runes Ilgreth had been carefully crafting, and set off a chain reaction: the volcano began to erupt! As devastation spread, Mengkare quickly swept up most of the shattered fragments of the destroyed *orb of gold dragonkind* and teleported away, back to his lair in Hermea.

THE GLORIOUS ENDEAVOR

Victory over the *orb of gold dragonkind* rang hollow, as Mengkare realized the volcanic eruption he had triggered had caused the loss of many lives, but he convinced himself that this was a necessary sacrifice. He devoted much of his time to studying the shards of the *orb of gold dragonkind*, and eventually decided that there was no way the destroyed artifact could ever be restored. Relieved that this thorn from his past had been truly vanquished, he placed the shards in his vault and spent the following years periodically traveling back to the perfect city of Axis to further research the nature of racial and spiritual perfection.

In 4212, Mengkare found something amazing in a cavern deep under Hermea—an ancient and inoperable *aiudara* called Vengegate. Although he was initially unable to reactivate the portal, Mengkare’s considerable intellect and magical skill allowed him to determine where the portal led—a remote location on the border of Isgar and Druma. Mengkare flew to the site, explored further, and discovered Alseta’s Ring. There, he also discovered the magical key needed to activate Vengegate.

But when Mengkare activated the portal, he made a disturbing discovery: the incarnation of Dahak that haunted the Ring. Mengkare’s wonder at discovering the portal network and desire to reactivate the other portals in Alseta’s Ring was replaced by fear of what would occur should the incarnation of Dahak escape from its imprisonment—a resurgence of dragonstorms and the release of a cruel god’s avatar.

And so Mengkare hid the Vengegate key in his lair and dedicated himself to finding a solution to this new problem. For 2 centuries the dragon pondered, spending much of that time researching in the Perfect City on Axis. Eventually he discovered a potential solution, then spent nearly another century searching his soul and agonizing over the ramifications of what he’d learned—a potential way to not only defeat Dahak’s incarnation but also to strike a significant, perhaps even mortal, blow to the dragon god of destruction, but only at the expense of an entire civilization.

Mengkare’s discovery was of the *Anima Invocation*, the same ritual the Ekujae elves used so long ago to end the previous Age of Ashes and imprison Dahak’s avatar. Mengkare studied the ritual and focused on methods of expanding and improving its effects, eventually coming to the conclusion that if he could engineer a powerful enough sacrifice of a sufficient number of perfected souls, he could not only defeat the manifestation of Dahak but cause significant and lasting damage to the dragon god himself! Using the same logical arguments he’d used to retroactively justify the devastating volcanic eruption he’d triggered years before, he was able to come to terms with the most distasteful part of his plan—the sacrifice itself. If sacrificing a few thousand souls could save hundreds of thousands or more, would it not be a greater evil to do nothing and potentially consign future nations to oblivion?

Mengkare returned to Golarion in 4512 and spent the next several years finalizing his plan. Then, in 4519, he traveled to the region surrounding Alseta’s Ring, disguised as a human wizard named Lamond Breachton, and scoured Isgar for people who epitomized the perfection he sought. The dragon’s initial plan was to tell these recruits the goal of his plan and use saving

the world as motivation, theorizing that a like-minded group of good-hearted people would see the wisdom of his goals, but he quickly found that humans were resistant to building a society whose goal was self-sacrifice. When he realized his initial plan to create a utopia was a failure, the dragon used powerful magic to erase all traces of his attempt. He wiped the subjects’ memories, leaving them with only the barest training they’d need to survive in the remote wilderness. He extended this mind-wiping magic to cut off the citizens of the town from their loved ones, seeking to ensure his first failure would remain forgotten. He then spent a year helping the townsfolk get re-established, playing the role of a “kindly wizard who’d discovered the amnesiac citizens of a remote town and sought to save them.” In so doing, Mengkare yet again stanchd his own guilt by telling himself he was acting for the greater good of humanity.

Mengkare spared no expense in this pursuit, spending a significant amount of gold from his hoard to ensure the town would thrive, helping the citizens create a supportive infrastructure before he abandoned them to their fates. The townspeople never heard from him again, but they never forgot—they named their home after him, and Breachill exists to this day, an unsuspecting remnant of Mengkare’s doomed first attempt to create a utopia.

It would be decades before Mengkare began his second attempt at creating a utopia. With this second Glorious Endeavor and the founding of the utopian city of Promise, he embraced secrecy and sought to not only recruit souls but also to hand-craft them himself via selective breeding and rigorous training. But what Mengkare didn’t anticipate was that his creation of a new organization—the Scarlet Triad—would eventually set into motion a series of events that could well bring the Glorious Endeavor to its knees.

The Scarlet Triad

The storms that wracked the world after Aroden’s death devastated Promise and forced setbacks to the Glorious Endeavor. Over the months that followed, Mengkare realized he needed to focus his attentions on protecting and guiding the Glorious Endeavor on Hermea, and thus he couldn’t spare the time to personally seek out talented and gifted humans on the mainland to recruit to the project. As a solution, he founded a group called the Scarlet Triad in 4607, drawing upon three allied mercantile concerns with ties to (and based in) the city of Katapesh. The triad’s leaders arranged for the use of chambers below the city’s so-called Red Pyramid and took on the role of curators and guides of the historic site as a front for

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their operations. Only the city's leaders had an inkling of the Scarlet Triad's true purpose, and Mengkare paid well to ensure they were satisfied enough to not probe too deeply or ask too many questions.

For decades, the Scarlet Triad served as "talent scouts" for Promise, but as the Glorious Endeavor continued to gain momentum and population, the need for new blood grew less and less. By 4690, Mengkare reduced funding and support to the Scarlet Triad, reasoning that their services were increasingly unnecessary. The Triad then decided to secretly branch out into the slave trade to augment their dwindling coffers, figuring that their agents were already seeking out talented and gifted people and that even those who didn't meet the strict requirements for inclusion into the Glorious Endeavour could still fetch a high price as slaves.

The Scarlet Triad kept this venture quiet from Mengkare with the aid of their current leader, Uri Zandivar, whose elder sister Emaliza had the dragon's ear and a vaunted position as one of Mengkare's 13 elected advisors—the Council of Enlightenment. With his sister's aid, Uri prevented Mengkare from learning the truth about the Triad's descent into the slave trade—as long as the organization continued to provide the good human stock the dragon sought and did so at reduced overhead, things ran smoothly. When Absalom outlawed slavery in 4717, the Scarlet Triad saw a significant portion of its business crash and burn, and over the past few years it has been working to branch out—most significantly into Old Chelias's slave trade, into the Darklands below the Five Kings Mountains (hoping to set up a new slave trade with the duergar there), and with a cult of Dahak worshippers in the Mwangi Expanse—a cult whose invasion of Breachill sets into motion the events of this Adventure Path.

In the meantime, the Scarlet Triad has become focused on a significant project—gathering up as many shards of the destroyed *orb of gold dragonkind* as it can, so that it can rebuild a lesser version of the orb. With the aid of strange rituals, powerful allies, and essences of Dahak himself stripped from tainted gold mined from the Mwangi Expanse where the deity's manifestation once walked the world, the Scarlet Triad grows ever closer to something Mengkare assumed was impossible—rebuilding, at least in part, an artifact that will grant the Scarlet Triad the power to gain its most powerful slave yet: Mengkare himself.

THE RING AND THE TRIAD

The phrase "Tomorrow Must Burn" is one Mengkare often uses to justify his actions. It refers to the end goal of the Glorious Endeavor, and to Mengkare's conviction that in order to save the future from

Dahak, a short-term and hopefully controlled apocalypse in the form of sacrificing the populace of Promise will secure survival for the rest of the world.

"Tomorrow must burn..." Mengkare tells himself, "...so the days thereafter can prosper." It's flawed logic that the PCs might be able to capitalize upon in the final adventure, *Broken Promises*, to convince Mengkare of the error of his ways.

No such opportunity exists to redeem the Scarlet Triad, though. These slavers have wholeheartedly embraced the idea of weaponizing Alseta's Ring—eventually using it both as a method for swift travel throughout the region and as a destructive agent against the sites the ring connects to, focusing Dahak's wrath upon those who would oppose them. Uri Zandivar believes that once they can control Mengkare via a partially reconstructed *orb of gold dragonkind*, the dragon will reveal the secrets of the ancient portal network and allow them to relocate their base of operations to Promise.

For the moment, though, the Scarlet Triad must act cautiously. After all, the group is still under Mengkare's (distracted) watch, and Uri realizes that any attempt to directly control or activate the portals of Alseta's Ring before they've managed to complete repairs to the *orb of gold dragonkind* runs an increased risk of attracting the dragon's attention. So instead, Uri has taken steps to ensure a Scarlet Triad presence near all five portal sites, with cover stories to justify their presence, should Mengkare grow curious. Keeping an eye on Vengegate (in Promise) and Duskgate (in southern Katapesh) is simple enough, since the Scarlet Triad already has legitimate reasons to be active in Hermea and Katapesh. By having agents established in Ravounel and Saggorak under the pretense of securing additional mercantile interests, the Scarlet Triad can watch over Dreamgate and Jewelgate (that these interests primarily involve the slave trade remains yet another secret the Triad is keeping from Mengkare). And in the Mwangi Expanse, the Triad has secured an alliance with the Cinderclaws to gain shipments of gold tainted with Dahak's poisonous legacy. Agents have also been keeping an eye on Breachill from afar through contacts with local bookseller Voz Lirayne.

As the events of the first two adventures in Age of Ashes unfold, the PCs' actions largely go unnoticed by the Scarlet Triad—Breachill has a long tradition of “spawning adventurers,” after all, but to date, none of them have made memorable names for themselves. Their defeat of Voz isn't immediately noticed either, for the Triad agents have more significant tasks distracting them. However, by the time the PCs disrupt the Cinderclaws in the second adventure, Cult of Cinders, certain agents among the Scarlet Triad begin finally to take note. It falls to the gnoll Laslunn, third in command of the Scarlet Triad, to investigate what happened to Voz, and as the third adventure begins, she rightfully suspects that the PCs may be growing into a significant problem. Fortunately for the PCs, Laslunn has her own plots and keeps her knowledge about the PCs to herself, hoping that the PCs might become tools she can use to gain more power within the Triad.

When the PCs begin Age of Ashes, two of the portal keys await discovery. Scarlet Triad agents control three of the portal keys needed to use the *aiudara* of Alseta's Ring. Laslunn keeps the key to Jewelgate safe, while her direct superior Ilssrah Embermead guards the key to Duskgate as she works to undermine the dwarven city of Kolvar near the ruins of Saggorak. Uri himself has secretly absconded with Vengegate's key from Mengkare's treasury. In keeping with the plan to maintain low profiles and mask their actual interest in Alseta's Ring, none of these three keys have been used to infiltrate Breachill. Indeed, as Uri suspects, the way stations within all but Vengegate are likely to contain dangerous traps and hazards—for now, these factors keep Alseta's Ring safe from infiltration via the Scarlet Triad.

Campaign Timeline

Key events leading up to the start of the Age of Ashes Adventure Path are listed below.

Date	Event
Age of Legends	Elves arrive on Golarion. Candlaron creates the <i>aiudara</i> network, beginning with construction of the portals of Alseta's Ring.
-5293	Earthfall.
-5280	Dahak sneaks into the Material Plane via a flaw in Huntergate to revel in the post-Earthfall ruins, focusing his wrath in and around the Mwangi Expanse.
-5277	Dahak is defeated by the Ekujae and banished, but a fragment of his power remains stuck in the “in between” of the elf gates. Backlash from his defeat spills into Alseta's Ring and destroys the portal to Lotusgate.
1559	The dwarven city of Saggorak is founded.

2492	Orc invasion of Five Kings Mountains begins.
2507	Saggorak is blockaded by orcs.
2519	Saggorak falls after a 12-year siege.
3197	Khadon the Mighty leads effort to reclaim Five Kings Mountains from orcs.
3279	Khadon's forces defeat the orcs at the Battle of Splitmist Pass. He then founds the empire of Tar Khadurrm.
3288	Khadon the Mighty walls off Saggorak after discovering the city to be infested with undead.
3469	Mengkare hatches in Taldor in the World's Edge Mountains.
3660	Dragon Plague strikes Taldor.
3661	Mengkare and his parents are dominated by the <i>orb of gold dragonkind</i> and forced to blockade Maheto.
3667	Mengkare is banished to Axis and his parents are slain.
3672	Dragon Plague ends in Taldor.
3773	Mengkare returns to Golarion after spending about a century in exile and study in Axis.
3819	Mengkare is convinced to join the Shining Crusade by a passionate young crusader named Iomedae; he does so disguised as a human wizard.
3823	The loss of Arazni is the final straw for Mengkare and he abandons the Shining Crusade after seeing humanity at its worst. (Tar-Baphon, while undead, is still human as far as Mengkare is concerned.)
3977	Mengkare hears rumors about the return of the <i>orb of gold dragonkind</i> and confronts its new owner, Ilgreth, only to become dominated by the orb again.
3980	Mengkare destroys the <i>orb of gold dragonkind</i> and Ilgreth along with it; Droskar's Crag erupts as a result.
4212	Mengkare discovers Vengegate, Alseta's Ring, and the trapped incarnation of Dahak.
4519	Mengkare begins the first Glorious Endeavor near the site of Alseta's Ring.
4520	Mengkare realizes his first attempt to create a utopia is a failure and wipes the memories of the citizens of Breachill.
4521	Mengkare leaves Breachill to its fate after spending some time helping the amnesiac town regain its footing, returning to Hermea to reevaluate his plans.
4552	Mengkare founds Promise on Hermea, now planning to “farm” humans rather than recruit them, and intending to keep secret the truth behind his plans from all.
4606	Aroden's death. Storms wreak havoc on Hermea and cause major setbacks for the Glorious Endeavor.
4607	Scarlet Triad is founded and charged with seeking

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- out promising humans to send to Hermea, freeing Mengkare from the job of seeking new recruits.
- 4638 Order of the Nail is founded and constructs Citadel Altaerein.
- 4682 Order of the Nail relocates to Varisia.
- 4690 Scarlet Triad gets into the slavery business.
- 4711 Citadel Altaerein is completely abandoned.
- 4715 Scarlet Triad starts seeking out slivers of the *orb of gold dragonkind* to begin work on rebuilding a lesser version of the artifact.
- 4717 Bumblebrasher goblins move into Citadel Altaerein. Absalom outlaws slavery.
- 4719 Current year. Cinderclaw cult activates Huntergate and invades Citadel Altaerein.

Age of Ashes Summary

A summary of the six adventures in Age of Ashes, along with their character levels, appears below. Note that these summaries contain only brief details on upcoming adventures—if you have all six parts of Age of Ashes available, consider reading the entire campaign to familiarize yourself with what's coming up next before you begin play.

HELLKNIGHT HILL

By Amanda Hamon

Pathfinder Adventure Path #145, Levels 1–4

When they investigate the source of strange signal fires atop the abandoned Hellknight fortress of Citadel Altaerein, the PCs find more than a desperate tribe of goblins. The dungeons below have been invaded by a band of Dahak cultists who belong to a much larger group known as the Cinderclaws. At the same time, a local bookseller and secret worshipper of Norgorber begins to lay plans for using Citadel Altaerein as the site of an assassin's guild. By defeating her plot and the stranded Cinderclaws, the PCs not only remove a threat to the town of Breachill, but discover the lost *aiudara* network of Alseta's Ring and recover the deed to the citadel—making the PCs its new owners.

CULT OF CINDERS

By Eleanor Ferron

Pathfinder Adventure Path #146, Levels 5–8

The PCs use their newfound *aiudara* network to travel to the Mwangi Expanse, seeking the source of the Cinderclaw cultists who used it to invade Hellknight Hill. As they do so, they experience first-hand the dangers of Dahak's trapped incarnation, and then befriend a settlement of Ekujae elves who welcome them into their homes. The elves have their own problem—some sort of affliction strikes them blind if they travel east into the jungle, and their leaders have

determined that the cult of Dahak (a group they have fought for generations) is responsible. With the elves' support, the PCs explore the trackless jungles and discover strange magical pillars invested with potent magic tied to Dahak's cult, a hidden strip mine used by the Cinderclaws to produce poisonous gold, and eventually the cult's fortress, where they can save the elves and defeat the Cinderclaws completely.

TOMORROW MUST BURN

By Ron Lundeen

Pathfinder Adventure Path #147, Levels 9–11

While the Cinderclaws have been defeated, the PCs learn that another group, the mysterious Scarlet Triad, has been not only providing the cult with powerful magic but has been using it as a source for tainted gold. When an agent of the Scarlet Triad strikes at the PCs' allies in Breachill, they follow up in the nation of Ravounel, traveling via another portal in Alseta's Ring. Once there, they discover the Scarlet Triad working to expand the underground slave trade in Old Cheliah, using the city of Kintargo as a base of operations. Working with the halflings of the Bellflower Network to oppose the slavers, the PCs strike a critical blow to the Scarlet Triad's attempt to expand into Cheliah, eventually confronting and defeating the operation's third-in-command, the gnoll slaver Laslunn.

FIRES OF THE HAUNTED CITY

By Linda Zayas-Palmer

Pathfinder Adventure Path #148, Levels 12–14

The Scarlet Triad knows it has enemies now—with Laslunn's defeat and the destabilization of their slaver operations in Ravounel, a coming alliance with duergar slavers in the Darklands below the Five Kings Mountains grows even more important. The Scarlet Triad's second in command, the dwarven cleric Ilsrah Embermead, steps up her plans to forge not only this alliance, but another with the magma dragon Veshumirix, who holds what might be the largest shard of the *orb of gold dragonkind* in his hoard. The PCs use Alseta's Ring to travel to the haunted dwarven city of Saggarak, where they recruit the aid of the dwarves of Kolvar to oppose the Triad once again. For while an alliance with duergar slavers will bolster the Scarlet Triad's resources, an alliance with a powerful dragon who owns a shard of the artifact needed to complete the Triad's plot could spell even greater danger, should the PCs let it come to pass.

AGAINST THE SCARLET TRIAD

By John Compton

Pathfinder Adventure Path #149, Levels 15–17

With two defeats against the Scarlet Triad under their

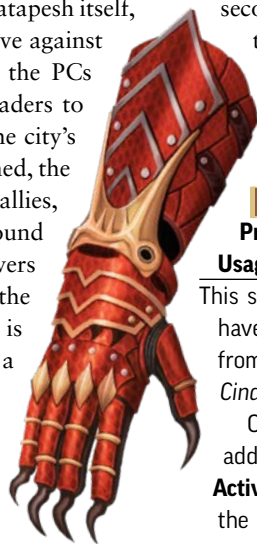
belts, the PCs are finally ready to take the fight to the slavers' home turf—the city of Katapesh. First, they'll need to save the gnomes of the settlement of Finderplain, who have been enduring brutal sandstorms of a supernatural nature. With the gnomes' aid, the PCs can move on to the city of Katapesh itself, but before they can make their final move against the Scarlet Triad's base of operations, the PCs must convince that city's mysterious leaders to declare the Scarlet Triad in breach of the city's mercantile laws. Once this is accomplished, the Scarlet Triad find themselves without allies, and a swift strike against their underground complex not only can disrupt the slavers for good, but reveals to the PCs the true danger—that Mengkare himself is planning a devastating apocalypse in a misguided attempt to defeat Dahak.

BROKEN PROMISES

By Luis Loza

Pathfinder Adventure Path #150,
Levels 18–20

The Scarlet Triad has been defeated, and the PCs have recovered all of the portal keys to activate the remaining *aiudara* of Alseta's Ring, but their work is far from done. As this final adventure begins, Dahak's manifestation, trapped for so long without a body inside the limbo of Alseta's Ring, finally manages to escape. The dragon god's avatar surges out of Alseta's Ring, and the PCs are forced to contend with the first dragonstorm in thousands of years—one centered on their home town of Breachill! Defending the town from this event only buys the PCs time—they must move on to Promise and confront Mengkare before he moves forward with his plan to sacrifice the people of his utopia in an attempt to defeat Dahak. Whether the PCs are able to convince the gold dragon of the error of his ways or are forced instead to defeat him in combat is up to them, but in the end, Dahak's manifestation must be exorcised. As long as he haunts Alseta's Ring, all lands touched by the portals will be threatened by dragonstorms. Now at the height of their power, the PCs will need all of their resources and abilities to infiltrate a series of demiplanes within Alseta's Ring, realms where Dahak's manifestation has toyed with potential apocalypses over thousands of years, if they hope to defeat his presence once and for all. Only with the dragon god's presence completely expunged from the world can the PCs be assured that their homes will not face devastation in a new Age of Ashes!



Hellknight Hill Treasures

The Cinderclaw cultist Malarunk carries two unusual magic items. The first is a magical gauntlet fashioned from drake scales and fitted with cold iron talons to look like the claw of a red dragon when worn. The second is a magical charm, a *hunter's arrowhead*—this item is also the key item needed to activate Huntergate, and opens the way for the PCs to begin the next adventure.

CINDERCLAW GAUNTLET

ITEM 5

UNCOMMON EVOCATION MAGICAL

Price 150 gp

Usage worn on 1 hand; Bulk L

This sharp-taloned +1 *striking spiked gauntlet* appears to have been crafted from dragon scales, with claws built from iron. In addition to the typical weapon traits, a *Cinderclaw gauntlet* has the versatile S trait.

On a critical hit, the *Cinderclaw gauntlet* deals an additional 1d6 fire damage.

Activate ⤵ command; **Trigger** Your attack roll with the *Cinderclaw gauntlet* is a critical success. **Effect** The creature you hit must succeed at a DC 19 Fortitude save or be sickened 1 by the gauntlet's acrid smoke. Creatures that don't need to breathe are immune.

HUNTER'S ARROWHEAD

ITEM 4

RARE ENCHANTMENT INVESTED MAGICAL

Price 80 gp

Usage worn; Bulk —

This arrowhead-shaped charm is not meant to be affixed to an arrow, but instead to be carried in a pocket or inside of a quiver. A *hunter's arrowhead* is etched with images sacred to the elven god Ketephys. If you carry one on your person, you are infused with great skill at hunting, and gain a +1 item bonus to Survival skill checks and attack rolls against any creature you've currently designated as your prey for the Hunt Prey ranger ability (note that the bonus to attack rolls is an item bonus, and therefore not cumulative with an item bonus from a magic weapon). A *hunter's arrowhead* is also a religious symbol of Ketephys.

This specific *hunter's arrowhead* (and no other) is a key to the Huntergate *aiudara*. If this *hunter's arrowhead* is touched to the stone within Huntergate, it activates the portal—provided the portal is fully functional. See "Cult of Cinders" for more information about Huntergate and what lies beyond its archway.

Activate ⤵ command; **Frequency** once per day; **Trigger** You would miss with an attack made with a bow. **Effect** You get a +2 circumstance bonus to your attack roll. This can turn a miss into a hit.



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RENALI

This striking woman has an air of curiosity and recklessness about her. Only the strange sheen of her eyes, slightly jerky movements, and her tendency to lace her fingers together like a spider's web indicate that she is anything out of the ordinary.

Although she takes pains to always appear in her graceful human form when in the presence of other humanoids, Renali is in reality an anadi—a member of a species of shapeshifting spider-like humanoids. Despite the ferocity some might attribute to their spider forms, anadis are a largely peace-loving people. Many generations ago, the anadis learned how off-putting their humanoid neighbors found talking, debating, and trading with what appear to be enormous arachnids. As a result, ingrained into their culture is a natural desire to never show their spider forms to humanoids unless displaying an open challenge or threat—which is a rarity. Anadis in general dislike war and conflict, but when threatened, they are not afraid to shift forms and use their vicious mandibles and natural venom to protect themselves, their families, or their villages. Anadis are most populous in Garund, particularly among rural and vegetated locales, though they are found in pockets elsewhere on Golarion, including in Azlant and Casmaron.

A loner even by the standards of a people who value independence, Renali is an explorer, a wilderness survivalist, a subsistence hunter, an herbalist, a naturalist—and sometimes a reckless wanderer whose endless curiosity puts her into difficult situations. Renali was born into a reclusive anadi clan in the northern Mwangi Expanse, located far from the primary anadi nation to the south. From a young age, Renali found herself more at home in the wild jungles, studying and learning about the various flora and fauna she encountered, than she did among the safety and community of her village.

When Renali was still a child, her parents recognized her practical intelligence and capacity for learning, and they pushed her to focus her studies on the various herbs and traditional remedies that were the specialty of their village's herbalist. Reyannon, Navina, and Liartel—the partners in the web marriage who birthed and raised Renali—rationalized that this was the best way for their daughter's talents to serve the village, and they believed that it was Grandmother Spider's

will that she eventually take on that official role. Not one to question her family or their understanding of the beloved Weaver, for a time Renali tried to play the part everyone wanted for her.

She studied under her village's herbalist, Yoneri, learning the techniques of mixing unguents and creating the potent salves her clan was known for. Yet never did she feel passionate or even terribly interested in the work. Still, Renali persisted in learning these traditions until Yoneri saw the young woman's ennui and grew concerned. When Yoneri finally sat her student down for a gentle discussion, the truth poured out: Renali did not want either the full training nor the life of a village herbalist, important and respected as the role might be. She'd rather explore uncharted territory, discover and experience new things, and protect the beautiful natural world around her. She worried, however, about letting down her parents, Yoneri, the village—everyone but herself.

Yoneri was saddened by Renali's words, disheartened to hear that Renali valued herself so little she was willing to languish in unhappiness just to avoid disappointing those who had foisted expectations on her, however well intentioned. Acting as much as Renali's mentor and friend as her teacher, Yoneri spoke with the young woman's parents, and then she presented Renali with a plan.

The village would give Renali any resources she needed to survive and thrive for 2 years. During that time, she was to follow her own callings—explore where she liked, camp where she liked, and cultivate and care for nature as she liked. At the end of those 2 years, Renali was to return to her village, either to resume her final studies to become her people's herbalist, or to inform them of a new role she had discovered and decided to pursue during her journeys.

Delighted and shocked to be the focus of such a plan, Renali immediately accepted and began her wanderings. For the first few weeks, she stayed close to the jungles near her village, thrilled and a little scared to be entirely on her own. After some time, Renali

began to roam farther and farther from her home base. Eventually, she spanned much of the length and width of the Mwangi Expanse. Every day brought a new sight for Renali, and the friends she met along the way have brought her closer and closer to finding an answer for Yoneri once her roaming period ends in about a year.

Just a few days before the beginning of “Hellknight Hill,” Renali happened upon the Cinderclaw cult and their obsession with the nearby Huntergate. She stayed hidden from them and watched them manage to bumble through reactivating one side of Huntergate. When the cultists sent a band through the active portal, Renali followed—invisible and curious—only to find herself trapped in the dungeons below Hellknight Hill when the cultists tried to send a second force in and damaged the portal, causing it to shut down.

Realizing she was trapped, Renali panicked and ran. By shifting into her spider form, she clambered up into the Goblinblood Caves, managed to sneak by the greater barghest, and settled into a small cave near a large nest of spiders. While these wild spiders were dangerous to her, they were also familiar, and as long as she stayed quiet and hunted in her spider form, she stayed relatively safe. Over time, she has become increasingly eager to find a way back home.

Campaign Role

Although the heroes encounter Renali relatively late in the adventure, it’s possible for her to serve as a recurring NPC during subsequent chapters of this Adventure Path. If the PCs are on friendly terms with Renali and help her return to the Mwangi Expanse through Huntergate, her disappearance from the heroes’ group need not be permanent. Instead, Renali could act as a scout and even an ambassador while the PCs traverse the Mwangi Expanse. Given her knowledge of local flora and fauna, she can also give them information about the creatures and monsters they encounter in that nation.

RENALI

CREATURE 4

UNIQUE CG MEDIUM ANADI HUMANOID

Perception +12

Languages Anadi, Common

Skills Athletics +6 (+8 to Climb in true form or spider form), Crafting +10 (+14 weaving), Deception +7, Medicine +12, Nature +10, Stealth +10, Survival +10

Str +0, **Dex** +2, **Con** +0, **Int** +2, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +1

AC 18; **Fort** +8, **Ref** +10, **Will** +12

HP 60

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ fangs +12 (finesse), **Damage** 2d6+3 piercing plus anadi venom

Arcane Innate Spells DC 22; **2nd** *illusory creature*, *invisibility*; **1st** *color spray*, *illusory disguise*, *illusory object*; **Cantrips (2nd)** *detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *message*

Anadi Venom (poison); **Saving Throw** DC 20 Fortitude; **Maximum Duration** 4 rounds; **Stage 1** 1d6 poison damage and flat-footed (1 round); **Stage 2** 1d6 poison damage, flat-footed, and clumsy 1 (1 round)

Change Shape ♦ (arcane, concentrate, polymorph, transmutation) As anadi hunter (page 84).

Spin Silk As anadi hunter (page 84).



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VOZ LIRAYNE

This sneering half-elf wears plain gray, unadorned robes, and soft boots to muffle her footfalls. Her enigmatic face is a mask as she slinks unnoticed through crowds, always alert for her next opportunity for personal gain.

Proprietor of the Reliant Book Company, Voz Lirayne maintains a facade of mild courtesy, presenting herself as one of the most unassuming shopkeepers in Breachill—and that is by her own design, as she dabbles in both research and affiliations that would certainly run afoul of the town's laws. Voz is an expert at staying in the shadows and drawing as little attention as possible. In truth, she's a necromancer who practices that dark art in isolated locales—such as the crypts of Citadel Altaerein on Hellknight Hill. She is also a secret worshipper of Norgorber who hopes to finance the creation of a combination assassin's guild and necromancy school in that deity's honor. Voz realizes that if anyone knew her secret inclinations, her customers and fellow business owners would forsake her and jeopardize not only her livelihood, but her goals and ambitions.

Voz originally hails from Tamran in Nirmathas, and she is the daughter of a restless elven hunter named Zlaradel and her fisherman husband, Carren. Voz's parents tried to instill their own simple values into their unexpected child; they taught young Voz to value her independence, enjoy her pursuits without self-consciousness or shame, and embrace simplicity as bliss. However, well intended as these lessons were, Voz's parents were also wholly emotionally unequipped to raise a child, especially one as headstrong and as naturally cruel as Voz. When young Voz began to lord her rudimentary knowledge of languages and magic over other children and even some adults, her parents praised her studiousness. When she demanded to be sent away from what backwater Tamran to a so-called proper school, her parents mortgaged their house and businesses. They helped her hide her Nirmathi identity and send her to a prestigious academy in Canorate in Molthune.

It was at this school, the Imperial Academy, where Voz honed her ability to blend in with crowds and hide her darkest inclinations. After all, as the scion of a nation the Molthuni considered wayward rebels and natural enemies, Voz would have been expelled

immediately had her instructors discovered the lie behind her carefully constructed background as the prodigy child of laborers from Eranmas. And so Voz kept her head down and dove into her studies on magic, using the basics she learned to delve into the subject that truly interested her: necromancy. The idea of making money by killing her inferior enemies and then animating their bodies fascinated and excited Voz, and thus she began her descent into true evil.

Voz continued to research more profane and taboo topics, from the art of enslaving souls to ways to precisely kill and preserve bodies. This side trek into anatomical studies led her to discover the teachings of Norgorber, the Reaper of Reputation and god of thievery, assassination, and secrets. Voz felt a wicked kinship with a religion that spoke so perfectly to her naturally secretive and increasingly bloodthirsty nature, and she began to dream of one day taking her rightful place as a leader among the other faithful of his flock.

Voz might have finished her studies at the Imperial Academy and left with impeccable credentials, were it not for an incident in her final year. Toward the beginning of the semester, Voz had a shipment of profane tomes sent to her under an assumed name. She received the books without attracting notice, but failed to properly hide the tomes about necromancy, soul siphoning, and lichdom. When a cleaning staff member discovered the books in her room on a dreary midnight, Voz panicked and murdered the poor man. Knowing all her transgressions would soon be revealed, Voz packed all her research and fled the school that very night. Using her skills of deception and obfuscation, she escaped the country and flew south.

For a while, Voz drifted throughout Isger, disgusted to find that nation to be yet another backwater akin to her homeland. She longed to experience Egorian's obsidian glitter, the jewel of diabolic Chelias, or even Pangolais, the shadowy but decadent cosmopolitan capital of wicked Nidal. Eventually, she decided on a different goal: found a guild of assassins and necromancers of her own. By this time, Voz had

settled in Breachill, where the innocent and welcoming townsfolk were happy to accept her and leave her be. Her goals set, Voz opened the Reliant Book Company under the guise of an esoteric scholar. She quietly began to make money while looking for ways to impress whatever Norgorberites she could, petitioning them for the support necessary to found her guild.

In her research, Voz stumbled upon many ancient and potentially powerful pieces of information, but one she made more recently dwarfed the others: rumors of a lost network of elf gates said to be buried within walking distance of her new home. According to her research, this elf gate, something called “Alseta’s Ring,” lay below neighboring Hellknight Hill. An underground complex below the ruined citadel atop Hellknight Hill would make for a perfect site for a hidden assassin’s guild, even more so if in its basement were a set of functioning elf gates that would allow for quick transport to other locations. The more she learned about Alseta’s Ring, the more intrigued she became, keeping her notes in a journal she carried at all times on her person. (See page 53 for details on this journal’s contents.)

But Voz lacked the funds to begin; the Reliant Book Company made just enough to stay afloat—not nearly enough to fund the foundation of a secret assassin’s guild. And so Voz began reaching out, surreptitiously, to her esoteric contacts, hoping to find someone who would bankroll the guild.

She received an unexpected response from a group that called itself the Scarlet Triad, which claimed to share an interest in Alseta’s Ring. If she could secure access to the Ring and report to the Scarlet Triad about its functionality, they promised to fund her guild. Wary about the group’s true motives—she was unable to determine much more than that they were a merchant’s guild in Katapesh—Voz agreed to their proposal and, in the days since, has focused on securing access to the ruins deep under Hellknight Hill.

Campaign Role

If Voz escapes or the PCs somehow bargain with her, she’s likely to remain

a threat throughout this Adventure Path. In this case, Voz shadows the PCs as they step through each of the *aiudara* that they restore to functionality, pursuing her research alongside them to activate the portals and claim her reward from the Scarlet Triad. Voz could show up as an additional antagonist at any key moment in this Adventure Path, and her motivations are now twofold: learn the details of Alseta’s Ring, and take vengeance on the heroes who were either daring enough to defeat her once or stupid enough to let her escape alive.

VOZ LIRAYNE

CREATURE 5

UNIQUE NE MEDIUM ELF HUMAN HUMANOID

Perception +7

Languages Common, Elven, Goblin, Halfling, Necril, Orcish

Skills Arcana +13, Deception +11, Library Lore +11, Mercantile Lore +11, Occultism +11, Religion +7, Society +11, Stealth +10

Str +1, **Dex** +3, **Con** +3, **Int** +4, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +2

Items +1 dagger (bonded item), healing potion, scroll of sleep, scroll of true strike

AC 20 (21 with mage armor), **Fort** +10, **Ref** +12,

Will +9

HP 56 plus 10 temporary from false life

Speed 25 feet

Melee ♦ dagger +13 (agile, finesse, magical, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+3 piercing

Ranged ♦ dagger +13 (agile, magical, thrown 10 feet, versatile S), **Damage** 1d4+3 piercing

Arcane Prepared Spells DC 23, attack +15; **3rd** bind undead, paralyze, vampiric touch; **2nd** acid arrow, false life, mirror image, spider climb; **1st** fear, grim tendrils, mage armor, ray of enfeeblement; **Cantrips (3rd)** chill touch, detect magic, light, read magic, shield

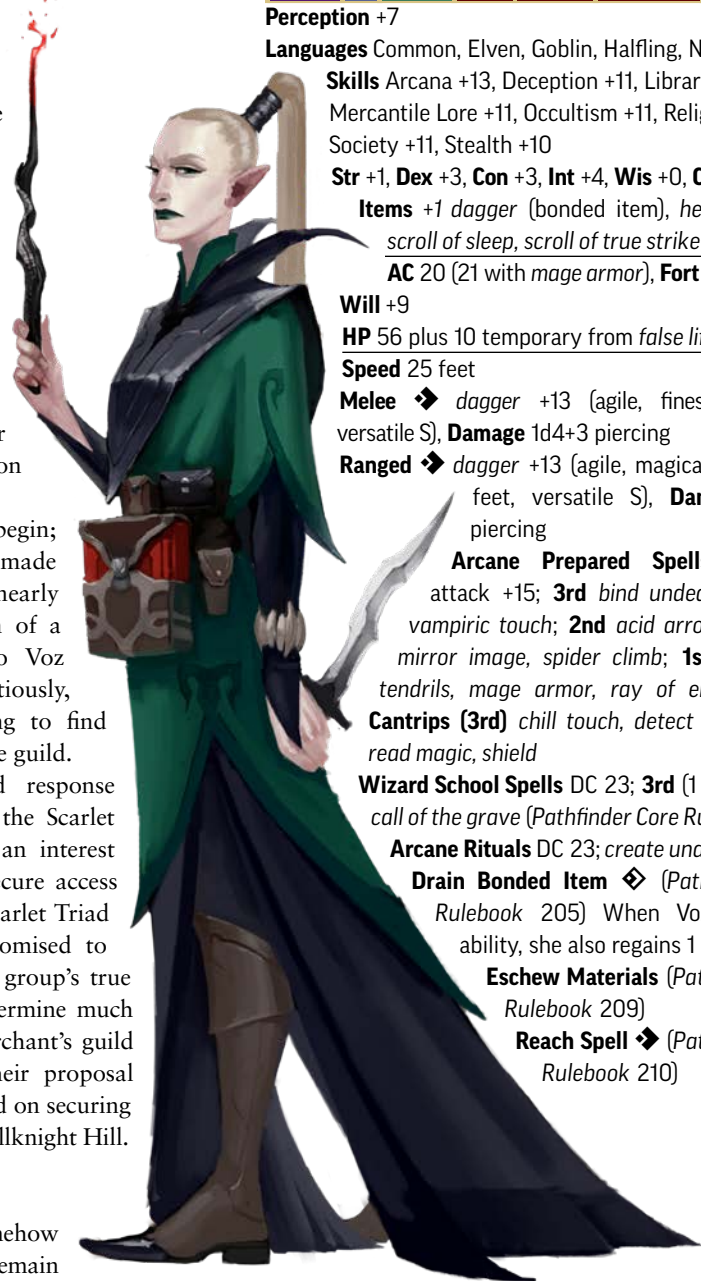
Wizard School Spells DC 23; **3rd** (1 Focus Point) call of the grave (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 406)

Arcane Rituals DC 23; create undead

Drain Bonded Item ♦ (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 205) When Voz uses this ability, she also regains 1 Focus Point.

Eschew Materials (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 209)

Reach Spell ♦ (Pathfinder Core Rulebook 210)



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WARBAL BUMBLEBRASHER

This impeccably dressed goblin woman wears understated silver jewelry to accent her pristine robes. She gives a warm, measured, diplomatic smile to most anyone she meets.

Warbal Bumblebrasher is Breachill's esteemed ambassador from the Bumblebrasher tribe, which has lived for several generations near (and more recently within) Citadel Altaerein. By far the Bumblebrasher with the most wanderlust, Warbal sates her appetite for knowledge, refinement, and diversity of friends in her new home in Breachill. At the same time, she gives back to the tribe that birthed and raised her by acting as its representative, advocate, and friend in all town matters that might concern or benefit the goblins.

Warbal knows that she is the single personal link that most Breachill residents have with the goblins of Iser's wilds, many of whom have been outright hostile in the past—memories of the Goblinblood Wars still linger, even though that conflict ended many years ago. As such, Warbal sees it as her personal mission to put forward a good face for her people to everyone in town she meets, and to have deep discussions with them both to advocate for goblins as a whole and to gently show the townspeople that many goblins are not contributing to a violent legacy.

Wide-eyed and highly intelligent from a young age, Warbal dreamed about acquiring knowledge of the outside world. Despite these yearnings, Warbal was too dedicated to her people to ever consider leaving the tribe and setting out on her own. Eventually, when the Hellknights abandoned the citadel entirely, the Bumblebrashers moved into the keep and established themselves in a defensible area in its vaults. At this point, Warbal's curiosity and wanderlust peaked as she scoured the keep for any and all tomes the Hellknights left behind. The precocious young goblin drank in all of the history and Hellknight protocols that she learned from her patchwork library, even though the monsters that quickly came to occupy the keep threatened her life every time she left the tribe's safety.

Warbal might have festered in misery and unfulfilled potential for many more years were it not for the intervention of the Bumblebrasher's new chief, Warbal's older cousin Helba. Recognizing Warbal's unhappiness as a rank-and-file tribe member—

even if the whip-smart young goblin did not herself understand why she was always so morose—Helba began to wrack her brain for a solution. Sending a lone goblin, let alone one without any knowledge of the world outside her tribe, away from the protection of the group was incredibly dangerous, Helba knew. But it also wasn't an option to force Warbal into a life that left her unhappy and unfulfilled. Finally, the goblin chief hit upon a plan, and to help her bring it about, she tracked down a trusted member of the merchant caravans that once traded with the Bumblebrashers on the One-Eyed Incline—a kindly half-orc bard and tailor named Torash, who still occasionally visited the goblins in the keep when he dared the journey.

Helba and Torash traveled to Breachill, where the half-orc was a respected member of Shelyn's Smile, the town's artisans' guild. There, Torash used his connections to gain an audience for Helba with the Breachill town council, which was more than happy to meet with the chief of a nearby kindly goblin tribe the councilors never knew existed. She got the council to agree that the Bumblebrashers would provide crafted goods to Breachill, and in exchange, the town would fund an advocate who would speak on the goblins' behalf in all related town matters. Thus, the job of Bumblebrasher ambassador to Breachill was born.

When Helba returned to Citadel Altaerein, she officially designated Warbal as the tribe's first ambassador to Breachill. Ecstatic, the eager goblin immediately moved into town, where the council funded a modest but comfortable flat for her and provided her a living stipend—the lion's share of which she spends on books and occasional holiday forays to other Iseri towns. For the past several years, Warbal has performed her duty wisely and graciously, learning much from her position of responsibility even as she has experienced culture shock from all the differences in the environment around her. Warbal has nonetheless scored many diplomatic successes both for the Bumblebrashers and for the townspeople. The latter, who value freedom and self-sufficiency over all,

grow more impressed with this quietly intelligent and kind goblin woman every day.

Campaign Role

Warbal is one of the first NPCs the heroes meet in this adventure, and at that time is deeply worried about the Bumblebrashers, as Helba hasn't appeared for their last two meetings and she has seen alarm fires on the horizon. Though she is distracted by her concern, Warbal is an excellent way for the PCs to learn about some of the goblins who inhabit the wilds outside of Breachill. If the PCs are amenable to her, Warbal is more than happy to answer their questions about the Bumblebrashers and to generally do anything reasonable they might ask to help with their mission to contact the lost goblin tribe.

Raised as a survivalist, Warbal has significant skills when it comes to camping in the wilderness between Breachill and Hellknight Hill. She can be an invaluable advisor, and if the PCs wish to assign her to wait for them outside the keep while they investigate, perhaps tending to their mounts or helping with other similar tasks, she can easily sustain herself in the nearby woods for even a couple of weeks. While the PCs explore Citadel Altaerein, Warbal can act as a scout in the area surrounding the keep, provide information about some of the monsters inside, and give them a very rough sense of the keep's layout—but she's forgotten much in the many years since she's lived there and can sketch only a rough image for the PCs. She doesn't know about the secret entrance to the keep—this is a more recent discovery Helba has (perhaps unwisely) kept to herself for now.

Once the PCs have rescued the Bumblebrashers, Warbal returns to her people to take stock of their situation and determine whether there's anything the town can do to help. However, if the PCs take a shine to Warbal, she might further help them scout in Citadel Altaerein's vaults. Once evidence of Voz Lirayne's tampering comes to light, however, Warbal again becomes extremely worried for her people and takes her leave from the party to touch base with Helba.

Warbal's involvement in the adventure need not end at this point, though. After all, she continues to work on the Bumblebrashers' behalf in both Citadel Altaerein and Breachill. If the PCs are on friendly terms with her, consider increasing the awards the Breachill town council gives them for completing quests on its behalf, since Warbal will have advocated for the PCs personally. Further, at key points in the adventure when the PCs might need a minor magic or mundane item within the keep, consider allowing the PCs to create an arrangement in which Warbal brings them what they need at just the right time.

WARBAL BUMBLEBRASHER

CREATURE 1

UNIQUE NG SMALL GOBLIN HUMANOID

Perception +3; darkvision

Languages Common, Goblin

Skills Diplomacy +8, Goblin Lore +9, Nature +5, Religion +5, Society +7, Survival +3

Str -1, **Dex** +2, **Con** +2, **Int** +2, **Wis** +0, **Cha** +3

Items book titled *History of the Bumblebrashers in Isgar*, religious symbol of Desna, scholar's robes

Goblin Scuttle **Trigger** A goblin ally ends a move action adjacent to Warbal. **Effect** Warbal Steps.

AC 15, **Fort** +5, **Ref** +5, **Will** +5

HP 20

Speed 25 feet

Melee **◆** fist +5 (agile, finesse, nonlethal, unarmed),

Damage 1d4-1 bludgeoning

Melee **◆** heavy book +0, **Damage** 1d6-1 bludgeoning

Ranged **◆** heavy book +3 (thrown 10 feet), **Damage** 1d6-1 bludgeoning

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ANADI HOMELAND

The largest group of anadis live in Garund in the nation of Nurvatcha. Other anadi clans and villages exist in the surrounding region. Anadis are also present in Casmaron and on some of Azlant's smaller islands. Regardless of where they live, they share common values and cultural characteristics.

Anadi

Anadis are peaceful, reclusive humanoids who live deep within woodlands, jungles, and other untamed areas of wilderness. Their natural forms resemble humanoid spiders covered in beautiful and distinctive markings of varying colors. These patterns are as unique as other humanoids' facial features, birthmarks, and other identifying aspects.

Anadis have an innate talent for illusion and transmutation. They learned long ago how off-putting their natural forms can be to other humanoids, so they frequently use their innate talents to assume human forms. When they do so, only a strange, lovely sheen to their dark eyes and the deliberative, jerky movements of their gestures might indicate that an anadi is not entirely what they appear to be. Given their tendency to accommodate humans' delicate sensibilities toward arachnids, most anadis consider showing their natural forms to a stranger a rather rude display. Instead, most display their spider-like forms only as an intimidation tactic when threatened. When forced into combat—an eventuality most anadis despise—they shift into their true forms as soon as possible, allowing them to inflict their devastating natural venom on their foes.

ANADI HUNTER

Anadi hunters act as the eyes and ears of their clans, scouting the surrounding area for potential invaders.

ANADI HUNTER

CREATURE 2

UNCOMMON CG MEDIUM ANADI HUMANOID

Perception +7

Languages Anadi, Common

Skills Acrobatics +8, Athletics +6 (+8 to Climb in true or spider form), Crafting +6 (+10 weaving), Nature +5, Stealth +8

Str +2, **Dex** +4, **Con** +2, **Int** +0, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

Items composite shortbow (20 arrows), leather armor, shortsword

AC 19; **Fort** +6, **Ref** +10, **Will** +7

HP 27

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ shortsword +10 (agile, finesse, versatile S),

Damage 1d6+2 piercing

Melee ♦ fangs +10 (finesse), **Damage** 1d8+2 piercing plus anadi venom

Ranged ♦ composite shortbow +10 (deadly 1d10, propulsive, range increment 60 feet, reload 0), **Damage** 1d6+1 piercing

Anadi Venom (poison); **Saving Throw** DC 16 Fortitude;

Maximum Duration 4 rounds; **Stage 1** 1d6 poison damage and flat-footed (1 round); **Stage 2** 1d6 poison damage, flat-footed, and clumsy 1 (1 round)

Change Shape ♦ (arcane, concentrate, polymorph, transmutation) The anadi changes into their true form, spider form, or human form. The above statistics assume the anadi is in their true form. While in their human form, the anadi hunter can't use their fangs attack and loses their climb Speed. When in spider form, they can't use weapons.

Spin Silk (concentrate, exploration, manipulate) By spending several minutes, an anadi can produce silk to craft items made of cloth. A single anadi can produce enough silk in a day to craft a single garment.



ANADI SAGE

Anadi sages commune with nature and hone their magic through practice.

ANADI SAGE

CREATURE 4

UNCOMMON CG MEDIUM ANADI HUMANOID

Perception +12

Languages Anadi, Common

Skills Athletics +6 (+8 to Climb in true or spider form), Crafting +9 (+13 weaving), Deception +8, Diplomacy +10, Nature +12, Survival +10

Str +0, **Dex** +2, **Con** +0, **Int** +1, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +2

Items hide armor, shortsword

AC 21; **Fort** +8, **Ref** +10, **Will** +12

HP 58

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ shortsword +12 (agile, finesse, versatile S), **Damage** 1d6+3 piercing

Melee ♦ fangs +12 (finesse), **Damage** 2d6+3 piercing plus anadi venom

Arcane Innate Spells DC 22; **2nd** *blur*, *illusory creature*; **1st** *color spray*, *illusory disguise*, *illusory object*; **Cantrips (2nd)** *detect magic*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *message*

Anadi Venom (poison); **Saving Throw** DC 20 Fortitude; **Maximum Duration** 4 rounds; **Stage 1** 1d6 poison damage and flat-footed (1 round); **Stage 2** 1d6 poison damage, flat-footed, and clumsy 1 (1 round)

Change Shape ♦ (arcane, concentrate, polymorph, transmutation) As anadi hunter.

Spin Silk As anadi hunter.

ANADI ELDER

Anadi elders must make the difficult decision of whether to continue negotiations or to escalate a disagreement to outright conflict.

ANADI ELDER

CREATURE 6

UNCOMMON CG MEDIUM ANADI HUMANOID

Perception +15

Languages Anadi, Common

Skills Athletics +12 (+14 to Climb in true or spider form), Crafting +13 (+17 weaving), Deception +12, Diplomacy +10, Nature +14, Society +9, Survival +12

Str +2, **Dex** +4, **Con** +0, **Int** +1, **Wis** +4, **Cha** +2

Items composite longbow (20 arrows), hide armor, shortsword

AC 23; **Fort** +10, **Ref** +14, **Will** +16

HP 95

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ shortsword +16 (agile, finesse, versatile S), **Damage** 1d6+5 piercing

Melee ♦ fangs +16 (finesse), **Damage** 2d6+5 piercing plus anadi venom

Ranged ♦ composite longbow +16 (deadly 1d10, propulsive, range increment 100 feet, reload 0, volley 30 feet), **Damage** 1d8+1 piercing

Arcane Innate Spells DC 25, attack +17; **3rd** *hypnotic pattern*, *invisibility sphere*; **2nd** *blur*, *invisibility*, *mirror image*; **1st** *color spray*, *illusory disguise*, *illusory object*; **Cantrips (3rd)** *detect magic*, *electric arc*, *ghost sound*, *mage hand*, *message*

Anadi Venom (poison); **Saving Throw** DC 22 Fortitude; **Maximum Duration** 6 rounds; **Stage 1** 2d6 poison damage and flat-footed (1 round); **Stage 2** 2d6 poison damage, flat-footed, and clumsy 1 (1 round)

Change Shape ♦ (arcane, concentrate, polymorph, transmutation) As anadi hunter.

Spin Silk As anadi hunter.



GRANDMOTHER SPIDER

Many anadi villages believe deeply in the teachings of Grandmother Spider, the goddess of twilight, weaving, illusion, and family. The most devout anadi believe that this goddess, sometimes called Nana Anadi, long ago led their ancestors from servitude. The legend goes that when the anadi were frightened by the darkness, Grandmother Spider plucked the dewdrops from her web to hang in the sky and light the night for them. Nana Anadi is an honorary matriarch to many in Nurvatcha, though the goddess has never taken the nation's throne—and most believe she would never wish to do so, anyway.



WEB MARRIAGES

Anadis are communal when it comes to courting one another and raising their young. Most relationships are triads or tetrads that make up a single household and share domestic responsibilities. Such partnerships often extend to members' work outside of the home; one family could consist of three hunters who coordinate group hunts, while another might have four sages who spend as much time together in the library as at home. These "web marriages" play a large role in anadi society; members of a web marriage vote in blocks during local elections and defend one another to the death in times of strife.

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THE FIRST DOORWARDENS

Elves crafted the original doorwardens in honor of their goddess of portals, Alseta. Such doorwardens (such as the one in this volume's adventure) are similar to the one presented here, but they speak Elven instead of Common, wield specially crafted elven curve blades rather than longswords, and may have great knowledge of elven culture and religion.

Doorwarden

Doorwardens are constructs originally invented by elves. Upon first glance, these guardians resemble ornate doors made entirely of steel or even mithral, but when trespassers try to force their way past, the doorwarden transforms into a skilled and sturdy soldier bearing its "door" like a towering shield.

Perceptive travelers can sometimes spot a door warden before its magic becomes obvious. The door often bears a round disk or similar embossment that resembles a shield boss designed for bashing, and the bar that can be lowered to block entry resembles an arm clasping a longsword by the hilt. The original doorwardens crafted by the elves included a motif of elven armor and a metal mask in the style of Alseta's own, though other cultures embellish their own doorwardens with their own themes and sometimes even their own ancestral weapons, such as axes for dwarven doorwardens.

Doorwardens sometimes know about the chambers they guard, and they have been known to speak to trespassers, especially elves. But a doorwarden cannot be persuaded to stand aside; it is bound to the portal where it has been placed and will defend it until destroyed.

DOORWARDEN

CREATURE 5

UNCOMMON LN LARGE CONSTRUCT

Perception +13; low-light vision, *see invisibility*

Languages Common

Skills Athletics +13, Intimidation +11

Str +6, **Dex** +0, **Con** +3, **Int** -1, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +2

Items longsword, steel shield (Hardness 5, HP 20, BT 10) with shield boss

AC 22 (24 with shield raised); **Fort** +12, **Ref** +7, **Will** +10

HP 60; **Immunities** bleed, death effects, disease, doomed, drained, fatigued, healing, necromancy, nonlethal attacks, paralyzed, poison, sickened, unconscious; **Resistances** physical 5 (except bludgeoning)

Attack of Opportunity ⤵

Reactive Shield ⤵ **Trigger** An enemy hits the doorwarden with a melee Strike. **Effect** The doorwarden can Raise its Shield and gain its shield's benefit to AC against the triggering attack.

Shield Block ⤵ When the doorwarden uses Shield Block against a melee attack from a creature within 5 feet, it can also push the creature 5 feet.

Speed 20 feet

Melee ⚔ longsword +15 (reach 10 feet, versatile P), **Damage** 1d8+9 slashing

Melee ⚔ shield boss +15, **Damage** 1d6+9 bludgeoning

Melee ⚔ door +13, **Damage** 1d4+8 bludgeoning

Innate Arcane Spells DC 19; 2nd *see invisibility*

Imitate Door ⚡ (concentrate) Until the next time it acts, the doorwarden appears to be a door. It has an automatic result of 31 on Deception checks and DCs to pass as a door.

Slam Doors ⚡⚡ (concentrate) The door opens and slams its doors, making two door Strikes against one creature. If both hit, the creature is grabbed—stuck between the doors. The doorwarden's multiple attack penalty doesn't increase until it has finished both attacks.

Emperor Bird

The emperor bird is native to the jungles of the Mwangi Expanse and known for its brilliant plumage and innate magic. While it usually feeds on lizards, big insects, and other small creatures, the emperor bird is highly territorial and not afraid to attack larger prey. Its beak, resembling that of the much smaller peafowl, is exceptionally sharp, but its deadliest weapon is its tail—the long, whiplike blades of bone hidden among its tail feathers are a nasty surprise for any predator trying to sneak up on the bird.

The emperor bird was given its current name 2,000 years ago when Taldor's Sixth Army of Exploration ventured into the Mwangi Expanse. When the legion spotted this 6-foot-long bird with its spectacular multicolored feathers trailing from its tail, wings, and crest, the soldiers thought the bird regal enough to suit their emperor, disregarding the name the Mwangi had given to the bird generations before, bebaki.

Keeping an emperor bird was, for many years, a sign of prestige among the nobility of Taldor. That was long ago, however, and emperor birds eventually fell out of fashion. Inevitably their former owners forgot about their colorful pets, and hundreds of neglected emperor birds were released back into the wild by weary servants. While many such freed birds perished quickly in the unfamiliar woodlands of Avistan, some managed to hold out, and emperor birds can still be encountered in the Verduran Forest.

The emperor bird uses its brilliant, iridescent plumage for mating displays as well as for intimidating rival suitors and potential predators. Not only are the feathers beautiful, but they are actually magical—a fact that has piqued the interest of alchemists and wizards alike, many of whom have spent decades capturing and breeding emperor birds in the hope of unlocking their arcane secrets. Mages stationed in the Mwangi Expanse will pay a pretty penny for intact feathers from these majestic creatures—or better yet, live specimens.



OTHER EMPEROR BIRDS

Other varieties of bebaki flit amid the jungle canopies of the Mwangi Expanse, their relationship to one another identifiable by the constant feature of their massive and deadly tail feathers. A subspecies called long-beaked emperor birds is remarkable for its bright yellow plumage and its namesake beak, which is long and sharp enough to dig through ironwood tree trunks, allowing it to feast on the golden sting ants native to certain corners of the Mwangi Expanse.

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EMPEROR BIRD

CREATURE 2

UNCOMMON N MEDIUM ANIMAL

Perception +8

Skills Acrobatics +9, Intimidation +7, Survival +7

Str +2, **Dex** +3, **Con** +0, **Int** -4, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +3

AC 18; **Fort** +6; **Ref** +9; **Will** +7

HP 27

Speed 15 feet, fly 20 feet

Melee ♦ beak +11, **Damage** 1d10+2 piercing

Melee ♦ tail +11 (agile, reach 10 feet), **Damage** 1d8+3 slashing

Dazzling Display ♦♦ (enchantment, mental, primal, visual) The emperor bird flaps its mesmerizing wings. Each creature within 15 feet that can see the emperor bird must attempt a DC 19 Will save.

Critical Success The creature is unaffected.

Success The creature is dazzled for 1 round.

Failure The creature is dazzled for 1d4 rounds.

Critical Failure The creature is confused for 1d4 rounds.

Tail Lash ♦♦ The emperor bird makes tail Strikes against two different creatures within reach. The emperor bird's multiple attack penalty does not increase until it has finished both attacks.





SALTWATER GRAULADONS

Although the vast majority of grauladons live in fresh or brackish waters, a rare grauladon species lives in and along saltwater coasts.

These giant grauladons are even bigger than their common brethren, with stronger jaws and even darker breath. Rumors hint at the existence of truly massive saltwater grauladons capable of sinking ships.

Most folk regard these stories as nothing more than tall tales, but plenty of eccentric old sailors and lighthouse operators readily attest otherwise, pointing to mysterious descriptions of shipwrecks in ancient logbooks and sometimes even showing their own scars as proof of the legends.

Grauladon

Grauladons are vicious predators that appear crocodilian in form, but are in fact distant offshoots of dragonkind. They make their dens in the shallows of fetid ponds or isolated corners of larger bodies of water, usually in rural swamps or woodlands. Driven almost entirely by their base desire to feed, grauladons spend most of their time swimming leisurely underwater looking for prey such as fish or waterfowl. Possessed of a greed befitting their more majestic dragon cousins, grauladons often take down prey larger than they need, jealously guarding the corpses to keep scavengers away even as the meat rots. A typical grauladon is 16 feet long from its snout to the tip of its tail and weighs 1,500 pounds.

A grauladon's stench may seem supernaturally disgusting, but it is simply the result of the creature's fetid habitat and diet of rotting, waterlogged meat. As grauladons' exhalations bear a passing resemblance to dragons' breath, they have earned the nickname "mud drakes" from rural folk.

Grauladons can be found in both fresh and brackish water in most temperate climates. They prefer to lair in shallow waters, particularly where reeds or other foliage conceal their bulk from unsuspecting prey. Grauladons are highly territorial and won't tolerate other predators living or hunting near their homes.

GRAULADON

CREATURE 2

UNCOMMON N LARGE DRAGON

Perception +7; darkvision, scent (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Draconic (can't speak any language)

Skills Athletics +10, Stealth +6, Survival +5

Str +4, **Dex** +0, **Con** +4, **Int** -3, **Wis** +1, **Cha** -2

AC 17; **Fort** +12, **Ref** +6, **Will** +7

HP 35; **Immunities** paralyzed, sleep

Reactive Breath **Trigger** The grauladon takes damage from an adjacent creature.

Effect The grauladon uses Noxious Breath, including the triggering creature in the area.

Speed 20 feet, swim 30 feet

Melee **◆** jaws +10, **Damage** 1d12+4 piercing

Melee **◆** tail +10 (agile), **Damage** 1d8+4 bludgeoning

Body Slam **◆ Requirements** More than one enemy is adjacent to the grauladon.

Effect The grauladon swings its tail at each adjacent enemy and attempts to Trip each creature adjacent to it. It rolls only a single Athletics check and compares the result to the Fortitude DC of each target.

Deep Breath A grauladon can hold its breath for 225 rounds (22-1/2 minutes).

Noxious Breath **◆** The grauladon hisses and unleashes a nauseating cloud of halitosis in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in the area must succeed at a DC 18 Fortitude saving throw or be sickened 1 (sickened 2 on a critical failure). The grauladon can't use Noxious Breath or Reactive Breath again for 1d4 rounds.

Graveshell

The graveshell is a dangerous predator that draws scavengers and explorers into its grasp using a morbid lure: the corpse of a former victim impaled upon the spikes that protrude from its large, turtle-like shell. Aside from its shell, the monster resembles no known animal. Small but bright yellow eyes watch from the sagging flesh of its head, the most prominent feature of which is a curiously shaped, toothy maw twisted into a perpetual grin. Its stubby arms and legs are impractical for both walking and swimming, though the algae-caked claws tipping each limb are deadly weapons.

Graveshells are intelligent—a fact that surprises many who encounter them—and surrender rather than fight to the death. These monsters have little to offer in exchange for their lives, though the waterlogged treasures on their collection of corpses may entice opportunists.

GRAVESHELL

CREATURE 1

UNCOMMON N LARGE BEAST

Perception +4; darkvision, wavesense (imprecise) 30 feet

Languages Common, Undercommon

Skills Athletics +6, Stealth +4

Str +3, **Dex** -1, **Con** +3, **Int** -3, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +0

Corpse Disguise (exploration) The graveshell conceals its true nature over the course of a few minutes by impaling a corpse (typically humanoid) on its spiky shell before partially submerging itself in water. It has an automatic result of 22 on Deception checks and DCs to pass as a corpse floating in the water.

AC 17 (19 while withdrawn into its shell); **Fort** +8; **Ref** +2; **Will** +4

HP 20

Shell Block  **Trigger** The graveshell takes damage from a physical attack while withdrawn into its shell (see Shell Game below). **Effect** The graveshell reduces the damage from the attack by an amount equal to its shell's Hardness. A graveshell's shell has a Hardness of 6, 10 Hit Points, and a Broken Threshold of 5. If its shell is broken, the graveshell can't attack with shell spikes, nor can it use Shell Game. If the shell is destroyed, the graveshell's AC is reduced to 16. As long as a graveshell is alive, its shell naturally repairs itself after a week.

Speed 20 feet, swim 20 feet

Melee  jaws +8, **Damage** 1d6+3
piercing

Melee  claw +8 (agile), **Damage** 1d4+3
slashing

Melee  shell spikes +8, **Damage** 1d4+3
piercing

Deep Breath The graveshell can hold its breath for 200 rounds (20 minutes).

Shell Game  The graveshell withdraws into its shell, gaining a +2 circumstance bonus to AC and allowing it to use Shell Block. This lasts until the graveshell moves or attacks with any attack other than its shell spikes. The graveshell can't take this action or get any benefit from it if its shell is broken.



AMBUSH HUNTERS

Due to its size and ungainliness, a graveshell must employ an unusual hunting strategy if it hopes to catch a meal. A young graveshell usually scavenges its first lure from among the animals slain by swifter and more ferocious members of its kind. The graveshell carefully positions its chosen corpse atop its shell to cover the spikes that keep it in place. Then, the creature sinks down into a pool of water, leaving only the corpse visible above the surface. When an ignorant passerby wades into the water to inspect the seemingly floating cadaver, the graveshell fully extends its spikes to impale its latest victim before using tooth and claw to rend its fresh catch.

HELLKNIGHT HILL

Part 1:
The Council's
Chosen

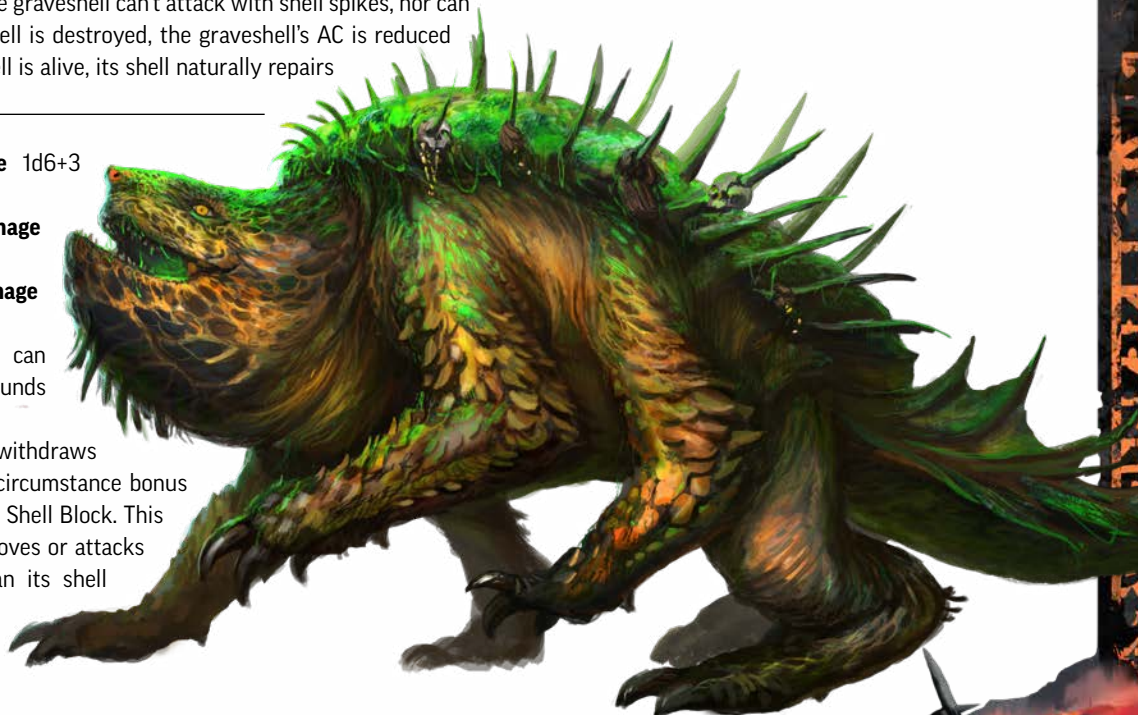
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OTHER HELLCROWNS

The stats below reflect a hellcrown that arose from a knight of the Order of the Nail. These hellcrowns are identified by the prominent horns of their helmet. Hellcrowns risen from other Hellknight orders have different abilities reflecting their orders' principles and methods of discipline.

Hellcrown

The life of a Hellknight is bloody, brutal, and often short. Many who perish in service to a Hellknight order are glad to rest after having served their masters so faithfully, but others seek to continue their work even in death. When a Hellknight is decapitated, the ghostly undead known as a hellcrown is an occasional result. Consumed by the desire to bring about order by inflicting cruelty, hellcrowns haunt battlefields and abandoned castles, slaying all they encounter. A strange fusion of spirit and steel, a hellcrown has no corporeal form by itself, but instead inhabits the helmet it so proudly wore in life. Dangling from the helmet like a shroud is a shadow of the former Hellknight's spine, adding to the creature's terrifyingly gruesome appearance. Hellknights regard hellcrowns with a mixture of disgust and respect, considering the individuals who transform into these floating undead to have been resolute in purpose but weak in body.

A hellcrown usually manifests hours or longer after its body's death, and only when its body is unattended; this might even take days if the Hellknight perished in a major battle.

Typically, no recognizable fragment of the Hellknight's former personality survives the grisly transformation into a hellcrown, but in rare and particularly tragic cases a hellcrown might remember its life and hold grudges against those it views as the cause of its death. Regardless of whether they retain memories of their lives or have lost all former sense of self, hellcrowns linger around the site of their death, reminding all they encounter of the merciless principles of their order.

HELLCROWN

CREATURE 1

UNCOMMON LE TINY UNDEAD

Perception +10; darkvision

Languages Common

Skills Intimidation +8, Stealth +7

Str -2, **Dex** +4, **Con** +3, **Int** -1, **Wis** +1, **Cha** +1

AC 16; **Fort** +4, **Ref** +6, **Will** +10

HP 20, negative healing; **Immunities** death effects, disease, paralyzed, poison, unconscious

Speed fly 25 feet

Ranged ♦ nail +9 (range increment 20 feet), **Damage** 1d4+2 piercing plus bleeding nail

Bleeding Nail If the hellcrown hits with a nail Strike, the target must attempt a DC 16 Fortitude save. On a failure, the nail is embedded in the creature, making it enfeebled 1 for 1 minute and giving it 1 persistent bleed damage (enfeebled 2 and 1d4 persistent bleed damage on a critical failure). Each additional embedded nail increases the enfeebled value by 1 (to a maximum of enfeebled 4) and the bleed damage by 1. A creature can remove a nail with an Interact action to reduce the enfeeblement and amount of bleed damage. Pulling out the last nail removes both conditions.

Terrifying Stare ♦ (fear, mental, visual) All creatures that can see the hellcrown and are suffering from its bleeding nail must attempt a DC 16 Will saving throw. A creature that fails is frightened 1, and on a critical failure becomes fleeing for as long as it's frightened. Any creature that attempts a save is then temporarily immune for 10 minutes.

Tixitog

Tixitogs are a species of bizarre aberrations that make their homes in the dens of giant spiders. Immune to poison and able to traverse sticky webs thanks to the thick slime that covers their bodies, tixitogs steal food cocooned in spider lairs and prey on spiders themselves, but they are careful never to kill so many that their food supply runs out. Their favorite meal, however, is the odd adventurer or spelunker who stumbles into their nest.

These strange creatures have oblong bodies coated in a viscous and transparent slime, three large black eyes, and eight thick, multi-jointed limbs, four of which are inverted and point upward, allowing the monster to easily crawl on either the ceiling or floor of narrow caverns and squeeze through narrow spaces. Their jaws appear small and tubular when closed but peel apart and stretch to terrifying proportions when opened, as their dozens of pointed teeth part to reveal a freakishly long tongue.

A tixitog usually hides from the spiders in the lair it has claimed, not out of fear but to keep the spiders from abandoning the lair and moving elsewhere. When a tixitog emerges from the shadows, most spiders flee from it rather than attack, and the tixitog uses this behavior to direct entire swarms of spiders where it pleases. This is typically bad news for bands of adventurers who find themselves within a tixitog's lair; in the mass hysteria caused by a skittering swarm of spiders headed straight toward them, spelunkers typically fail to notice the more dangerous threat that follows closely behind.



TALKING WITH TIXITOGS

Tixitogs live long lives, and they have cultivated knowledge over the years that may prove useful for adventurers who can coax it from them. A tixitog who has been bested in combat will not mindlessly fight to the death, but will instead try to strike a deal with its attackers, speaking in simple Common to offer information, treasure, or even the aid of its spider-herding abilities under the right circumstances.

HELLKNIGHT HILL

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Toolbox

TIXITOG

CREATURE 3

UNCOMMON NE MEDIUM ABERRATION

Perception +9; darkvision, web sense (imprecise) 60 feet

Languages Aklo, Common

Skills Acrobatics +8, Athletics +10, Occultism +7,
Spider Lore +9, Stealth +10

Str +3, **Dex** +3, **Con** +2, **Int** +0, **Wis** +2, **Cha** -1

Web Sense The tixitog can detect the vibrations of creatures touching a web that the tixitog is also touching.

AC 19; **Fort** +9, **Ref** +10, **Will** +7

HP 40; **Immunities** poison

Speed 25 feet, climb 25 feet

Melee ♦ jaws +10, **Damage** 1d12+5 piercing

Melee ♦ tongue +12 (reach 20 feet), **Effect** tongue pull

Melee ♦ leg +10 (agile), **Damage** 1d10+5 bludgeoning

Swallow Whole ♦ Small, 1d12+3 bludgeoning, Rupture 10

Tongue Pull When a tixitog hits a Small or smaller creature with its tongue Strike, the target is pulled into the tixitog's mouth. The tixitog can then attempt to Swallow it Whole.



Next Month

CULT OF CINDERS

by Eleanor Ferron

The PCs travel through a magic portal to confront the Cinderclaw cultists in the very heart of their territory, deep within the deadly jungles of the Mwangi Expanse.

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Alak Stagram

Alak is a recent recruit into the Hellknight Order of the Nail, an armiger who hasn't yet earned the right to don the full plate armor of the mercenary law enforcers. His journey to Citadel Altaerein atop Hellknight Hill to recover lost heirlooms puts him in the PCs' path early on, and he can become a dangerous rival or a loyal ally, depending on how he is treated. If he survives the events of "Hellknight Hill," Alak chooses not to immediately return to his order's home in Varisia but instead elects to remain in Breachill. His skill in athletics makes him a potential trainer for hire once the PCs begin the task of rebuilding their new castle home.



Helba

The Bumblebrasher goblins never bothered to keep count of their chieftains. Helba's merely the latest to run the tribe, but by all accounts she's been doing a great job—at least, up until the Cinderclaws invaded the tribe's home below Citadel Altaerein atop Hellknight Hill. Many goblins perished before Helba led a retreat up to the castle battlements, only to become stranded there, besieged from below by cultists and draconic monsters. If she and the surviving Bumblebrashers are rescued, Helba is gracious and thankful. Unless the PCs permit them to remain in the castle dungeon, she and her goblins relocate to the Goblinblood Caves a few miles outside of town to recover. Helba's skill (and luck) at survival makes her a potential trainer for hire when the PCs begin the work of restoring and rebuilding Citadel Altaerein during the next adventure, "Cult of Cinders."



Lotusgate

The *aiudara* of Alseta's Ring were the first created by the elven hero Candlaron, and of those, Lotusgate was the first of them all. Originally linking Alseta's Ring to the elven nation of Kyonin, Lotusgate's terminus below Hellknight Hill was destroyed not long after Earthfall, when the Ekujae elves managed to trap Dahak's divine manifestation within the Huntergate portal, which was opposite to Lotusgate. The backlash of divine dragonfire erupting from Huntersgate struck Lotusgate, destroying the portal and forcing its way station to phase back into the Material Plane in a state of devastation.

Today, thousands of years later, the Kyonin side of Lotusgate has become the hub of a much larger *aiudara* network, its link to Alseta's Ring long forgotten. The ruined portal in Alseta's Ring exists as a reminder that nothing, no matter how exquisitely crafted or magically protected, lasts forever. The ancient techniques Candlaron used to build *aiudara* have been lost as well, so the chances of Alseta's Ring being some day relinked to Kyonin are remote at best. In the Age of Ashes Adventure Path, Lotusgate plays no role other than as a reminder of the past. At your option, you could allow the PCs to discover a method to repair the portal once they're very high level, but such an event is beyond the scope of this campaign.



DAWN OF A NEW AGE

Fires burn atop the ruined citadel on Hellknight Hill, sending plumes of red smoke into the air that could be a call for help. Within the old keep, strange invaders from a distant land, mysterious long-lost ruins, and the machinations of a shadowy organization await discovery. Something dire is building toward an apocalyptic event, and it falls to your characters to stop the end before it begins. The Age of Ashes Adventure Path begins with “Hellknight Hill”—a complete adventure for 1st- to 4th-level characters.



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