

THE ABYSSAL CAMPAIGN

A D&D-Planescape© Short Campaign for a Party of Adventurers of the 8th Level

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The Abyssal Campaign is a long adventure (or short campaign) during which the player characters get stuck in what most consider the most dangerous place in the multiverse – the Abyss, of course. Originally planning on a quick trip to Arborea with the aim of borrowing a magical artefact, the heroes get involved in something far beyond what they could dare to imagine. They will have to face all the worst horrors that the Abyss can conceive, thwart the machinations of powerful demon lords, and run for their lives as they try to escape their fury. They will have to fight their own heart in places where morality is a crime, and struggle to retain their sanity through a plane where relief or safety are alien concepts.

WHEN I USED TO SAY, “THERE ARE WORST PLACES”, I USUALLY DIDN’T IMPLY ANY PLACE IN PARTICULAR. NOW I KNOW THAT THERE IS ALWAYS A WORST PLACE. I’VE BEEN THERE.
– A BARIAR JUST OUT OF THE ABYSS. THE LUCKY BARK!

The Abyssal Campaign

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ADVENTURE NOTES

Adventure Synopsis

The PCs get trapped in the Abyss, without means of escape, and caught in the middle of a tanar'ri power struggle.

The Plot In Brief

The PCs are hired by a person called the Gardener to retrieve a magical item. During the trip, however, a powerful Abyssal creature precedes them and steals the item. When the characters attempt to follow, though, they become trapped in a Tanar'ri fortress on the Abyss. They manage to escape when the palace is attacked by Baatezu troops, but they discover in shock that they are unable to leave the plane in any way. They spend some time to just learn the basics of survival on the Abyss, and then they head back to the fortress to try and find what happened to them and why.

They discover that a little-known demon lord by the name of Ithla-Sathlo had set a trap that should have contained the power of the magical artefact upon entering the Abyss. Instead, for some reason the artefact vanished and the trap caught the PCs instead, locking them into the plane. Worse, the minions of Ithla-Sathlo are now after them. The heroes eventually discover some details of the web they've fallen into. The magical item is actually the last artefact of a waning goddess. Ithla-Sathlo discovered this, and created a mystic trap that would allow him to trap, corrupt and use the artefact, vastly increasing his own powers. Then, the demon lord planned to take on Demogorgon.

The Gardener unexpectedly shows up, and suggests the PCs to go to Demogorgon's realm to warn the powerful demon lord of the plot against him. Demogorgon will crush Ithla-Sathlo, and the trap will be released, allowing the PCs to escape. Unfortunately, something doesn't quite go right, and the PCs find they are still trapped.

Their travels take them to the Triple Realm of Graz'zt and there the plot thickens. The most powerful of the demon lords has the artefact, having been informed of Ithla-Sathlo's plan and having moved to counter it. He has employed a githyanki team to magically hijack the portal through which the item traveled, stolen the item for himself, and let his old rival crush Ithla-Sathlo. A disguised necromancer was able to capture Ithla-Sathlo's soul as Demogorgon dealt the final blow, and to deliver it to the lord of the Triple Realm. Graz'zt's plan was perfect, except for a single flaw – the minions he sent to retrieve the secret magic Ithla-Sathlo was going to use to drain the artefact failed their mission. The enraged tanar'ri lord sends the PCs to the former realm of Ithla-Sathlo, promising them that he will release them from the Abyss if they can get the magic he wants.

Meanwhile, other powers are getting wind of the situation and moving to make the best of it. The baatezu hear of the death of Ithla-Sathlo and decide to attempt to seize Infestant for themselves, as a beach-head into the Abyss. The cultists of the fallen god Orcus seek to covertly help the devils, hoping that this will further destabilize the Abyss and maybe create an occasion for their lord to return. At the center of it all, the PCs need to find out the best way to get out of it all alive.

Who's In

Characters that start the Abyssal Campaign should be between the 7th and 9th level of experience. This should allow them to survive “everyday life” on the plane, provided that they keep their head low and their wits ready. The cutters have enough HP and resources to avoid getting killed in a random fashion, and sufficient knowledge to tell bloods from berks on the Abyss. As the adventure progresses, they should become powerful and cunning enough to carry their own weight when involved in the depths of Abyssal politics.

By altering some of the combat situations, or giving the heroes more or less time to recover their strength between major battles, DMs can suit the adventure to characters below 7th level or above

10th, though it should be noted that deviating too much from the assumed power scale can alter the tone and feeling of the adventure.

A party tending towards law and/or good will face the toughest moral challenges and get very little in return. There are no gods of light here, to reward the servants of justices for upholding their morals and ethics. This is probably the situation where the best roleplaying experience can be had. More shady groups, on the other hand, will find that the quickest and bloodiest way is usually what reaps the best rewards – but there's a hidden price. The ways of the Abyss earn many enemies to their practitioners, and sooner or later one of them will prove quicker and bloodier than you.

Formats And Descriptions

Major NPCs and NPCs that the PCs are likely to fight or ally with are fully statted out at the point of the adventure where they're likely to appear.

NPCs for which you probably won't need stats are signaled in the following format: (name/sex, race, class and level/plane of origin/alignment, faction).

Descriptions that can be read aloud use *this* font. You could also read them for yourself and change them for your players the way you see fit.

Factions

It is very likely that when the PCs realize the kind of trouble they got into, they are already stuck in the Abyss. And of course, at that point they won't be able to contact their factions, at least for some time.

Nevertheless, the Athar could be interested in the details of how a deity was so foolish to have her artefact stolen, and how a demon lord planned on corrupting the artefact to his will. This kind of dark reinforces their position against the veneration of powers.

A bunch of Mercykillers, led by a Justiciar, are interested in bringing Ithla-Sathlo to justice for the destruction caused in the Hive Ward. A Harmonium overseeing officer is with them.

The baatezu are interested in any kind of information about tanar'ri internal politics, and while they will soon learn about the destruction of Ithla-Sathlo by Demogorgon through their own sources, they might be willing to pay something for the whole dark. Dealing with the devils is risky business as always, but player characters aren't generally known for prudence.

A few characters in the adventure use faction feats from the Planescape 3.5e conversion at www.planewalker.com. If you can't or won't download the feats document, just assign different feats instead. They don't play a central role.

Unusual Parties

Even though the adventure is designed with a fairly standard party in mind – including at least a tough fighter, an arcane spellcaster, a divine spellcaster, and a stealthy person, – in reality, most gaming groups differ from the norm at least a bit. Maybe a party lacks a powerful healer and needs more time to recover from combat, or maybe they are specialized in melee combat and can defeat opponents way too easily if they can get them close quickly. DMs often have to alter or change adventure modules in order to suit the different capabilities of their particular group of PCs. To ease their job, throughout this adventure you will find sidebars suggesting ways to balance specific encounters against an unusual party's strength and weaknesses.

Or, of course, you can just leave things as they are, and leave to the players the duty of finding a way around the obstacle! To re-

Unusual parties – example

If your party lacks a member with enough stealth capabilities to consistently sneak around the fortress without alarming the guards, you can have the tieflings in areas 1 and 3 be sleeping on duty, or substitute one of the potions in the crate in area 2 for a *potion of invisibility*.

flect the increased (or reduced) difficulty of the task, you should increase (or reduce) the Encounter Level accordingly.

What If...?

As in any adventure module, there are certain points where the characters are assumed to take a certain choice, walk a certain path, do certain things. Many times, the assumed party decision is the most logical one, and the one your players will likely choose to follow. And, this being the Abyss after all, there are other times where the wrong choice will “only” get them all killed in some horrible manner.

Nevertheless, D&D isn’t a videogame. It would be pretty unrealistic if all – or even *most* – important choices were forced or obvious. Additionally, PCs are notorious for missing obvious clues or finding unexpected solutions, and unwittingly destroying the plot. For this reason, the adventure occasionally provides sidebars explaining what happens should the PCs go the other way. They won’t cover all possible cases, and they won’t provide all the details – we don’t want the text to be 600 pages long, do we? – but they can help the DM to refocus and get the adventure back on track.

A note on NPCs – when you are in the Abyss, you’d better get as many allies as possible, even if you’ll have to keep an eye on them. There are several occasions for smart PCs to get someone to tag along with them, and even some occasions to get someone *trustworthy* in the party. It is fairly difficult to know in advance how long a given NPC will last with the PCs. Many of them are too weak and don’t stand a snowball’s chance in hell of surviving for long. Some only want to get to the nearest portal and then get away. Therefore, many minor NPCs that could join the group are mentioned seldom or not at all in subsequent parts of the adventure. A good DM should use the NPC personality and motivations as a guideline to what he would do if he lasted surprisingly long.

Still, we don’t want the whole thing to feel like a scout trip. Feel free to get rid of these NPCs in the most horrible and/or gory way you can come up with as soon as you get bored with them. This can serve to push the party away from the wrong direction without being forced to kill off a PC, or just to demonstrate the terrible cruelty of the plane.

More Of The Dark

As the adventure progresses, the action is centered on the PCs. However, there are many other characters who take part in the adventure, doing stuff that will influence the PCs later. To help the DM understand exactly what is going on, the adventure occasionally provides sidebars titled “More of the dark” which detail something that is happening in the background or that happened long ago, without the knowledge or awareness of the PCs, and which isn’t important to them right now.

A Cutter With Potential

This adventure is designed to allow the heroes to complete it without getting killed if they play it real smart. As much as the Abyss doesn’t give fair chances, we DMs try to do. Nevertheless, few people can be very smart all the time, mistakes are made, and PCs die. Sometimes, it is difficult to integrate the new, replacement hero into the ongoing story – especially in *this* story, since after chapter I any new protagonist will not be subject to Ithla-Sathlo’s curse and will therefore not have much reason to continue in the adventure except for helping his friends. During chapter II you may get away with making new characters be recent prisoners of Castle Maldithar who got through that portal by chance and therefore are still cursed, but after that there aren’t going to be many excuses. To mitigate this problem, and as a nice gift to players who don’t know what character to make next, the adventure occasionally provides sidebars titled “A Cutter with Potential”, which suggest how to turn one of the campaign’ NPCs into a new PC for use by a player. Sometimes, this is going to skew the plot a little, but the advantage in terms of involvement and continuity is going to be worth it.

Challenge Summary

At the end of each chapter, you will see a summary of all meaningful challenges which the PCs may face in that chapter, and the associated encounter level. You can check the challenges that were overcome during the adventure, and then use the table to assign XP. As usual, it doesn't matter *how* the PCs accomplish their goal; for example, in the first chapter the PCs have to get through several giant spiders. They will get full XP whether they kill the spiders or simply sneak past somehow. The challenge isn't "kill the spiders", but "defeat them" – prevent them from accomplishing their goal (in this case, eating the heroes as they pass through). Obviously, this shouldn't allow the PCs to get XP multiple times for the same situation; use your judgement. For example, sneaking past the spiders, into the tree and then back out counts as the same encounter, and therefore is only rewarded once.

Just because something is in the Challenge Summary, it doesn't mean that the PCs are supposed to *do* it. In fact, there are lots of challenges which the heroes probably won't overcome. They are listed anyway, just in case.

The EL as presented factors in the influence of terrain, ambushes, enemies' likelihood to flee, lack of adequate equipment, and similar conditions as well as the number of enemies in the encounter. Still, you may want to adjust it if the PCs arrive in favorable or unfavorable conditions not through their merit or fault.

Primes In The Abyss

The Abyssal Campaign is a D&D Planescape© adventure. However, if you don't play on the planes, you can adapt it with a bit of work. Mostly, you'll have to alter Chapter I so that it takes place on your world instead of Sigil, but after that, the rest should be easy.

A flavor note: copper coins are called "greens" on the planes, because copper tends to go green when it is handled by fiends for any length of time, so many copper coins have green stains. Silver coins are called "stingers" because they'll cause a baatezu a nasty itch (it's very bad form to pay a devil in silver). Gold coins are called "jinx", from an ancient aasimon belief that holds greed as the root of all evil. Platinum coins are called "merts", from the name of the Platinum Heaven of Mount Celestia.

Forbidden Lore

Since this adventure takes place in the Abyss, you will need more details on the workings of magic on this plane than what is given in the Manual of the Planes. According to the Rule of Threes, there are three things you have to be particularly careful about, when you cast spells on the Abyss.

First of all, the Abyss very easily corrupts Alteration magic. Whenever an arcane caster attempts a spell of this school, he or she has to make a Spellcraft check, DC 15 + two times the spell level. If the check succeeds, the spell works as normal. If it fails, though, the spell is corrupted in some way. The DM is free to decide the exact result, but as a general guideline, a spell that doesn't physically change the target shouldn't become directly dangerous (for example, *fly* could cause the target to sprout wings, and *cat's grace* could cause the target's eyes to become catlike). A spell that actually changes the target's body, instead, could cause dire and even permanent consequences (*stone skin* could actually turn the target to stone).

Secondly, magic on the Abyss tends to draw unwanted attention, more than in any other place. Don't spy on fiends, don't call on fiends, keep your head low. Whenever you cast a Divination spell, the local demon lord will know it, and will be able to strike at you using the power of the Abyss. The lord can send a spell at you through your divination, provided that the spell is something related to the divination itself (for example, *discern lies* could be the conduit for a *suggestion*, but not for a *daze* spell), or he could send you false information. It should be noted that this requires the direct attention of the demon lord; most of them will not bother with low-level, frequently used divinations. *Detect thoughts* and similar spells or effects are not to be used on tanar'ri; attempts to

do this force the caster to roll a Will save, DC equal to 15 + the demon's Charisma, or suffer permanent insanity of a type decided by the DM (*heal*, *restoration*, *wish*, *limited wish* or *miracle* can restore the character's mind). Success means that the caster takes 1d4 Wisdom and 1d4 Intelligence damage, and may remember fragments of information. Callings tend to be intercepted and turn up a demon, too. The chance for this is 10% per spell level; the higher the spell, the more powerful the fiend.

SO, MISTER DIVINER? GOT
SOMETHING OUT OF MY HEAD? MY
TURN NOW!
- A TANAR'RI, TO AN UNLUCKY
MIND-READER, AND READYING ITS
CLAWS

Finally, Necromancy has a few problems; minor demonic spirits generally inhabit freshly created zombies or skeletons, and this usually results in the undead attacking their creator. *Reincarnation* always causes the target to assume some kind of demonic form. A good character that dies in the Abyss without receiving a *blessed burial* spell will return as a bodak.

There are a couple benefits too, if you like chaos and destruction. Damage-dealing evocation and conjuration spells are automatically *empowered*, as per the Empower Spell metamagic feat. Illusions are automatically *extended* and the DC for any Illusion spell is increased by +2.

Specific layers or realms within the Abyss might have additional effects. They will be detailed within the location's description during the adventure.

If you use psionics, you should decide whether the planes could affect the powers of the mind or not. Both solutions are plausible; you could say that the corruption takes place as the power is manifested, or you could say that since psionics only come from within, they are unaffected. If you decide to let the Abyss affect psionics, though, you need to figure out a magic school equivalency for psionics. In general, powers that alter something's or someone's physical form can be corrupted as Alteration magic (though corruption can be avoided with a Psicraft check). Stuff that finds information is equivalent to Divination and can be intercepted by the local lord. Attempts to get information from a tanar'ri's mind fail spectacularly as described above. Powers that deal direct damage are *empowered*, and powers that create illusions and deceptions are *extended* and have their DC increased by +2. Notably, though, *astral constructs* don't risk turning up a tanar'ri instead.

Though not an effect of the Abyss itself, it is important to remember that *plane shift* and similar magic can only take you to the first layer of a plane (and on a random place, too). When the PCs want to get to different layers of the Abyss, they have to find a gate. They can use *plane shift* to get from a deep layer to the Plains of Infinite Portals, though. Also, the Plane of Shadow and the Astral Plane are only coexistent with the first layer. Magic or powers that draw from those planes (eg. *shadow conjuration*, *astral constructs*) and effects that bring you entirely to those planes (eg. *plane shift*, bags of holding) work normally. However, magic that makes you be "partly here, partly there" (eg. *shadow walk*) cannot be used on deep layers since they are too distant from those planes.

The Demons

Tanar'ri are by far the ruling race of the Abyss. Though individual layers may feature more numerous or more powerful species, tanar'ri are what the overall plane is crawling with. There are many, many varieties of these fiends, though each of them is first and foremost a tanar'ri. Tanar'ri do not have a fixed shape, though they can't change at will either. Rather, they evolve from one shape to the next over the course of their existence, changing when they subconsciously *know* that they are ready to do so. There is no precise hierarchy either, though some forms are definitely greater in power and higher in stature than others. Tanar'ri are broadly divided into least, lesser, greater and true tanar'ri, in ascending order of power and status. Guardian tanar'ri – a category which includes the molydei only – are a bit to the side; they enforce the Blood War and are considered to rank just below the balors. Many tanar'ri forms have evolved to fit a specific layer or type of layers, and may be very common or very rare, depending on where the heroes are.

- **Alkilith.** These fiends are slimy, shapeless creature, and they undertake missions for the Abyssal lords in the most vile, toxic and foul places. They are true tanar'ri, and quite rare.
- **Alu-fiend.** Half-fiends that are born from a female demon are sometimes called alu-fiends. They enjoy the status of lesser tanar'ri.
- **Armanite.** These centaur-like creatures are violent, numerous, and very common on layers that are hospitable to them – plains, provided the environment isn't too inherently dangerous. They are lesser tanar'ri.
- **Babau.** These gaunt, acidic fiends are greater tanar'ri, and thus enjoy some independence. Among greater tanar'ri, though, they are some of the weakest and most common.
- **Balor.** The balors are the most powerful tanar'ri, except for demon lords. Balors embody all-consuming fire and rage. They are true tanar'ri.
- **Bar-lgura.** These apelike fiends are brutish and stupid. They are lesser tanar'ri, and not very common except in jungle-like layers. They favor guerrilla tactics.
- **Bulezau.** These minotaur fiends are very dangerous in close combat, thanks to their overwhelming strength. They are quite stupid, and therefore ranked as lesser tanar'ri. They would be quite common, if not for the tendency to fight anything that moves.
- **Cambion.** Half-fiends that are born from a female mortal are sometimes called cambions. They enjoy the status of lesser tanar'ri.
- **Chasme.** Chasmes are insectoid fiends, and they often work to punish desertors from the Blood War. They are greater tanar'ri, and rather rare except in some layers.
- **Dretch.** Dretches are bloated, misshapen fiends, used as cannon fodder in the Blood War. They are least tanar'ri, and very common just about everywhere.
- **Glabrezu.** Glabrezu are dog-like fiends that corrupt mortals with promises of power. They are true tanar'ri.
- **Goristro.** Goristroi are enormous fiends, unmatched in sheer physical might. They are also quite dumb, but they are still considered greater tanar'ri. They are quite uncommon.
- **Hezrou.** Hezrou are froglike fiends, generally employed as overseers for the troops. They are among the most common greater tanar'ri.
- **Manes.** Manes are Abyssal petitioners. They are very common everywhere on the Abyss. Tanar'ri don't even consider them as members of the race, but they are still classified as least tanar'ri by everyone else.
- **Marilith.** Mariliths are snakelike, six-armed fiends. They are smart and cunning, and they are among the most powerful true tanar'ri.
- **Maurezhi.** Maurezhi are very rare. They can eat a person, and acquire their memories and experiences. They are lesser tanar'ri.
- **Molydeus.** The two-headed molydei are the ultimate enforcers of the Blood War. They have authority over each and every other tanar'ri to this end. They are the only guardian tanar'ri.
- **Nabassu.** Nabassu are quite numerous, but they mostly travel to the Prime to spread the fear of the Abyss. They are the least powerful among greater tanar'ri.
- **Nalfeshnee.** Nalfeshnee are massive, bloated fiends that rule portions of the Abyss and transform the souls of the chaotic evil into manes, dretches or rutterkins. They are among the most powerful true tanar'ri.

- **Rutterkin.** Sometimes, the energies of the Abyss mutate a dretch into a misshapen rutterkin. Rutterkin are somewhat more powerful than dretches, but they are constantly wracked by pain, which they seek to share as much as possible. They are least tanar'ri, though relatively rare.
- **Succubus.** Succubi are beautiful females in form, and they tempt mortals with lust. They are lesser tanar'ri, but they are quite smart and uncommon. Some rare succubi have a natural form that is male, and they are called incubi.
- **Vrock.** Vrocks are vulture demons. They are the weakest and most common of true tanar'ri.
- **Wastrilith.** Wastriliths are powerful water fiends. They inhabit the water courses of the Abyss, and they are greater tanar'ri. Wastriliths are also known as “water lords”.
- **Yochlol.** The yochlol are the servants of the goddess Lolth. They have three shapes – beautiful female, giant spider, and shapeless slime. They are considered lesser tanar'ri, but they only serve the Spider Queen.

It would be foolish to assume that these are all the tanar'ri that exist. The demons are nothing if not versatile, and they constantly adapt their forms to overcome new challenges and find new ways to spread evil. But these are the most common tanar'ri, and those that the PCs may meet during this adventure. In addition, the Abyss is crawling with fiendish creatures of all sorts that are not tanar'ri – many of them will be present in this adventure.

The PCs aren't going to meet all of these fiends at once. Many fiendish generals favor certain specific types, and many layers tend to have a few very common types of fiends, with the rest being relatively rare. For example, Rothakon's army mostly employs dretches as cannon fodder, babaus as shock troops, vrocks for aerial support, and the occasional bulezau (though they are notoriously unreliable). That's what the PCs are going to meet at the beginning of the adventure. Broken Reach is generally only visited by intelligent fiends; the Lord of Mithrengo is employing mostly babaus, bar-Igura and hezrous, along with the usual manes and dretches. After that, the PCs will have met all of the most common tanar'ri, except for armanites. The centaur-fiends have steered clear of both Mithrengo and Broken Reach because while the PCs are visiting, several Blood War recruiters have forcibly enlisted the biggest pack of armanites in the area. The rest don't want to come near the area for now.

Standing high above even balors, the tanar'ri lords rule entire layers of the Abyss. Each lord is a unique entity, with its own powers and shape, old of millennia. No stats are provided for the princes of the Abyss. While not deities, they should be more than capable of easily defeating PCs of these levels, should a fight arise.

INTRODUCTION

While the PCs and the rest of the multiverse go about their jobs, generally trying to stay out of the way of tanar'ri and the like, the lords of the demons plan, plot and scheme to gain power on the abyssal layers. None of these bloods ever sleeps – they can't, because the next attack, assassination attempt or hostile alliance could happen at any moment. It is said that the most cunning of the demon lords hatch plans that take their course over several millennia, manipulating the destiny of mortals, their families, or even entire nations. Tanar'ri don't learn patience easily, but the immortal lords have had more than enough time to learn. It's pretty simple, after all: those who haven't, have died.

The immensely powerful rulers of the Abyss still don't hold a candle to the powers of the planes. The gods themselves remain far above their petty schemes, confident in their hold on the greatest power that there can be. Knowledge, faith, *belief* – belief pushes the wheel of the cosmos, it composes the very planes, and the powers control it. Tanar'ri lords that can crush any mortal with a gesture have to bow to the power of a real god.

Yet... yet, sometimes, some very rare times, a god is brought low, or a minor being may rise to greatness. Those times, we ordinary people must take care and hope not to get caught in the events. Power clashes with power, and the rest has better be somewhere else when it happens.

Power Consumes Those Who Lack It

Have you ever heard of the goddess Selthian, cutter? No, of course you haven't. That's because she's a very minor goddess, with just a handful of followers around the material plane and maybe a dozen on the planes. Selthian is technically a demigod right now, but it wasn't always like this. The goddess of the beauty of plants, Selthian used to command if not awe, at least a modicum of respect. During those days – probably seeing the way she was headed – the goddess decided to expand her portfolio to include herbal healing and remedies, hoping to attract a larger number of followers.

To this end, Selthian created an artefact which she hoped would draw people to her faith. The *Selthian Orb* is a wooden sphere, about as big as a halfling's head, seemingly wet to touch. The orb immediately heals 3d8 hit points to any wounded creature that touches it, or restores one point to any drained stat. This effect is performed once per round, though not more than a single time per day on a single creature. The main power of the orb, though, is activated by placing it inside a tree or other plant in a forest or grove. This can be done by placing the orb somewhere in the woods; its power will shape the growth of the surrounding plants so that they protect and encase it. Once its contact with the local plant life is established, the magic of the Selthian Orb will protect all plants within a radius of about ten miles from any kind of poisoning or disease. What's more, it will influence all medicinal herbs that grow within several miles of the forest where it has been placed. Any nonmagical positive effect – healing, enhancing, protecting – of the affect plants is doubled. Alchemical items based on those herbs will perform twice as well, but any simple remedy is similarly affected as well. Poisonous plants are unaffected.

The creation of the *orb* was a poor choice for Selthian overall. The artefact is powerful if used carefully, but it can't really be called awe-inspiring. Followers never came, choosing the worship of powers who offered direct healing capabilities instead, and Selthian never established a grip on the healing business. Her original portfolio, the beauty of plants, was too limited to sustain a healthy number of followers, and so during the course of several centuries her power slowly decreased.

The artefact eventually found its way to the cares of a group of druids on a remote corner of Arboorea. Selthian was content to leave it there, unknown to the multiverse at large. She had enough troubles staying alive, and no need of being constantly reminded of her bad mistake.

Weaving A Dark Fate

While Selthian was struggling to retain her power, a minor tanar'ri lord by the name of Ithla-Sathlo was fighting with fang and claw to establish his domain over the 329th layer of the Abyss – a horrible little place named Infestant. Ithla-Sathlo enjoys the transformation and corruption of life that comes so easily in his plane, and has specialized in the selection and cultivation of dangerous plants and monstrous vegetal creatures. Over the course of centuries, the tanar'ri and the other nightmare creatures he controls have managed to bring the layer under his rule. While the control of an entire layer is no small feat, Infestant is small and not much inhabited (except for the plant creatures, which have expanded to fill almost the entire place). The Abyssal high ups still seem to take little notice of Ithla-Sathlo's deeds.

And so, Ithla-Sathlo conceives a plan which, if successful, will allow him to take on a major demon lord such as Demogorgon. The fiend knows of Selthian's artefact thanks to a druid he kidnapped, and also knows that the demipower currently isn't paying too much attention to it. Stealing the artefact will be easy, but once it enters the Abyss, Selthian will immediately know it. Even though Ithla-Sathlo is certain that she will not directly enter the Abyss, for fear of the local powers, he is not sure that the artefact isn't capable of *plane shifting* itself away, if ordered so by the demigoddess.

For this reason, he has prepared a cunning magical trap. The trap, designed to activate on the first creature with a mind that steps through a particular portal (the item, being an artefact, is partially intelligent and thus qualifies), will cast a powerful curse on the target. The spell is conceptually similar to a *dimensional anchor*, or *gate ward*; it strengthens reality around the target so that he or she is unable to pierce the planar barriers and step through planar portals. It still allows for layer-to-layer travel, though. The magic is so powerful that a simple *dispel magic* or *remove curse* won't do anything – *wish* or *miracle* could probably overpower it, but Ithla-Sathlo is confident that the artefact doesn't have *that* kind of power at its disposal. The portal chosen by the fiend lord is located within a little-used prison fortress on the 76th layer of the Abyss. He has selected that place because the layer also contains a shifting gate which, among other places, occasionally leads to Infestant. With some good timing, the orb can get to Ithla-Sathlo's reign quickly.

Setting up the trap took the demon lord several days and a considerable part of his power, but the tough part had yet to come. First of all, he has to get the item through that portal. To this end, he is going to send his tiefling granddaughter Lianne to Sigil, and look for a priest of Selthian that he knows lives there. Undoubtedly, the priest will have an extraordinary collection of beautiful plants and flowers. Once Lianne has found the priest, she has to poison all his greenery, with a special Abyss-brewed substance that won't be easily removed by normal means. Hopefully, the priest will think of the old artefact and send someone to fetch it. The skilled tiefling will be there to eavesdrop the location of the item, and then he will send a retriever to get the orb. The retriever, being a construct, will not trigger the trap.

Once the item is secured, Ithla-Sathlo intends to corrupt it and use it to empower his plant minions. With the renegade druids he employs, he can literally grow a huge army fairly quickly, and if each of the monsters is made twice as big, twice as powerful... it will be a tough battle, but he can take on Demogorgon using the surprise factor, and then gain control of his realm by infesting it with a lethal jungle before Graz'zt and the other high-ups recover from the shock.

Unfortunately for him, Graz'zt definitely isn't going to be surprised, because he already knows. He has spies everywhere on the Abyss, including Infestant, and soon they report that an upstart demon lord has taken the trouble to secure a small fortress around a little-used portal on layer 76th, perform a weird ritual on the portal, and prepare a retriever to get an item or something on Arborea. Graz'zt moves silently and quickly – he uses divination magic to locate the astral conduit corresponding to the gate Ithla-Sathlo is going to use to transport the orb to the fortress, and

TSK. AMATEURS.
- LORD GRAZZT

then assembles a team of githyanki astral pirates, ordering them to put themselves near the conduit and get ready to cast *pierce conduit* when ordered to...

CHAPTER I

In which the Heroes attempt to retrieve an item of power, and get beaten on time

Looking for a job

It is the usual foggy day in Sigil, the City of Doors. Merchants trade, workers work, planar travelers and common bubbers alike fill the inns and alehouses. While the PCs are having lunch at their case or favorite kip, they are contacted, either in person or through a messenger, by a friend of theirs or faction fellow, who seems to have found a nice easy job for them. He has heard about a mysterious cutter, known only as the Gardener, who is looking for a few capable bashers to retrieve an item from somewhere. The Gardener can be found in the Hive Ward – the contact provides the PCs with the street address for this Gardener, and no other information. He just saw the announcement on a pole at the Bazaar, and thought to inform the PCs.

If the PCs go and check the announcement by themselves at the Bazaar, they see a small sheet of paper nailed to a pole.

The handwriting is fluent and precise, and it says nothing more than “A group of cutters needed to retrieve an item from its current location. Legal job. Bubbers and addle-coves need not apply. Contact the Gardener; Muddy Street, 35/B, Hive Ward”.

It doesn't seem that anyone around has seen the man who placed the sign.

If the PCs look for chant about this “Gardener” before going there, they won't find much unless they look in the right places.

- If they just ask around in the Hive, a Gather Information check, DC 15, will allow them to discover that the Gardener is a secluded bloke, considered barmy by most, that lives alone in an abandoned warehouse somewhere on Muddy Street. If they beat DC 20, they also find out that this Gardener has removed the warehouse's roof and replaced it with thick glass panes. He has a lot of plants in there, and occasionally visits the Great Bazaar to buy rare herbs or flowers, or to sell specimens in return for the money he needs to maintain the greenhouse.
- If they ask around in the Great Bazaar, a Gather Information check, DC 20, will allow them to discover that the Gardener is fairly well known among plant traders that visit Sigil. He looks humanoid, except for his strange, vaguely metallic skin tone and his glowing eyes. He wears gray or green robes, and usually keeps the hood up. He is interested in rare plants and herbs from all places in the multiverse – the merchants occasionally buy rare specimens from him, or trade them for species he doesn't have yet.
- In other places, the Gardener isn't known. A Gather Information check, DC 30, will allow a very knowledgeable PC to meet someone who has once bought an ornamental Elysian moon-flower from the Gardener. The guy can't quite remember what the Gardener looks like, but he does know that he trades in rare herbs and plants.

In this and following Gather Information checks, at the DM's option, good roleplaying or informed contacts may award a circumstance bonus from +2 to +4 to the check's result.

Once the PCs reach number 35/B of Muddy Street, they find out that there is no “Gardener” there, only an old dwarf bubbler whose brain is so burnt out by cheap spirits that he can hardly understand what the PCs want, let alone remember who the Gardener is or where he lives. Unfortunately, street numbering in the Hive is approximate at best – turns out there are *two* buildings numbered 35/B. The PCs can find out if they ask to anyone else (and possibly pay a few greens for the favor), or just wander around for a while. The actual warehouse is next to the house of the old barmy, but the entrance is on the other side – visitors have to come through a narrow alley.

The Gardener's greenhouse

Lianne		Al. Chaotic Evil	Tiefling Rogue 7 th (Abyss)	CR: 7
Str: 15 (+2)	HP: 7d6+14 (50)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 19 (+4)	AC: 20 (+5 armor, +4 dexterity, +1 shield)	Armor: light		
Con: 14 (+2)	Initiative: +4 dex	% fail.: 20% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 15 (+2)	Ref: +9 (+5 base, +4 dex)	BAB: +5 Grapple: +7		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +4 (+2 base, +2 con)	Melee: +7 (+5 BAB, +2 str)		
Cha: 14 (+2)	Will: +5 (+2 base, +1 wis, +2 feat)	Ranged: +9 (+5 BAB, +5 dex)		
<u>Attacks</u>		<u>Skills</u>		
Masterwork short sword, +10 melee, 1d6+2(+poison), crit 19-20/x2		Balance +9 (+5 ranks, +4 dex)		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>		Bluff +11 (+7 ranks, +2 cha, +2 racial)		
Feats: Aspect of the Tanar’ri, Iron will, Weapon finesse		Climb +9 (+7 ranks, +2 str)		
Sneak attack +4d6, Trapfinding, Trap sense +2, Evasion, Uncanny dodge, darkvision 18 meters, cold, fire and electricity resistance 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.		Disguise +14 (+10 ranks, +2 cha, +2 synergy*)		
Languages: planar trade, tanar’ri, yugoloth, slaad		Diplomacy +4 (+2 cha, +2 synergy)		
<u>Equipment</u>		Escape artist +9 (+5 ranks, +4 dex)		
+2 <i>studded leather armor</i> (AB +5, max dex +5, check penalty 0, arcane failure 15%) (moderate abjuration; CL 6)		Hide +16 (+10 ranks, +4 dex, +2 hide)		
masterwork buckler (AB +1, check penalty 0, arcane failure 5%)		Intimidate +4 (+2 cha, +2 synergy)		
masterwork short sword (+1 to hit, 1d6 damage, crit 19-20/x2)		Jump +7 (+5 ranks, +2 str)		
<i>wand of invisibility</i> (11 charges) (faint illusion; CL 3)		Listen +8 (+7 ranks, +1 wis)		
<i>potion of cure serious wounds</i> (faint conjuration; CL 5)		Move silently +14 (+10 ranks, +4 dex)		
<i>potion of cat’s grace</i> (faint transmutation; CL 3)		Open lock +7 (+5 ranks, +2 int)		
5 doses of black adder venom (injury DC 11, 1d6 con/1d6 con)		Search +7 (+7 ranks, +2 int)		
450 jinxes, 50 stingers		Sleight of hand +11 (+5 ranks, +4 dex, +2 synergy)		
		Spot +8 (+7 ranks, +1 wis)		
		Survival +4 (+2 wis, +2 synergy**)		
		Use magic device +12 (+10 ranks, +2 cha)		
		Use rope +6 (+4 dex, +2 synergy***)		
		* if she knows she’s being observed		
		** when finding/following tracks		
		*** when binding someone		

While the PCs walk along this alley, have each of them roll Spot. Those who beat DC 22 notice something, maybe a shadow moving quickly on the roof of the warehouse. If a PC goes to check, he sees nothing, but what they noticed was Ithla-Sathlo's servant taking place to eavesdrop the conversation. Her name is Lianne and she's a tiefling rogue. Right after having spotted the PCs, she's invisible too – she has a wand of invisibility for the mission and is making liberal use of it. For additional caution, she is hiding and moving silently as well.

The tiefling positions herself on the roof, on one of the filthiest roof tiles. From the inside, even a character that can see invisible creatures has to roll Spot versus her Hide check to see her. She also has a +4 circumstance bonus, because of the light from the sky dazing the character.

The warehouse is a large building, about 15x20 meters, and looks very old but well built. The Gardener replaced the roof with large sheets of thick glass, making the building into a pretty effective greenhouse. The temperature

More of the dark

Lianne is the daughter of a woman named Lesla and the half-tanar'ri Rothakon – who, in turn, is the son of Ithla-Sathlo himself. Being the granddaughter of a demon lord, Lianne has exceptional stats and power. Lesla is currently imprisoned in the demon lord's fortress on Infestant, where she's been for thirty years. She has gone insane a long time ago. The mother of Rothakon died while giving birth to the half-fiend.

Lianne is a fairly ugly tiefling; her average complexion looks human, but dark green stripes cross her face and body. Her catlike eyes are a further confirmation of her demonic streak.

Lianne is staying in a ruined Hive building near the slags. The same building contains a large wood and metal crate. The crate contains a retriever, crafted by Ithla-Sathlo. The monster will obey Lianne's orders.

Additionally, Lianne has hired a bunch of thugs to stop or at least slow anyone else that tries to reach the Orb.

Lianne was born and bred on the Abyss. To her, violence and betrayal are the ways the world works. Her father conceived her with no other reason than having another good servant, and treated her accordingly. She obeys him out of fear, and indeed can't even conceive any other reason. Lianne has no love of him, but no hatred either. For what she knows, that's just the natural way of raising a daughter.

Lianne's basic motivation is survival. Everything she does, she does because otherwise Rothakon will kill her.

inside is somewhat warmer than the outside, and much more humid. The tuladhara lives in a couple of rooms arranged one above the other on one side of the warehouse.

The rest of the greenhouse is full of plants of all kinds. When the characters knock, a voice from the inside invites them to enter, and then they feel as if they had stepped through a gate and into a jungle.

The walls are stacked high with shelves, each row of each shelf full of a dozen large pots, where hundreds of wonderful plants you have never seen before are growing. The mid of the warehouse is occupied by long, wide tables, each supporting more flowers, low bushes, herbs and assorted greenery. Most of the plants have some kind of flower – after the dominant green colour, the room is awash with all the hues of the rainbow. The flowers are of all sizes and shapes; some you can recognize but lots are completely alien. The room probably has a good smell too, but after having walked in the Hive for a while, you certainly aren't going to sense it.

Have all PCs roll Spot, DC 21. Characters with 5 or more ranks in Knowledge (Nature) gain a +2 synergy bonus to this roll; characters with at least one level in the Druid class gain an additional +2 competence bonus. Those who succeed can notice the effect of the poisoning, as described later.

As you look around, you are approached by a humanoid cloaked figure. The Gardener is wearing a long grey robe and a hooded cloak, and the hood is pulled on his head. The light comes in straight from above, and so his face is shadowed, but you can distinguish a clean face and friendly smile. You also easily notice the eyes – they are a lot more visible than the rest of the face, because they give off a faint glow.

PCs with low-light vision can also notice that the Gardener's skin seems to have a vague metallic tint. The Gardener (male tuladhara cleric 5th/Outlands/true neutral) is basically obsessed with his greenhouse. He manages to earn just enough money to maintain it by selling pretty flowers to rich ladies and herbal remedies to whoever needs them. With the little money he can put together, he just buys more rare plants, from every place in the multiverse. Why he does that, and why in Sigil (where, generally speaking, the most a flower can hope for is a quick death), is a mystery he isn't inclined to talk about – the truth, of course, is that he is a priest of Selthian, and he feels as his duty to maintain a presence in Sigil.

The man welcomes the PCs and starts walking between the lines of tables, beckoning them to follow him. As they walk among the beautiful plants, and with the occasional “don't touch” warning when they pass near some of the Abyssal ones, the Gardener explains his problem. He sounds genuinely worried. His greenhouse has been poisoned. The substance is innocuous to animal life, but is

LOOK AT THIS! AND THIS! I
UNDERSTAND KILLING
PEOPLE, BUT WHAT KIND
OF FIEND COULD HAVE
DONE THIS TO MY
PLANTS?
– GRIEVING GARDENER

lethal to plants. He keeps beckoning the PCs and inviting them to watch closely at this or that flower, pointing at tiny wilted spots, rotting smells, fallen leaves, and a few obviously dying herbs.

Even though the damage doesn't seem too severe, the Gardener assures the PCs that there is no readily available cure, and the situation can and will get worse. The weaker Elysian flowers will die first, in a matter of two or three days. The tougher lower-planar stuff will take longer (and his small razorvine patch seems to thrive on the poison as it does on just

What if...?

Lianne is invisible and hiding. Nevertheless, there are some ways for the PCs to spot her, in which case they will probably attempt to capture her, kill her, or at least chase her away. She can flee easily enough; if she can't eavesdrop the conversation, she will follow the PCs from a large distance until she sees the portal they've used, and only then she will activate the retriever. This will give the PCs about half an hour more time, afterwards.

If she can't even do that, or if she gets captured or killed, the retriever won't be activated and the PCs will actually recover the Orb! A few days later, they are contacted by a desperate Gardener, who's had his greenhouse thrashed and the Orb stolen by an Abyssal death machine, and who wants their help again...

about anything else), but the doom is inevitable.

The Gardener has no idea of how the venom got in the greenhouse. In fact, he is only sure that it's a poison and not a disease because it is affecting all species of plants. He has no idea of why someone would poison his plants, either, and even less of an idea about who could have done it. What he does know, though, is what could fix the problem.

The Gardener's - Fine Herbs

With his skills and his collection of specimens, the Gardener could become rich. Of course, he is far too obsessed to even think seriously about it. He has a huge variety of medicinal plants, including some exceptionally rare and useful ones. He doesn't have a large quantity of any of them, though. Generally, he has one specimen of each of his plants, and is very careful with harvesting the medicinal substances. Here's what he's got right now:

- *Razorvine, giant*. He doesn't actually grow this stuff, but he has a few twigs in a metal box. The leaves of this variety are as big and sharp as good knife. They count as masterwork daggers, except that if they aren't sheathed, fire will destroy them on a failed save. The Gardener sells up to 3 of them for 300 gold each.
- *Fury Leaf*. This brown-red leaf comes from a lower-planar plant. Once properly treated, if a character chews it (a standard action) he will immediately get a powerful adrenaline rush, giving him a +4 bonus to Strength and Constitution, +2 to Will saves versus fear effects, -2 to AC and impossibility to concentrate. This effect lasts for 3 rounds plus CON modifier, after which the character is fatigued for as many hours as rounds that the rush lasted. The character can terminate the effect by spitting the leaf, if he wants. The Gardener knows that the drug is addictive, but doesn't know the details of the addiction. He has 15 leaves, and sells them for 150 gold each.
- *Ointment*. This white paste can be smeared on a wound, restoring 1d8 hit points. He has 20 doses, and sells them for 40 gold each.
- *Antidote*. A character that drinks this vial has a +5 bonus to saves versus poison, for 1 hour. He has 15 doses, and sells them for 50 gold each.
- *Lizai Fungus*. This tough fungal growth lives on certain remote caves on Pandemonium. It constantly exudes a mild poison (initial damage 1d2 strength, secondary damage none, DC 12) and needs little care. A cutter can let it grow on the inside of his scabbard, and whenever he extracts the blade, it will be coated in poison. The fungus takes one hour to poison the blade again, and must be cleaned off every week to prevent it from growing too much (the character who does this has a 5% chance of getting poisoned in the process, as if handling poison). The Gardener can treat any number of scabbards, but it takes a week of time and cares to make the lizai take hold. He wants 1200 gold, too. Hey, the greenhouse is costly to maintain!
- *Neraian Lezalith*, also known as armour-plant to those who know. It only grows on a specific prime material world, and is bloody rare there, too. Worse still, the local elves don't take kindly to strangers attempting to obtain it. Nevertheless, the Gardener somehow scored a seed of the stuff and now has a small plant. This thing grows normally in the soil, but the seed can also be made into a potion that causes the plant to grow around a person's chest and upper arms and legs, forming a tough living armor. It looks weird, and feels weirder, and is a real pain to take off (takes one hour, the character takes 3d6 damage, Fortitude save DC 15 for half), but it is effective. The armor bonus is +1 and grows one point per week up to +5; arcane penalty 5%, check penalty -1, maximum dexterity +7. The armor weighs 0.5 kilograms per point of armor bonus. The Gardener prices the only seed he has at 2000 gold.
- *Potions*. The Gardener sells potions of *bull's strength*, *cat's grace*, *cure light wounds*, *cure moderate wounds*, *minor restoration*, *cure poison* and *cure disease* for their normal price. He has 10 each.
- *Extraordinary potions*. The Gardener sells 3 potions of *persistent bull's strength* for 850 gold each and 2 potions of *persistent cat's grace* for 850 gold each. The enchanter level is 11 for these potions.
- *Poisons*. The Gardener has 1d6 doses each for each of the poisons in the DMG table, provided that they are of vegetal origin, and sells them for 10% more than the listed price, because he disapproves of the use of poison.
- *Extraordinary poisons*. That doesn't prevent him from doing some research, of course. He has *Hades' Nectar* (1d6 Wisdom as initial and secondary damage, DC 18; he has 3 doses and sells them for 200 gold each), *Bloodburn* (4d6 hit points initial damage, 1d3 Constitution secondary damage, DC 21; he has 2 doses and sells them for 500 gold each) and a certain stuff "so nasty that I haven't named it" which causes petrification as initial and secondary damage, DC 19. It is based on a highly magical plant, of course – the Gardener won't reveal the details, but he guarantees that mass production is impossible. He has just one dose and he sells it for 1400 gold.

The Gardener, of course, has an even larger variety of plants that are just pretty to look at. He puts a hefty price on those, though – 100 jink to 1000, and maybe even more, depending on rarity. That's because he doesn't like giving away an entire plant, and will only do so for enough money to get another specimen from his merchant friends.

He tells the PCs that he knows of a magical item, similar to a wooden sphere, which is supposed to cure any kind of plant from any kind of illness. He has been doing a lot of research in the past few days, and he has discovered the location of the item, Arborea, and a portal leading near its location. Of course, now someone has to retrieve the item, but he can't leave the greenhouse for fear that the mysterious poisoner will return to complete the job. And that's where the PCs come in. They'll get the item for him.

The Gardener isn't rich but he can offer the PCs a wide variety of medicines and exotic herbs that an adventurer can find useful. The task is easy, after all – the other side of the portal leads to an elven village; it is likely that the elves use and take care of the item, so the trickiest part will be convincing them to lend it to the PCs for a few days. He thinks about offering the PCs a total of 2000 jink worth of the stuff he usually sells, but being desperate the reward can be pushed up quite a lot.

If the PCs accept, the Gardener points them to a portal to Arborea that lies in an alleyway of the Hive, not too far from the warehouse. The key is a rare Bytopian flower, and the Gardener has four of them. He warns the PCs that he only has those four – two to go and come back with the item, two to return the item should this be necessary, and get back. It would take a long time for him to get more of them, so they must come back with the item on the first trip. The Gardener will give them two flowers for now.

As soon as the PCs leave, Lianne stealthily enters the greenhouse and steals the remaining two Bytopian flowers. After that, she goes to the thugs she hired, who were waiting near the Gardener's place, and tells them to kill the PCs. They are well paid, but not fanatical; they will run if pressed. Then, she hurries towards the case where the retriever her master gave her is hidden. Four malignant eyes flare to life, the monster is awakened, Lianne gives it the key and its orders, and the Abyssal construct runs towards the portal. Running through a crowd is easy when you are an infernal death machine, people kindly move out of the way of their own accord. Plus, Lianne's thugs are going to at least slow down the heroes. So, the retriever will manage to reach the portal before the PCs – though only moments before.

Unusual parties

A very numerous party might need two copies of a key for all of its members to pass through a portal. Either have the Gardener have twice as many keys, or let the PCs be forced to leave some members behind. Maybe the members that stay in Sigil could start investigating the poisoning in the meantime.

What if...?

For whatever reason, the PCs might decide they'd rather investigate the poisoning *before* getting the cure. In this case, the retriever gets the Orb without PC interference, and the PCs get to hear about the monster which appeared near the slags, entered the portal the Gardener mentioned, got out of the same portal after some time, ran around some more, and finally vanished into the slags.

If they then go to Arborea, they find that the item was stolen by the retriever.

Hive thug (6)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Rogue/Warrior 1 st /3 rd	CR: 3
Str: 14 (+2)	HP: 3d8+1d6+4 (21)	Speed: 9	Armor: light % fail.: 40% Check pen.: -5	
Dex: 11 (+0)	AC: 16 (+4 armor, +2 shield)			
Con: 13 (+1)	Initiative: +0	BAB: +3	Grapple: +5	
Int: 9 (-1)	Ref: +2 base	Melee: +5 (+3 base, +2 str)		
Wis: 9 (-1)	For: +4 (+3 base, +1 con)	Ranged: +3 base		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: -1 wis			
<u>Attacks</u> Long sword +6 melee, damage 1d8+2, crit 19-20/x2, or Dagger +3 ranged 3 m, damage 1d4+2, crit 19-20/x2			<u>Skills</u> Bluff +4 ranks Climb +3 (+6 ranks, +2 str, -5 armor) Hide -1 (+4 ranks, -5 armor) Intimidate +6 ranks Jump +3 (+6 ranks, +2 str, -5 armor) Listen +3 (+4 ranks, -1 wis) Move silently -1 (+4 ranks, -5 armor) Spot +3 (+4 ranks, -1 wis)	
<u>Feats and special abilities</u> Feats: Toughness, Power attack, Weapon focus: long sword. Class features: Sneak attack +1d6, Trapfinding				
<u>Equipment</u> Long sword (1d8 damage, crit 19-20/x2) Rusty chain shirt (AB +4, max dex +3, check pen. -3, arcane failure 25%) Heavy wooden shield (AB +2, check penalty -2, arcane failure 15%) Dagger (1d4 damage, crit 19-20/x2, range 3 m) 20 stingers				

The portal is located inside an alley, which departs from a wide road of the Hive ward. The road, despite being large, is fairly unused. It is located not far from the slags, and people generally stay clear of the area. The construct arrives from the opposite direction with respect to the PCs, and enters the alley just as the PCs are turning an angle. Have each PC roll Spot, DC 20. Those who succeed can notice something darting inside the alley. It looks small and dark (what they've seen is just one of the rear legs of the creature).

When they near the alley, they see large tracks on the muddy ground. If a PC has the Track feat, he can easily (DC 5) tell that the tracks are of moments before, that it was at least one large creature, and that it entered the alley and then vanished – presumably, into the portal. If he beats DC 10, he can also tell the direction the creature came from, and could follow the tracks backwards if he wanted to. The PCs don't have the time for that, though, because it looks like something is getting to the item before they do! If the character beats DC 20, he can tell that it actually was a single huge creature, with eight legs. If no characters have the Track feat, the best they can gather is that something big and heavy was in the alley not long ago.

Unusual parties

The retriever is supposed to stay seconds ahead of the PCs until it flees with the Orb. Its speed of 12 means that, likely, the slowest members of the party can't keep up. If the party is faster than average, they still probably can't fight effectively with the running retriever.

Nevertheless, if you think that the party could actually prevent the retriever from completing its mission, you could consider adding a few HD to the creature.

Bloodbath in paradise

Once you step into the portal, you find yourselves in a flat, grassy area. There are a few large trees scattered around you, lots of pretty flowers, a path coasting the edge of a forest, and warm sunlight from a blue sky. Overall, a pleasant wilderness, were it not for the huge eight-legged Abyssal monstrosity that is rending a druid to pieces, and the screams of pain from an elven einheriar militia member being fried alive by a scorching ray. The frozen corpse of another elf doesn't help, either.

Retriever	Al. Chaotic Evil	Huge Construct (Abyss)	CR: 11
Str: 31 (+10) Dex: 17 (+3) Con: - Int: - Wis: 11 (+0) Cha: 1 (-5)	HP: 10d10+80 (135) AC: 21 (-2 size, +3 Dex, +10 natural) Initiative: +3 dex Ref: +6 (+3 base, +3 dex) For: +3 base Will: +3 base	Speed: 15 Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +7 Melee: +15 (+7 base, +10 str, -2 size) Ranged: +8 (+7 base, +3 dex, -2 size)	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +25
Attacks 4 claws +15 melee reach 3 m, damage 2d6+10, and Bite +10 melee reach 3m, damage 1d8+5, and Eye ray +8 ranged touch up to 30 m			
Feats and special abilities Construct traits, darkvision 18 m, low-light vision, fast healing 5 Eye ray (su): each ray may be used once every 4 rounds; fire ray deals 12d6 fire damage, reflex DC 18 for half; cold ray deals 12d6 cold damage, reflex DC 18 for half; electricity ray deals 12d6 electricity damage, reflex DC 18 for half; petrification ray causes petrification, fortitude DC 18 to avoid. Find target (su): the retriever always knows the direction of the Selthian Orb as if guided by <i>discern location</i> . Improved grab (bite attack).			

If the PCs immediately come to help the druid, the retriever will decide not to waste any more time. It will drop the woman and run towards the center of the forest. The druid (**Ishaine/female human druid 3rd/Arborea/chaotic good**) picks herself up, and shouts at the PCs that the monster is running to the sacred tree, and that it must be stopped. Then, she turns and runs behind the retriever.

The elven einheriar say (in elven) that they are going to the village of Virdias to get reinforcements, and run along the path. The PCs are left alone. There is a trail of broken trees that clearly marks the passage of the retriever. PCs with ranged weapons and spells can't target it; even with the fallen trees on its path, the forest is too thick.

More of the dark

The female druid the PCs meet is called Ishaine and is the current defender of the sacred tree. She knows about the orb, and knows that she has to protect it, but she has no idea of the sphere's origin or powers.

Fact is, the orb has been here for millennia and even the druids forgot about its history.

The previous keeper left some years ago, and was recently kidnapped by Ithla-Sathlo.

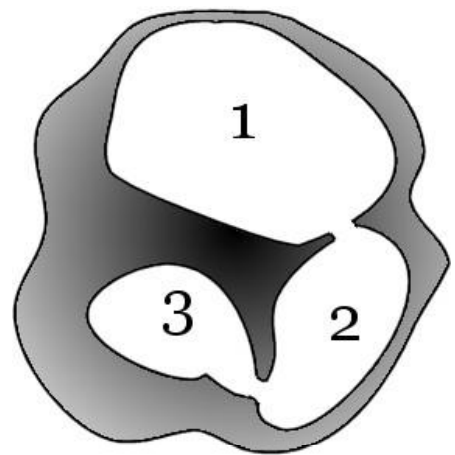
The retriever is headed to the item's location. The Selthian Orb is hidden inside an ancient, enormous tree, more than 20 meters wide and hundreds of meters tall. It is the oldest and largest tree in the forest, and its trunk has three natural cavities large enough to be considered caves. The tree has grown around the Orb over the course of several millennia. Only the druids that protect the forest know about it, though; the rest of the elves just think it's a big tree, and generally stay clear of it because people wandering in the area occasionally meet giant spiders.

The druids generally don't enter the tree, and when they do they use magic to avoid hurting it. The demonic construct isn't that kind; when the PCs reach the sacred tree, the retriever has just broken the trunk in the thin northern side and has entered area number 1. The druid is here, too, and she urges the PCs to do

something, quickly. Notice that the inside of the tree is very dark, and the PCs need some source of light.

1. This area is empty; the air is stale and the ground is composed of dust and some moss. The PCs can't see the top of the cave, which apparently goes on for some tens of meters. A lot of noise, roaring and chittering, and the occasional flash of light, comes from area 2.

2. This area is the nest of dozens of giant spiders. The druids employ them as guardians of the orb. Unfortunately, they just aren't tough enough for the retriever, which is strong enough to break their webs and immune to their poison. The spiders are attacking the creature en masse, without doing noticeable damage. The construct is being slowed, though; the area is full of webs and even though the retriever can break them easily, it still can't move anywhere close to normally. The spiders won't attack the druid, but they have no reservations about the PCs. She will use her spells to deter them from attacking, but there are too many of them.



The Sacred Tree

Giant spiders		Al. Neutral	Large Celestial Monstrous spider (Arborea)	CR: 3
Str: 15 (+2)	HP: 4d8+4 (22)	Speed: 9, climb 6		
Dex: 17 (+3)	AC: 14 (-1 size, +3 Dex, +2 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: -	Ref: +4 (+1 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +3 Grapple: +5		
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +5 (+4 base, +1 con)	Melee: +4 (+3 base, +2 str, -1 size)		
Cha: 2 (-4)	Will: +1 base	Ranged: +5 (+3 base, +3 dex, -1 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
Bite +4 melee, damage 1d8+3+poison		Climb +11 (+8 racial, +3 dex)*		
Feats and special abilities		Hide +3 (-4 size, +4 racial, +3 ranks)**		
Darkvision 18 m		Jump +2 (+2 strength)		
Tremorsense (ex): can detect and pinpoint any creature in contact with the ground within 18 meters, or any creature in the spiders' room.		Move silently +3 (+3 dex)**		
Vermin traits		Spot +4 (+4 racial)		
Poison (ex): DC 13, damage 1d6 Strength initial and secondary.		* these spiders use their Dex modifier for Climb checks, and can always take 10		
Web (ex): it can throw a web up to eight times per day; range increment 3 m up to 15 m, effective on targets up to Huge size, as a net attack. The target can escape with Escape Artist (DC 13), a Strength check (DC 17), or by dealing 12 damage to the net.		** within this room, the spiders have a +8 racial bonus to Hide and Move silently		

Since the area is covered in giant webs, characters walking or flying in it are entangled and suffer a –2 penalty to hit, –4 to dexterity, must move at half speed and can't charge or run. They can free themselves with a successful Escape artist check (DC 16) or Strength check (DC 20), or by dealing 14 damage to the web (this clears a 1,5x1,5 meters section of webbing). Walking characters have a +5 bonus to any check to free themselves.

The retriever is killing off the spiders with its eye rays, but as soon as it notices someone getting near to the passage to area 3, it will focus its attention on him to try and stop him. Naturally, the druid is the first character doing this – she moves as fast as possible towards the passage, and the retriever kills her with its lethal beams. After a few rounds, during which the PCs should desperately and fruitlessly try to stop it while fending off the occasional giant spider, the construct reaches the passage and enters it. The hole is too small, so it breaks the wood some more, sending splinters everywhere.

3. This area is empty as the first one, except for a tall, irregular wooden column, which starts from the ground and disappears in the darkness above. The column seems to be alive, and part of the sacred tree. In the middle of the column, at about 1.7 meters from the ground, the Selthian Orb is embedded into the wood. It takes a DC 16 Strength check to get the sphere out of the wooden column, but this isn't a problem for the retriever, which jumps into the room and bites away the orb, together with a nice chunk of the column itself.

After the retriever has got the sphere, it will get back as quickly as possible, using its eye rays to dispose of anything that stands between it and the portal back to its master.

Not as easy as planned

The PCs now have to do some detective job, if they want to get the wooden sphere back. The monstrous creature which stole the item has vanished, and the Gardener is more desperate than ever. The heroes have to find where it went and why.

The retriever's tracks are fairly evident; a PC with the Track feat can follow them with a check, DC 10. After reaching the slags, though, the tracks vanish. Alternatively, the PCs can spend a few hours asking around the Hive, and if one of them passes a Gather Information check, DC 15, he can discover that a huge eight-legged monster has entered the slags not long ago. No one knows what the creature did within the slags, though – for what they know, it could probably still be there.

If the PCs enter the slags, they find that the retriever's tracks are a lot more confused. The creature walked on the rubble and cement, and while it certainly crumbled some walls and splintered some wood, the slags are *full* of crumbled walls and splintered timbers, so tracking isn't easy. Besides, the slags are a place bad enough that it hasn't been resettled, and there are lots of good reasons. For example, during the time the PCs spend in the slags, they will be attacked by a pack of fiendish dire rats. These were normal rats that, after several generations spent in the slags, acquired fiendish traits, possibly due to the powerful evil magic that had been used in the place.

What if...?

The retriever will almost certainly be able to scare the PCs off with its powerful eye rays, and with its fast healing capabilities it only has to run away for a few rounds to get back to full power. But should it be too damaged to return safely to the portal to the Abyss, Rothakon is *scrying* on the construct as it performs its mission, and has a *necklace of friends* linked to the retriever. He is reluctant to use the necklace, but will do so if it seems that the retriever can't make it.

After that, he will send the retriever through the portal, to activate the trap on the orb. Graz'zt's pirates will steal it, and the adventure will be back on track.

Fiendish dire rats (20)		Al. Neutral Evil	Magical beast (Outlands)	CR: 1/3
Str: 10 (+0)	HP: 1d8+1 (5)	Speed: 12, climb 6		
Dex: 17 (+3)	AC: 15 (+1 size, +3 dex, +1 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +5 (+2 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +1 Grapple: -4		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +3 (+2 base, +1 con)	Melee: +1 base		
Cha: 4 (-3)	Will: +3 (+2 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +4 (+1 base, +3 dex)		
<u>Attacks</u>		<u>Skills</u>		
Bite +4 melee, damage 1d4+disease		Climb +11 (+8 racial, +3 dex*)		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>		Hide +8 (+4 ranks, +3 dex, +1 size)		
Feats: Alertness, Weapon finesse		Listen +4 (+1 ranks, +2 feat, +1 wis)		
Low-light vision, Scent, Darkvision 18 meters, Resistance cold and fire 5, Spell resistance 6.		Move silently +4 (+1 ranks, +3 dex)		
Smite good (su): 1/day can make a normal melee attack to add +1 to damage to any good creature.		Spot +4 (+1 ranks, +2 feat, +1 wis)		
Disease (ex): filth fever, DC 12, incubation 1d3 days, damage 1d3 dex and 1d3 con.		Swim +11 (+8 racial, +3 dex*)		
		* Dire rats use their dexterity modifier for Climb and Swim checks		

The DC to track the creature here is 35. If a PC beats it, he can find the tracks again, leading up to a half-destroyed building that contains the portal the creature used.

The other way is to just wander around the slags. After a few hours of walking around, the PCs hear some noise from behind a heap of rubble. There, they find an ugly, filthy gnome (**Slett/male gnome rogue 5th/Outlands/chaotic neutral, Indep**); he is clothed with oily rags and carries on his shoulders an old backpack, way too big for the creature's size. He is named Slett, and he survives by scavenging the slags for any useful item he can find. It is a dangerous job, and Slett doesn't miss any occasion to mention it. He loves talking about his findings, his close encounters with the slags' creatures, and how experienced and tough you have to be in order to survive the slags. Slett has seen the retriever and is willing to tell the PCs where it went, in return for a few golds, or a bottle of good rum.

In any case, the PCs will eventually find the portal, but they will likely have to go back to gather more information and discover the portal key. The key is also the reason for which this particular portal sees very little use. To open it, a basher must have a claw, taken from a baatezu. Not any baatezu, either – the claws must come from a devil of cornugon status or higher. Assuming that they got to work as soon as they returned from Arborea, several hours will have passed by now. It is getting dark and these ruins and rubble all look the same; roll Orienteering/Survival for each PC in secret, versus DC 20. Those who succeed remember the right way out of the slags. Those who fail by 10 or more remember a *wrong* way. Tell the party which PCs seem to remember the way back, and let them decide who will be the guide. If no one succeeds at the roll, or if they follow a wrong direction, they get lost until dawn.

If they do get lost, use this as a first taste of being lost in an unfriendly place. Strange sounds during the night, unnatural shapes in the mist, and the occasional bone or skull amidst the ruins.

CAN TELL YA WHERE IT
WENT. CAN'T THINK WHY
YOU WOULD WANT TO
KNOW, THOUGH.
– PERPLEXED SLETT

What if...?

If the PCs somehow find the portal key without meeting Lianne, and don't feel inclined to look for her, the Gardener prompts them to do so. He says that a retriever doesn't go unnoticed, and that they'll probably find the guilty fairly fast. He says that they may gather some useful chant.

If they still want to get into the portal as soon as possible, let them. They'll have other chances to meet her.

If, instead, they *kill* the tiefling, they won't meet her later in the adventure. The implications of this fact will be explained in the following chapters.

During the night, they will be attacked by more fiendish dire rats, or by some other creature of the slags. If they decide to light a fire, or provide some other light source, make the sounds, shadow, and all the signs of a hostile environment increase; make them understand that the kind of dangerous creature that lives here isn't scared by fire – rather, it knows that food often lives near fires.

If the PCs go to the Hall of Information and check the portal registry for chant about this portal, they hit the blinds. It is little used, and while it is registered, there is no information to be found except for its location and a note stating that it leads to a lower planar location.

Another thing the PCs have to do is to locate the mystery poisoner. If they noticed Lianne back when they first met the Gardener, they'll probably figure out that they need to locate the eavesdropper. Naturally, there is practically no way to simply track her from the top of the Gardener's roof, and they probably don't have a description, either. However, if they ask about the retriever's run through the Hive, they can easily for a few coppers reconstruct the entire path. As it seems, the creature started from a semi-abandoned area not far from the slags.

It is a zone of old wooden huts and crumbling houses, built without plan or structure in a shapeless bunch. Only barmies and bubbers live here, and while each of them will be glad to provide the PCs with a colorful description of the Abyssal beast, none of them can tell for sure the exact point from which the creature left. The best the PCs can do is a Gather Information roll, DC 15; if they succeed, someone points them to a group of wooden huts where it seems that the retriever was first heard. As the PCs start to examine the huts, six more of Lianne's thugs, as well as those that didn't get killed or severely wounded during the first encounter with the PCs, take position near the tiefling's case. They hide in the shadows, pull out their blades, and wait for the PCs to get near. Lianne, instead, is here and hiding in the crate's remains in her shed.

Hive thug (6)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Rogue/Warrior 1 st /3 rd	CR: 3
Str: 15 (+2)	HP: 3d8+1d6 (17)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 14 (+2)	AC: 16 (+3 armor, +1 shield, +2 dex)	Armor: light		
Con: 11 (+0)	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 20% Check pen.: -2		
Int: 9 (-1)	Ref: +4 (+2 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +3 Grapple: +5		
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +3 base	Melee: +5 (+3 base, +2 str)		
Cha: 8 (-1)	Will: +0	Ranged: +5 (+3 base, +2 dex)		
Attacks		Skills		
Long sword +6 melee, damage 1d8+2, crit 19-20/x2, or		Bluff +3 (+4 ranks, -1 cha)		
Dagger +5 ranged 3 m, damage 1d4+2, crit 19-20/x2		Climb +4 (+4 ranks, +2 str, -2 armor)		
Feats and special abilities		Hide +6 (+6 ranks, +2 dex, -2 armor)		
Feats: Toughness, Power attack, Weapon focus: long sword.		Intimidate +5 (+6 ranks, -1 cha)		
Sneak attack +1d6, Trapfinding		Jump +4 (+4 ranks, +2 str, -2 armor)		
Equipment		Listen +4 ranks		
Long sword (1d8 damage, crit 19-20/x2)		Move silently +4 (+4 ranks, +2 dex, -2 armor)		
Studded leather armor (AB +3, max dex +5, check pen. -1, arc. fail. 15%)		Spot +4 ranks		
Light wooden shield (AB +1, check penalty -1, arcane failure 5%)				
Dagger (1d4 damage, crit 19-20/x2, range 3 m)				
15 stingers, 30 greens				

As the PCs check the huts near the one where Lianne kept the retriever, have each of them roll Spot against DC 26 (the thugs are taking 20 on Hide, and any person in heavier armor is standing 18 meters behind to avoid making noise). The PCs that win the check notice one or more of the hidden rogues, and the party may decide to attack. In this case, Lianne will stay hidden in her case. Maybe the thugs will take out the PCs, or maybe the heroes will just go away.

If the PCs look like they are about to enter Lianne's hut, the thugs attack. Again, they aren't very motivated and will run if seriously threatened, especially if a charismatic PC uses Intimidation on them when they are already wounded. After one round, the tiefling exits the wooden cabin and joins the fight. She is afraid of what the rest of her family will do if she lets the PCs escape (or, even worse, enter the Abyssal portal), but her primary motivation is survival. So, she will fight until she feels she can't win, and then offer to spill the dark in return for her life. She may tell the PCs that she had to poison the Gardener's plants so that he would send for the wooden sphere, and that then she had to activate the retriever, but she doesn't really know the complete plan. Only if the PCs threaten her, she will reveal that Rothakon the half-fiend hired her – which is still a half-truth – and that the portal in the slags leads to his fortress. If the PCs somehow probe her mind using magic or psionics, they can discover that Rothakon is her father, that a demon lord named Ithla-Sathlo is her grandfather, and that she suspects that even though she is following her father's orders, the full plan

was started by the tanar'ri lord. Lianne will try to convince the PCs to let her go in any way, and attempt to flee as soon as possible, leaving the PCs free to explore the cabin.

The cabin contains very little. There is a large crate, opened and broken, in the middle of the only room. The crate doesn't contain anything, though it seems that the inside is lightly scratched. There's a straw mattress on the floor and an oil lamp, as well as Lianne's backpack. It contains 400 gold coins, 100 silver coins, 50 copper coins, food for a couple of days, a potion of *cat's grace*, three potions of *cure light wounds*, and the empty bottle of the poison used on the Gardener's plants. There is also a bottle of a particular ointment that Lianne used to disguise her appearance. It's a clear paste that may cover her green streaks. Finally, there are a couple of what look like large claws, and they are tied to the backpack with a couple of strings. They are the baatezu claws, needed to open the portal in the slags.

Unusual parties

If the PCs lack a powerful healer, let them find less money and a few extra healing potions in the tiefling's backpack. They are going to need them.

Now, the PCs are ready to pass through the portal. When they do, the trap springs. Describe how the trip – despite being instantaneous – somehow feels like a bumpy ride, and how they come out very disoriented from the other side. The *real* adventure is about to begin.

Challenge Summary

Challenge	EL
Finding the Gardener	1
Defeating Lianne's thugs	7
Defeating the giant spiders (only one spider attacks)	4
Defeating the giant spiders (two spiders attack at the same time)	6
Defeating the giant spiders (four spiders attack at the same time)	8
Defeating the giant spiders (eight spiders attack at the same time)	10
Preventing the retriever from getting the Orb	11
Defeating the fiendish dire rats	5
Defeating Lianne and her thugs	9

CHAPTER II

In which the Heroes find themselves in a location most foul, and struggle to escape

Into A Dark Place

The portal leads to the 76th layer of the Abyss, within an obsidian fortress-prison named Castle Maldithar. This layer is always immersed in an eternal, darkest night. There is a lord of the layer, a blood who goes by the name Hayazeikanatzeras, but he lives very far from Maldithar and only concerns himself with the creatures of darkness (see below), so he leaves the fortress and its inhabitants alone. He *will* gladly interfere with divinations, as is the prerogative of all tanar'ri lords, though. No natural lights exist within the entire layer, and any light, natural or magical, has its light radius halved. The only exception is the gigantic lightning storms which occasionally envelop the entire layer, pouring down rain and lightning bolts with the same intensity. Metal armor draws the lightning strikes, though some kind of protection is needed because of the intensity and force of the rain and hail. Unsurprisingly, hide armor is popular among the troops here; the leaders, though, enjoy ironwood armors created by the dark druids of Infestant. Finally, there is a reason for which this layer was chosen as a prison location. Any kind of teleportation on this layer always fails, dealing 6d10 damage to the characters that were attempting it, and spells that enable passing through walls always seem to work but cease working as the character is inside a solid object. Unless the spell specifically mentions what happens in this case, the character must make a Fortitude save, DC 16. If he passes it, he takes 6d10 damage and is shunted back to where he came from. If he fails, he is embedded into the rock and killed.

As usual in the Abyss, if the environment doesn't kill you, the natives will do their best to complete the job. This place has bred its own kind of malice. The creatures that prowl the plane may be born from the nightmares of primes; they vaguely resemble prime material predators, but they are creatures of darkness, never quite in sight and constantly chipping at a body's nerves. They follow you in pitch black or dart from shadow to shadow, unnerving you, making just enough noise to let you know that they are there without pinpointing *where*. When they strike, it's as if a bolt of sharp, dark lightning has clawed you before returning to the black corners. When met in a lit place, these creatures resemble their prime material counterparts, except that they are invariably black in skin and fur, and move with such deadly grace that viewers feel hopelessly goofy by comparison.

Creature of Darkness is an inherited template that can be added to any carnivore animal. A creature of darkness uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Size and type: the creature's type changes to magical beast (augmented animal).

Speed: increase by 6.

Special attacks: a creature of darkness can perform sneak attacks as a rogue if it is small-sized or larger, adding +2d6 damage.

Special qualities: a creature of darkness gains blindsight with a range of 36 mt.

Abilities: a creature of darkness' Dexterity increases by +4, and its Intelligence increases to 3.

Skills: the creature gains a +8 racial bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks.

Feats: the creature gains Mobility as a bonus feat.

Challenge rating: as base creature +1.

Alignment: always chaotic evil.

Castle Maldithar was built with the purposes of securing the portal the PCs have just used, and to serve as a prison for captured Blood War soldiers. It is a wide, low, brooding building, with an extensive subterranean section. A small affluent of the Styx flows through the fortress. The river in this point isn't yet a part of the Styx; its water is dirty but drinkable. The underground complex comprises the upper prison, patrolled and maintained by the demon lord's mercenaries, and the lower prison. The lower prison is abandoned, and has become a place of terror; it is infested by fiendish creatures and the only "friendly" beings there are a bunch of prisoners, left to rot and for-

ALL RIGHT. LET'S JUST GET IN
AND GET OUT, RIGHT BOYS?

- OUR HEROES, GUILTY OF
OPTIMISM

gotten. But the portal never saw much use after the battle which left the Slags in Sigil the way they are now, and the vast cell complex, too, soon fell into abandon. Before Ithla-Sathlo sent his son Rothakon with some troops to conquer the fortress, the building was controlled by a small group of tanar'ri, tasked with keeping what few prisoners it holds. All the doors in the fortress are wide enough for a Large creature to pass through, though it'll have to crouch.

The entire Maldithar is fitted with an alarm system. Several points around the fortress contain a rope that can be pulled to sound a deafening shriek throughout the area. The shriek alerts everyone within 200 meters on the same floor, and deafens non-tanar'ri for 2d4 minutes.

The heroes get out of the swirling mist of the portal, and find themselves in a dark room (room number **14** on the second floor of the palace map – see Chapter IV). There are no light sources; PCs without darkvision can't see anything. The room is an approximately square chamber, and the PCs are in the middle of it. Two steel grates divide the room in three rectangular sections, with the heroes in the middle of it. They are separated from the single exit by one of the grates. Each PC must roll a Fortitude save, DC 21, or be stunned for 1d4 rounds – a temporary side effect of the curse they just got without knowing. From now on, the PCs have a very dim abjuration aura on them; it is so faint that it can't be detected as long as the same person has other auras on him or her. The actual, way more powerful, aura of the curse is masked.

Call for initiative! The PCs are just in, at least a few of them are probably stunned, and the rest are surprised. There are several guards and a few demons in this room, outside the metal bars, and they've seen the portal activate right before the PCs got in, so they aren't surprised. The guards have orders to capture anyone that gets through the portal alive, and are armed with blowguns to this end. The demons will ready actions to counterspell using *dispel magic*, or attack physically if the PCs somehow get out of the grates. One of the guards will run out of the room to sound the alarm immediately.

The characters now cannot get out of the Abyss in any way. Attempts to use a portal deal 3d10 damage as reality warps around the character, while other methods of escape simply fail. The curse cannot be dispelled; attempts to do so deal damage instead. *Dispel magic* deals 3d10 damage. *Greater dispelling* or *limited wish* deals 10d10. *Disjunction* deals 40d10 damage.

What if...?

If the PCs escape the guards and tanar'ri here, they still have to hide from the rest of the fortress defenders. With the alarm sounding, this will not be easy.

The palace map is in Chapter IV; currently, the place isn't in such a bad shape, but mercenaries and demons are almost everywhere.

If, by skill or luck, they manage to get in some safe place within the castle, the alarm will be ceased after six hours, though the guards will stay sharp for the intruders.

If they get out of the fortress, they may be able to meet the incoming baatezu forces, which haven't managed to find another way into the castle.

Mercenary guards (5)		Al. Neutral Evil	Human Fighter 5 th (Outlands)	CR: 5
Str: 13 (+1)	HP: 5d10+8 (32)	Speed: 6		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 14 (+4 armor)	Armor: medium		
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 25% Check pen.: -4		
Int: 10 (+0)	Ref: +2 (+1 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +5 Grapple: +6		
Wis: 11 (+0)	For: +5 (+4 base, +1 con)	Melee: +6 (+5 base, +1 str)		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: +1 base	Ranged: +5 base		
Attacks				Skills
Masterwork blowgun, +6 range 6m, damage poison, or				Climb +5 (+8 ranks, +1 strength, -4 armor)
<i>Cold iron longsword</i> +1, +8 melee, damage 1d8+2, crit 19-20/x2				Jump +5 (+8 ranks, +1 strength, -4 armor)
Feats and special abilities				Ride +8 ranks
Feats: Weapon focus: longsword, Power attack, Quick draw, Toughness, Exotic weapon proficiency: blowgun.				
Equipment				
Scale mail (AB +4, max dex +3, check penalty -4, arcane failure 25%)				
Heavy steel shield (AB +2, check penalty -2, arcane failure 15%) (not equipped)				
<i>Cold iron longsword</i> +1 (damage 1d8+1, crit 19-20/x2) (not equipped) (faint evocation, CL 3)				
Masterwork blowgun (damage poison)				
10 poisoned darts (DC 19, initial and secondary damage 1d6 dexterity)				

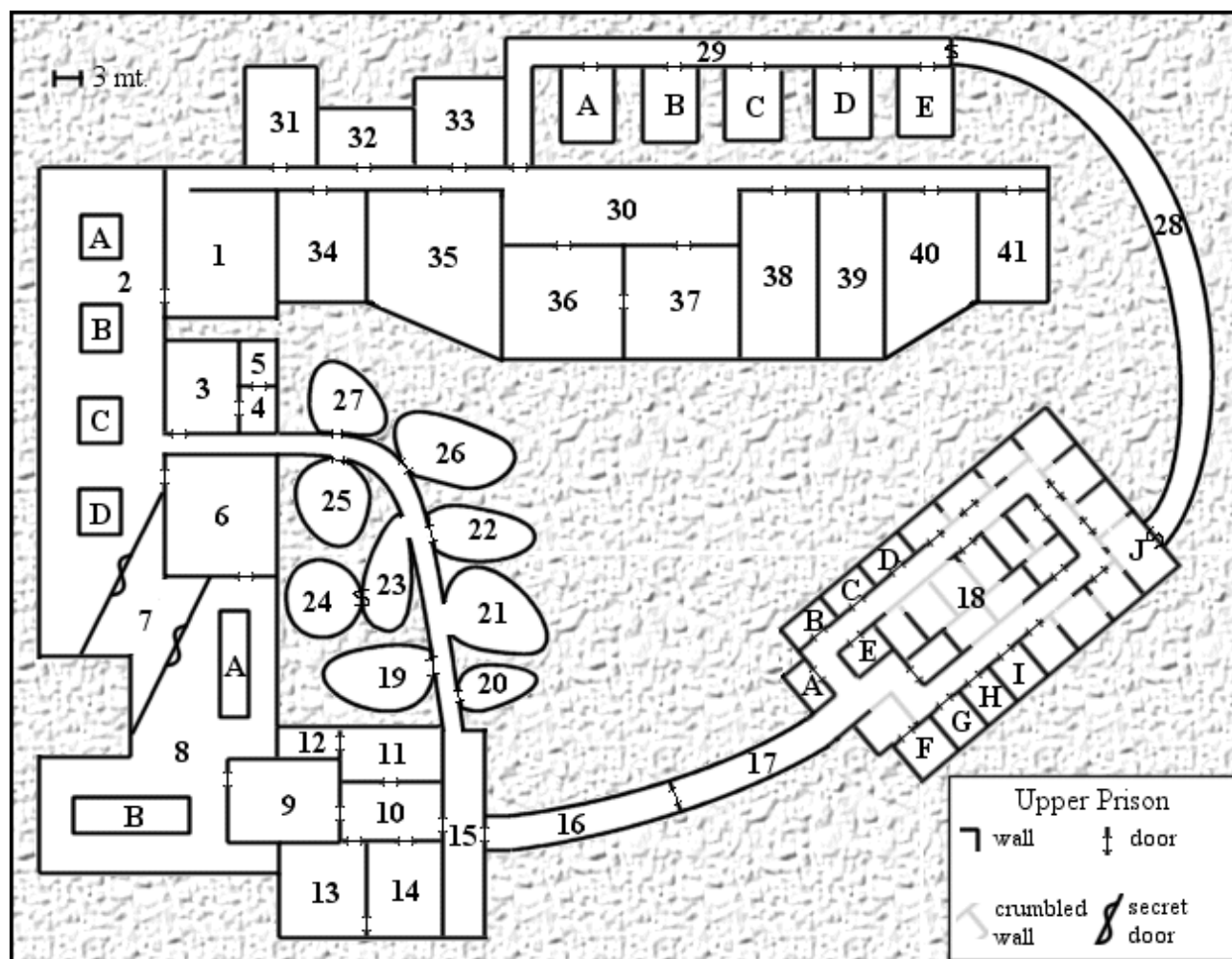
Mercenary guards (5)		Al. Neutral Evil	Tiefling Fighter 5 th (Outlands)	CR: 5
Str: 10 (+0) Dex: 14 (+2) Con: 12 (+1) Int: 11 (+0) Wis: 11 (+0) Cha: 8 (-1)	HP: 5d10+8 (32) AC: 15 (+3 armor, +2 dex) Initiative: +2 dex Ref: +3 (+1 base, +2 dex) For: +5 (+4 base, +1 con) Will: +1 base	Speed: 6 Armor: medium % fail.: 20% BAB: +5 Melee: +5 base Ranged: +7 (+5 base, +2 dex)	Check pen.: -3 Grapple: +5	
Attacks Masterwork blowgun, +8 range 6m (+9 within 9m), damage poison, or Masterwork blowgun, +6/+6 range 6m (+7/+7 within 9m), damage poison, or Cold iron shortsword, +6 melee, damage 1d6+1, crit 19-20/x2, or <i>Shortbow +1</i> , +9 range 18m (+10 within 9m), damage 1d4+1, crit 20/x3		Skills Bluff +1 (-1 cha, +2 racial) Climb +3 (+6 ranks, -3 armor) Hide +2 (+3 dex, +2 racial, -3 armor) Jump +3 (+6 ranks, -3 armor) Ride +7 (+4 ranks, +3 dex)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Weapon focus: shortbow, Point blank shot, Rapid shot, Toughness, Exotic weapon proficiency: blowgun. Darkvision 18m; cold, fire and electricity resistance 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.				
Equipment Hide armor (AB +3, max dex +4, check penalty -3, arcane failure 20%) Cold iron shortsword (damage 1d6, crit 19-20/x2) <i>Shortbow +1</i> (damage 1d4+1, crit 20/x3) (faint evocation, CL 3) 20 arrows Masterwork blowgun (damage poison) 10 poisoned darts (DC 19, initial and secondary damage 1d6 dexterity)				

Babau (5)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: 21 (+5) Dex: 12 (+1) Con: 20 (+5) Int: 14 (+2) Wis: 13 (+1) Cha: 16 (+3)	HP: 7d8+35 (66) AC: 19 (+1 dex, +8 natural) Initiative: +1 dex Ref: +6 (+5 base, +1 dex) For: +10 (+5 base, +5 con) Will: +6 (+5 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 9 Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +7 Melee: +12 (+7 base, +5 strength) Ranged: +8 (+7 base, +1 dexterity)	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +12	
Attacks 2 claws, +12 melee, damage 1d6+5, and Bite +10 melee, damage 1d6+2		Skills Climb +15 (+10 ranks, +5 str) Disable Device +12 (+10 ranks, +2 int) Disguise +13 (+10 ranks, +3 cha) Escape Artist +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex) Hide +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex) Listen +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis) Move Silently +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex) Open Lock +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex) Search +20 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +2 int) Sleight of Hand +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex) Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*) Use Rope +3 (+1 dex, +2 synergy**)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Cleave, Multiattack, Power attack All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Sneak attack +2d6, damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 14, telepathy within 30 mt. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); caster level 7 th . Protective slime (any weapon or character touching the babau takes 1d8 damage, ignoring hardness; magic weapon and characters may roll a Reflex save, DC 18, to avoid) Summon 1 babau 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.		* when following tracks ** when binding someone		

The metal grates have locks, and both of them are locked at the moment. It is almost impossible to fight with melee weapons through the grate (-10 penalty to hit).

When all PCs are down, dead or unconscious, they are dragged to room **29/A** and **29/B** in the upper prison. All their belongings are removed and placed in room **5**; all they have when they wake up is a filthy loincloth.

The Upper Prison



The upper prison is located about 5 meters below the ground. The ceiling and outer walls are reinforced with metal bars; they are support for the underground structure as well as occasional torture implement. They also further prevent the prisoners from attempting the use of various spells to escape. The rest of the walls, as well as the floor, are generally paved with granite blocks. The prison is in a dismal state; dust covers everything that isn't in use, the door hinges haven't been oiled in decades, and the lighting is poor in most locations (only the western area has wall torches; the rest of the floor is dark and the guards without darkvision have to carry torches). The cell doors are usually composed of steel bars, and the Strength DC to break them is 28. There's an eerie silence, with the exception of the guards' heavy steps on the floor. The noise seems to be always there, even in the most remote parts of the complex.

There are several areas in the upper prison. The area in the northern part of the map comprises several large cells, including some magically protected ones. The western area has a few offices, and some small, square cages, where the inmates are deprived of any kind of privacy and are exposed for show. This area was being expanded, but the works were never completed; there are some excavated caves (hastily plated with the usual metal bars) that are currently used as warehouses. Finally, there is another cellblock in the southeastern part of the map. It used to have many small isolation cells, though many of the cell walls were destroyed during a particularly flashy escape attempt some decades ago. They were never repaired, and only a fraction of the cells are in use now.

The upper prison is carefully patrolled by a large number of Ithla-Sathlo's mercenaries. Being an invasion force,

WILL? YOUR TURN TO
PATROL THE ISOLATION
CELLS. OK? ...WILL?
— ITHLERC LEADER, STILL
GETTING THE HANG OF
"VOLUNTEERING"

they are a lot more numerous than what would be sufficient to control the prison, especially considering the low number of actual prisoners. Still, they don't really care about the captives, and their surveillance is sloppy at best. Also, they are reluctant to enter the lower prison, as well as the isolation cellblock, and won't do so unless ordered by a tanar'ri. Every ten minutes, there is a 10% chance that a patrol enters the room the PCs are currently in (or passes in front of it and looks through the door). The chance is 10% per hour within the caves (rooms **19** through **27**), and patrols just won't go into room **18** unless they are sure that prisoners have escaped there. The patrol teams are composed of 3 mercenaries, but after the PCs' escape is noticed, they are reinforced to 7 mercenaries and a babau tanar'ri.

Patrol team merc, human		Al. Neutral Evil	Human Fighter 3 rd (Outlands)	CR: 3
Str: 13 (+1) Dex: 10 (+0) Con: 12 (+1) Int: 10 (+0) Wis: 11 (+0) Cha: 10 (+0)	HP: 3d10+6 (22) AC: 14 (+3 armor, +1 shield) Initiative: +0 Ref: +1 base For: +5 (+4 base, +1 con) Will: +1 base	Speed: 6 Armor: medium % fail.: 25% Check pen.: -4 BAB: +3 Melee: +4 (+3 base, +1 str) Ranged: +3 base Grapple: +4		
Attacks Shortbow, +4 range 6m, damage poison, or Longsword, +5 melee, damage 1d8+1, crit 19-20/x2, or Battleaxe, +5 melee, damage 1d8+1, crit 20/x3, or Warhammer, +5 melee, damage 1d8+1, crit 20/x3, or Scimitar, +5 melee, damage 1d6+1, crit 18-20/x2			Skills Climb +3 (+6 ranks, +1 strength, -4 armor) Jump +3 (+6 ranks, +1 strength, -4 armor) Ride +6 ranks	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Weapon focus: <their melee weapon>, Power attack, Toughness, Weapon focus: shortbow.				
Equipment Hide armor (AB +3, max dex +4, check penalty -3, arcane failure 20%) Light steel shield (AB +1, check penalty -1, arcane failure 5%) Each patrol member has one of the following weapons: longsword, battleaxe, warhammer, scimitar. There is a 10% chance for this weapon to be magical, with a +1 enhancement bonus. 50% of the weapons are made in cold iron.				

Patrol team merc, tiefling		Al. Chaotic Evil	Tiefling Fighter 3 rd (Outlands or Abyss)	CR: 3
Str: 13 (+1) Dex: 12 (+1) Con: 12 (+1) Int: 12 (+1) Wis: 11 (+0) Cha: 9 (-1)	HP: 3d10+6 (22) AC: 15 (+3 armor, +1 shield, +1 dex) Initiative: +1 dex Ref: +2 (+1 base, +1 dex) For: +5 (+4 base, +1 con) Will: +1 base	Speed: 6 Armor: medium % fail.: 25% Check pen.: -4 BAB: +3 Melee: +4 (+3 base, +1 str) Ranged: +4 (+3 base, +1 dex) Grapple: +4		
Attacks Shortbow, +5 range 6m, damage poison, or Longsword, +5 melee, damage 1d8+1, crit 19-20/x2, or Battleaxe, +5 melee, damage 1d8+1, crit 20/x3, or Warhammer, +5 melee, damage 1d8+1, crit 20/x3, or Scimitar, +5 melee, damage 1d6+1, crit 18-20/x2			Skills Bluff +1 (-1 cha, +2 racial) Climb +3 (+6 ranks, +1 strength, -4 armor) Jump +3 (+6 ranks, +1 strength, -4 armor) Hide -1 (+1 dex, +2 racial, -4 armor) Ride +7 (+6 ranks, +1 dex)	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Weapon focus: <their melee weapon>, Power attack, Toughness, Weapon focus: shortbow. Darkvision 18m; cold, fire and electricity resistance 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.				
Equipment Hide armor (AB +3, max dex +4, check penalty -3, arcane failure 20%) Light steel shield (AB +1, check penalty -1, arcane failure 5%) Each patrol member has one of the following weapons: longsword, battleaxe, warhammer, scimitar. There is a 10% chance for this weapon to be magical, with a +1 enhancement bonus. 50% of the weapons are made in cold iron.				

There are still some captives within the upper prison. Should the PCs free them, you may decide to have them follow the PCs around, and/or get them killed in some horrible way.

1. This is the entrance hall to the Maldithar underground, and it is extremely well protected. The stairs that climb upwards to the fortress are located in the southeastern corner of the room; they are an iron spiral staircase, designed to impede fighting from below. Anyone who is fighting on the staircase suffers a –2 penalty to hit foes that are higher on the steps. A locked steel grate blocks the access to this staircase. The wall in the northern area is mostly composed of a huge glass pane. The glass has been through a special tempering process, which gives it hardness 5 and 10 hit points. When it breaks, the glass shards will deal 1d4 damage to everyone within 1.5 meters from the glass.

The room is manned at all times by a dozen mercenaries and a few *bulezau tanar'ri* – fearsome fiends which look like gaunt, sickly minotaurs; they can and will tear a *sod's* arms from their sockets if angered, but they aren't exactly smart. The tiefling is a wizard and has a permanent detect magic spell on him. He's a nervous and paranoid guy – he will concentrate to detect magic at the slightest sound or movement. The lock on the staircase grate is probably the best one in the fortress; the DC to pick it is 35. There's a rope for the alarm in the middle of the room, a couple of tables, and a small safe near the door. The safe contains the key to the staircase and a *scroll of telekinesis*. The combination is only known to the *tanar'ri* in this room.

Tiefling wizard		Al. Chaotic Evil	Tiefling Wizard 9th (Abyss)		CR: 9
Str: 9 (-1)	HP: 9d4+9 (31)	Speed: 9		Check pen.: 0	
Dex: 14 (+2)	AC: 17 (+2 dex, +5 armor)	Armor: none			
Con: 13 (+1)	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0%			
Int: 16 (+3)	Ref: +5 (+3 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +4		Grapple: +3	
Wis: 9 (-1)	For: +4 (+3 base, +1 con)	Melee: +3 (+4 base, -1 str)			
Cha: 7 (-2)	Will: +5 (+6 base, -1 wis)	Ranged: +6 (+4 base, +2 dex)			
Attacks					
Unarmed attack, +3 melee, damage 1d3-1 non-lethal					
Feats and special abilities					
Feats: Brew potion, Combat casting, Empower spell, Spell focus: evocation, Spell penetration, Scribe scroll					
Darkvision 18m; cold, fire and electricity resistance 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.					
Wizard spells/day: 4/5/5/4/2/1 (DC 13+spell level, +1 evocation)					
Equipment					
<i>Bracers of armor</i> +5 (moderate conjuration, CL 10)					
<i>Pearl of power</i> (4 th level spell) (moderate transmutation, CL 7)					
Bag of spell components, including 2 black pearls worth 100 gold each.					
Spellbook (0 th level: all core; 1 st level: Protection from evil, Protection from good, Shield, Comprehend languages, Identify, Magic missile, Expeditious retreat; 2 nd level: See invisibility, Glitterdust, Invisibility, Arcane lock; 3 rd level: Fireball, Lightning bolt, Hold person, Slow; 4 th level: Dimensional anchor, Crushing despair, Ice storm, Dimension door; 5 th level: Permanency, Mirage arcana)					
Skills					
Concentration +17 (+12 ranks, +1 con, +4 combat casting*)					
Craft (blacksmith) +7 (+4 ranks, +3 int)					
Knowledge (Gray Waste) +14 (+5 ranks, +6 synergy, +3 int)					
Knowledge (Pandemonium) +14 (+5 ranks, +6 synergy, +3 int)					
Knowledge (Abyss) +14 (+5 ranks, +6 synergy, +3 int)					
Knowledge (Limbo) +14 (+5 ranks, +6 synergy, +3 int)					
Knowledge (Arcana) +15 (+12 ranks, +3 int)					
Spellcraft +17 (+12 ranks, +3 int, +2 synergy)					
* when casting on the defensive					

Prepared spells:

0th level: Detect magic, Detect magic, Detect magic, Prestidigitation

1st level: Comprehend languages, Magic missile, Magic missile, Expeditious retreat, Identify

2nd level: See invisibility, See invisibility, Glitterdust, Glitterdust, Arcane lock

3rd level: Hold person, Hold person, Slow, Slow

4th level: Dimensional anchor, Dimension door

5th level: **Empowered** Lightning Bolt

Human elite mercenaries (11)		Al. Neutral Evil	Human Fighter 6 th (Outlands)	CR: 6
Str: 15 (+2) Dex: 10 (+0) Con: 14 (+2) Int: 10 (+0) Wis: 12 (+1) Cha: 10 (+0)	HP: 6d10+15 (48) AC: 21 (+8 armor, +3 shield) Initiative: +4 improved initiative Ref: +2 base For: +7 (+5 base, +2 con) Will: +5 (+2 base, +1 wis, +2 iron will)	Speed: 6 Armor: heavy % fail.: 50% Check pen.: -6 BAB: +6/+1 Grapple: +8 Melee: +8/+3 (+6 base, +2 str) Ranged: +6/+1 base		
<u>Attacks</u> <i>Cold iron two handed sword</i> +1, +10/+5 melee, damage 2d6+6, crit 19-20/x2				<u>Skills</u> Climb +5 (+9 ranks, +2 strength, -6 armor) Jump +5 (+9 ranks, +2 strength, -6 armor) Ride +9 ranks
<u>Feats and special abilities</u> Feats: Weapon focus: two handed sword, Weapon specialization: two handed sword, Power attack, Toughness, Improved initiative, Quick draw, Cleave, Iron will				
<u>Equipment</u> <i>Banded mail</i> +2 (AB +8, max dex +1, check penalty -5, arcane failure 35%) (moderate abjuration, CL 6) <i>Heavy steel shield</i> +1 (AB +3, check penalty -1, arcane failure 15%) (faint abjuration, CL 3) <i>Cold iron two handed sword</i> +1 (damage 2d6+1, crit 19-20/x2) (faint evocation, CL 3) <i>2 potions of cure light wounds</i> (cures 1d8+1) (faint conjuration, CL 1)				

Bulezau (3)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: 22 (+6) Dex: 17 (+3) Con: 16 (+3) Int: 7 (-2) Wis: 10 (+0) Cha: 11 (+0)	HP: 7d8+21 (52) AC: 23 (-1 size, +3 dex, +11 natural) Initiative: +3 dex Ref: +8 (+5 base, +3 dex) For: +8 (+5 base, +3 con) Will: +5 base	Speed: 9 Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0 BAB: +7 Grapple: +17 Melee: +12 (+7 base, +6 strength, -1 size) Ranged: +9 (+7 base, +3 dexterity, -1 size)		
<u>Attacks</u> Greataxe +12/+7 melee reach 3m, damage 3d6+9, crit 20/x3, or 2 claws, +12 melee reach 3m, damage 1d4+6, and Head butt +10 melee reach 3m, damage 2d8+3, and Tail slap +10 melee reach 3m, damage 1d3+3				<u>Skills</u> Climb +16 (+10 ranks, +6 str) Jump +16 (+10 ranks, +6 str) Listen +10 ranks Spot +10 ranks Survival +10 ranks Swim +16 (+10 ranks, +6 str)
<u>Feats and special abilities</u> Feats: Improved bull rush, Multiattack, Power attack All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 14. Awesome blow with the head butt, as the feat. Rage: 25% chance per round of combat, 75% in rounds during which it was damaged but didn't hit a foe. Rage lasts until all opponents are dead or until 5 rounds pass without combat; it otherwise works as a barbarian's rage. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>cause fear</i> , <i>command</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>wall of fog</i> ; 1/day – <i>shout</i> . Caster level 7 th . Summon 1-3 rutterkin (40%) or 3-12 dretches (60%) babau 1/day with 25% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.				
<u>Equipment</u> Greataxe, Large size (damage 3d6, crit x3)				

2. This room is basically a wide hallway, which contains four large steel cages. A bunch of five mercenaries, led by a babau tanar'ri, walks up and down the hallway (stats are the same as other patrol team mercenaries).

You step into a dark room, or maybe a cave. It is immersed in darkness, and the walls must be farther apart than what you can see. You can see a group of people led by a fiend patrolling the area at least twenty meters from where you are. One of them is carrying a torch; the light reflects off something metallic in the middle of the room, maybe cages or grates.

The cages marked **A**, **B**, and **D** are empty (except for a few skeletons). Cage **C**, instead, contains a prisoner. He's an emaciated, weakened human named Jillon (**Jillon/male human fighter 3rd/Outlands/neutral evil**), who was imprisoned during the assault on the fortress. The captors haven't fed him, and every time the patrol walks by his cage they rattle the steel bars with their weap-

ons, preventing him from sleeping. The reasons for his imprisonment are unclear – he was a member of the mercenaries, but on a whim Rothakon claimed that he acted cowardly during the assault, and threw him in jail.

A corridor on the east side leads into an excavated area. On the north side of this corridor, an eroded plaque reads “jailmaster”.

The door just south of the corridor is half-rotten, and not even locked. Near the door, one of the granite stones on the wall can be pushed to activate the flaming oil in room 6. Noticing the device takes a Search check, DC 28.

The southeastern wall isn’t an outer wall, and thus doesn’t have the iron bars. It is also very thin. The DC to notice this with a Search check is 15. A Strength check, DC 21, or any other powerful hit, will cause the wall to fall into this room. It will fall on the cage marked **D**, without damaging it significantly, and then crumble, causing 3d6 damage to any character within 4.5 meters from the wall, unless they save on Reflex versus DC 17. The noise will likely be noticed by anyone in this hallway as well as anyone in room 6.

3. There’s a black granite desk in this room, and several stone benches, as well as a barrel of water. The hall serves as the jailmaster’s office. It is occupied by a tanar’ri, who guards the prisoners’ equipment and is pretty bored. He is just wishing for some intruder to get in.

Babau	Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: 21 (+5) Dex: 12 (+1) Con: 20 (+5) Int: 14 (+2) Wis: 13 (+1) Cha: 16 (+3)	HP: 7d8+35 (66) AC: 19 (+1 dex, +8 natural) Initiative: +1 dex Ref: +6 (+5 base, +1 dex) For: +10 (+5 base, +5 con) Will: +6 (+5 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 9 Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +7 Melee: +12 (+7 base, +5 strength) Ranged: +8 (+7 base, +1 dexterity)	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +12
Attacks 2 claws, +12 melee, damage 1d6+5, and Bite +10 melee, damage 1d6+2		Skills Climb +15 (+10 ranks, +5 str) Disable Device +12 (+10 ranks, +2 int) Disguise +13 (+10 ranks, +3 cha) Escape Artist +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex) Hide +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex) Listen +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis) Move Silently +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex) Open Lock +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex) Search +20 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +2 int) Sleight of Hand +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex) Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*) Use Rope +3 (+1 dex, +2 synergy**)	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Cleave, Multiattack, Power attack All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Sneak attack +2d6, damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 14, telepathy within 30 mt. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>greater teleport</i> ; caster level 7 th . Protective slime (su): any weapon or character touching the babau takes 1d8 damage, ignoring hardness; magic weapon and characters may roll a Reflex save, DC 18, to avoid. Summon 1 babau 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.		* when following tracks ** when binding someone	

The door on the right is locked, and he has the key to open it, as well as the key to open the door to room 5, and the key to the northern door in room 10. The door is trapped as well; the DC to find the trap is 25, and the DC to disable it is 28. The granite desk has a single drawer, which contains a *potion of neutralize poison* (moderate conjuration, CL 7) and 32 silver pieces. The room has a rope for the alarm, but the system is broken in this point, and pulling it will be useless. The babau doesn’t know this, though.

4. This room is empty. However, if the characters entered by picking the lock and didn’t check for traps, a nasty trap activates as soon as someone steps into the room (Search DC 21, Disable Device DC 21). Roll Listen versus DC 15. Those who succeed hear a hissing sound (and have time to hold their breath). Toxic gas fills the room – it is a poison, DC 19, initial damage 1d6 constitution damage, secondary damage 1 permanent constitution drain. Characters can hold their breath, but it’s useless unless they did it quickly enough. As if it wasn’t enough, both doors lock again, and any characters caught inside are exposed to the poison every round until they can get out. If they open

the door to room 5, the gas disperses into both rooms; the heroes have one round before it fills both of them. If they open the door to room 4, the gas gets out – everyone in room 4 is affected for one round, then the poison disperses.

5. This room contains several shelves, with the prisoners' equipment. Small items are kept in a safe, but it is currently unlocked. The PCs' stuff is here, as well as a bunch of assorted clothes, a *po-tion of invisibility* (faint illusion, CL 3), a scroll of *plane shift* (moderate conjuration, CL 9), and a *portable hole* (moderate conjuration, CL 12). There is also a gold and silver ring. A Spot or Search check, DC 15, reveals that the ring bears the symbol of Baator on the inside. It also radiates a moderate divination aura.

6. A “safety” room used to separate two prison areas. The most notable feature of this room isn't very notable at all – it is a hidden device, installed just above the ceiling, which can be activated from the outside to drop flaming oil in the entire room. The trap only works once, but it deals 5d6 damage to anyone who is within the room and sets them on fire, dealing another 5d6 damage during the following round. Instead of an alarm rope, there's a steel rod hanging from the ceiling here. The purpose is the same.

7. This is nothing more than an empty and forgotten area. A thick layer of dust covers the ground. A careful search reveals several old and broken crossbow bolts near one of the walls. If the PCs beat DC 19 in their Search check, they will find 5 whole bolts. They are +1 *shocking burst*, too – remains from an ancient battle (moderate evocation, CL 10).

8. Like room 2, this large hallway contains large cages. There's a low noise of running water in the air. What happened in these cells is a prime example of the inhuman cruelty of the Abyss. There's smell of corpse around this room, and no guards.

The cage marked A is right under the fortress' huge water basin.

The water filters through cracks in the ceiling, and falls into the cage as hundreds of tiny stream and constant droppings. The cage's floor is composed of rusted metal grates, which let the water fall further into the floor to some unknown depth. There are some still-living prisoners in the cage – two human males and an elven female. All of them wear nothing more than a loincloth.

One of the humans is a brown-haired man; he is thin and looks weakened. He is crouching with his head between his legs, crying, sighing and trembling. The second human is a muscular man, seemingly the only one who is vaguely healthy. He's standing and holding the cage bars, loudly asking for food. The elven woman is pale and skinny, lying on the floor, and apparently unconscious.

They are adventurers, captured about four months ago by the tanar'ri. The rest of their group died; there are seven corpses in the cage. The running water dampens the smell – and helps driving the captives insane. The lower prison lake is beneath this area.

The elf (Tilana/female elf wizard 7th/Arborea/chaotic good), whose name is Tilana, is a pale and skinny remain of a woman. She is unconscious and dying, but even if somehow awakened, she just stares into the void. The first human, named Trevoc, is – was – a paladin. He lost his powers because of what he was forced to do. He occasionally tends to the elf, forcing her to drink some water and trying to wake her up. Whenever he tries to talk to her, or to talk about their situation, he breaks into tears. The second human, a fighter named Briwan, seems to be the only mostly sane one. Fact is, that's far from the truth. The demons that owned the fortress until some weeks ago refused to feed the ten prisoners until six of them were dead and the rest were starving. The demons told the survivors that they would be given food if they raped the elf. The party refused; after some days, one of them managed to commit suicide by taunting the fiends until they got angry and killed him. After some more time, Briwan broke and did what the tanar'ri wanted. Trevoc didn't attempt to stop him, and lost his paladin powers. Briwan was fed and shared his food with the others, though the shocked Tilana initially refused. It went one for more and more days, and Tilana eventually closed her mind completely and had to be fed by force. One day, Briwan coldly told Trevoc that he

could no longer share the food he got with him, because it was barely enough to feed him and Tilana. With more prodding by the demons, Trevoc fell as well.

Trevoc		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Ex-Paladin 9 th (Elysium)	CR: 7
Str: 12 (+1)	HP: 9d10+9 (58)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 8 (-1)	AC: 10	Armor: none		
Con: 13 (+1)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +2 (+3 base, -1 dex)	BAB: +9 Grapple: +10		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +7 (+6 base, +1 con)	Melee: +10 (+9 base, +1 str)		
Cha: 15 (+2)	Will: +4 (+3 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +8 (+9 base, -1 dex)		
<u>Attacks</u>		<u>Skills</u>		
Unarmed attack, +10/+5 melee, damage 1d3+1 non-lethal		Concentration +17 (+12 ranks, +1 con, +4 combat casting*)		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>		Diplomacy +9 (+12 ranks, +2 cha)		
Feats: Combat casting, Weapon focus: longsword, Power attack, Cleave, Improved critical: longsword.		Knowledge (religion) +5 ranks		
38 non-lethal damage due to hunger		Ride +11 (+12 ranks, -1 dex)		
Fatigued due to hunger (currently has -2 Strength and Dexterity; can't run or charge)		* when casting on the defensive		
<u>Equipment</u>				
Filthy loincloth				

Briwan		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Fighter 9 th (Ysgard)	CR: 9
Str: 16 (+3)	HP: 9d10+18 (67)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 10	Armor: none		
Con: 15 (+2)	Initiative: +4 improved initiative	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 13 (+1)	Ref: +5 (+3 base, +2 light. ref.)	BAB: +9 Grapple: +12		
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +8 (+6 base, +2 con)	Melee: +12 (+9 base, +3 str)		
Cha: 11 (+0)	Will: +3 base	Ranged: +9 base		
<u>Attacks</u>		<u>Skills</u>		
Unarmed attack, +12/+7 melee, damage 1d3+3 non-lethal		Climb +15 (+12 ranks, +3 str)		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>		Jump +15 (+12 ranks, +3 str)		
Feats: Blind-fight, Cleave, Combat expertise, Improved critical: battleaxe, Improved disarm, Improved initiative, Lightning reflexes, Power attack, Weapon focus: battleaxe, Weapon specialization: battleaxe.		Ride +12 ranks		
5 non-lethal damage due to hunger		Swim +15 (+12 ranks, +3 str)		
Fatigued due to hunger (currently has -2 Strength and Dexterity; can't run or charge)				
<u>Equipment</u>				
Filthy loincloth				

Even though those tanar'ri were ousted from their prison, they succeeded in irredeemably corrupting Briwan and Trevoc, dooming their souls to the Abyss. Both of them are now chaotic evil in alignment. The former paladin has got used to the horrible act, and is constantly playing self-justifications in his mind. He still has nothing on Briwan, who no longer feels the need for justification, and would be ready to do literally anything for food or freedom. He is also physically healthier, and he is holding the cage bars and shouting, demanding food and an explanation of what's going on.

The cage marked **B** contains a single ghoul, and two mangled corpses. The ghoul starts howling as soon as someone enters the room. What happened here is evident: the fiends forced this man to survive by eating the flesh of his dead cellmates. When he died as well, the Abyss brought him back as a ghoul.

A Cutter with Potential

Briwan and Trevoc are of about the right power level and in the right plot situation to join up the party. But they are also rapists and murderers – which may be more evil than what your players want to deal with. Therefore, be very careful.

Tilana would be a more politically correct addition to the party, if only she could be shaken off her catathonic state (see page XXX).

None of these characters are subject to the curse, but they may have very strong feelings of revenge against Rothakon, and they have nowhere else to go. Tilana would also feel in debt towards the PCs.

Ghoul		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Undead (Abyss)	CR: 1
Str: 13 (+1)	HP: 2d12 (13)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 15 (+2)	AC: 14 (+2 dex, +2 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: -	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 13 (+1)	Ref: +2 dex	BAB: +1 Grapple: +2		
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +0	Melee: +2 (+1 base, +1 strength)		
Cha: 12 (+1)	Will: +5 (+3 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +3 (+1 base, +2 dexterity)		
Attacks				Skills
Bite +2 melee, damage 1d6+1+paralysis				Balance +6 (+4 ranks, +2 dex)
2 claws, +0 melee, damage 1d3+paralysis				Climb +5 (+4 ranks, +1 str)
Feats and special abilities				Hide +6 (+4 ranks, +2 dex)
Feats: Multiattack				Jump +5 (+4 ranks, +1 dex)
Ghoul fever (su): disease—bite, Fortitude DC 12, incubation period 1 day, damage 1d3 Con and 1d3 Dex; a humanoid that dies of ghoul fever rises as a ghoul at the following midnight; a humanoid with 4 or more HD rises as a ghast instead.				Move Silently +6 (+4 ranks, +2 dex)
Paralysis (ex): Fortitude DC 12 or paralyzed for 1d4+1 rounds; elves are immune.				Spot +6 (+4 ranks, +2 wis)
Darkvision 18 mt, undead traits, +2 turn resistance.				

The northwestern wall isn't an outer wall, and thus doesn't have the iron bars. It is also very thin. The DC to notice this with a Search check is 15. A Strength check, DC 21, or any other powerful hit, will cause the wall to fall into this room. It will fall on the cage marked A, breaking the door and letting the ghoul escape, and then crumble, causing 3d6 damage to any character within 4.5 meters from the wall, unless they save on Reflex versus DC 17. The noise will likely be noticed by anyone in this hallway as well as anyone in room 6 and 9.

I EAT
DEAD PEOPLE
- GHoul

There are two doors leading out of this hall; neither of them is locked, and near each of them there is a hidden stone, which can be pressed to activate the fire trap in the adjacent room. The stone can be detected with a Search check, DC 28.

9. This room is similar to room 6. It has the same trap and the same metal rod used to activate the alarm.

10. An atrium. The room is empty. The door leading north is locked (DC 27 to pick it).

11. The antechamber to the stairs to the lower prison. A single sleepy tiefling guards the entrance. He currently has a -5 to Spot and Listen checks until something startles him.

Tiefling guard		Al. Chaotic Evil	Tiefling Fighter 3 rd (Abyss)	CR: 3
Str: 12 (+1)	HP: 3d10+3 (19)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 15 (+2)	AC: 16 (+3 armor, +1 shield, +2 dex)	Armor: light		
Con: 13 (+1)	Initiative: +4 improved initiative	% fail.: 25% Check pen.: -4		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +3 (+1 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +3 Grapple: +4		
Wis: 9 (-1)	For: +4 (+3 base, +1 con)	Melee: +4 (+3 base, +1 str)		
Cha: 11 (+0)	Will: +0 (+1 base, -1 wis)	Ranged: +5 (+3 base, +2 dex)		
Attacks				Skills
Cold iron longsword, +5 melee, damage 1d8+1, crit 19-20/x2				Climb +5 (+4 ranks, +1 str)
Feats and special abilities				Jump +5 (+4 ranks, +1 str)
Feats: Dodge, Improved initiative, Mobility, Weapon focus: longsword.				Swim +5 (+4 ranks, +1 str)
Darkvision 18m; cold, fire and electricity resistance 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.				
Equipment				
Hide armor (AB +3, max dex +4, check penalty -3, arcane failure 20%)				
Light steel shield (AB +1, check penalty -1, arcane failure 5%)				
Cold iron longsword (damage 1d8, crit 19-20/x2)				

12. Here are the stairs leading downwards, to room 1 in the lower prison. They are slabs of black granite, with no torches lighting them. If one of the PCs is carrying a light, they can see old pools of dried blood here and there on the steps.

13. This room is used by on-duty guards. There are 15 mercenaries at all times here. Five of them are humans, and seven are tieflings. Their stats are similar to the patrol teams'. The remaining three are elite mercenaries; their stats are similar to those of the mercenaries in room **1**. One of them has the keys to the doors in room **15**.

14. Like room **13**, this room contains 15 mercenaries. Eight of them are humans and five are tieflings; their stats are similar to the patrol teams'. The other two are elite human mercenaries like those in room **1**.

15. A hallway, this room is open to the north to an excavated area. Both doors are very heavy wood and steel doors (DC 25 to bash them open), though they are currently unlocked. The mercenaries in room **13** have the keys.

16. This dark corridor lacks torches or any kind of light. It ends in a steel grate, with a lock. The lock is too rusty to work, and the grate is open.

17. This corridor leads to the small cells of area **18**. It is completely dark. There's an alarm rope here.

18. This was an isolation cellblock.

This entire area is completely dark, and stinks of rotting corpses. You can't hear any other person around you, but you do hear some other noises. Growls, hisses, some sort of animal cries coming from the darkness. From what little you can see, you understand that this place has been wrecked. There is a crumbled wall near where you stand, and rubble covers the floor.

Patrols don't come here. After a magical incident during an escape attempt, several walls were destroyed, and they were never fixed. The cells marked with letters are the only ones that are still usable. The mid area's floor has partially crumbled, and a gaping hole (4.5 meters wide) to the lower prison is exposed. PCs might accidentally fall into the hole, or decide to climb down. The hole leads to a series of twisty tunnels; the tunnels have some very steep points, and are covered in some sort of slime that makes climbing very difficult (DC 30, 15 with a rope) and causes falling characters to slide all the way to the bottom (Balance check DC 25 to stop somewhere within the tunnels instead of falling). The tunnels, through several hundreds of meters of meandering passages, lead down to room **21** in the Lower Prison. Notice that the creatures of darkness have adapted to the slime and can climb with relative ease (DC 15).

Many creatures of darkness, coming up from the hole, roam the cellblock. They hide between the walls, in the rubble, on the ceiling, and stealthily creep up and down from the passage. Every minute the PCs spend in the cellblock, there is a 10% chance that 1d6 of the creatures attack them. The PCs are surprised unless they roll Spot versus the creatures' Hide, or Listen versus the creatures' Move Silently. Additionally, when the PCs pass near cell **F**, they see (if they have any lights, or darkvision) three of the creatures throwing themselves at the bars of cell **I**. The creatures see the PCs in turn, but keep attacking the cell unless the PCs move closer or attack.

If the PCs freed the former jailmaster (see room **29**), they may find his half-devoured corpse here.

Cells **C**, **D**, **F** and **H** are empty. The cell marked **A** just contains a heap of skeletons. The bone heap is a couple meters tall; there must be at least 50 skeletons here. The tanar'ri threw sick or diseased prisoners in this cell to die and rot. Though they are normal skeletons, the atrocity of this room is such that the evil energies of the Abyss will corrupt any resurrection or reanimation attempt performed in the entire cellblock. The spell will fail, and its power will cause the bone heap to reanimate as a monstrous undead creature. It can't get out of the cell, but it will attack anyone and anything that passes nearby.

Animated bone heap	Al. Chaotic Evil	Huge undead (Abyss)	CR: 9
Str: 18 (+4) Dex: 12 (+1) Con: - Int: - Wis: 10 (+0) Cha: 1 (-5)	HP: 20d12 (130) AC: 14 (+1 dex, +3 natural) Initiative: +5 (+1 dex, +4 improved init) Ref: +7 (+6 base, +1 dex) For: +6 base Will: +12 base	Speed: 0 Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +10 Melee: +14 (+10 base, +4 strength) Ranged: +11 (+10 base, +1 dexterity)	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +22
<u>Attacks</u> 4 claws, +12 melee reach 6 mt, damage 1d8+4			
<u>Feats and special abilities</u> Feats: Improved initiative Immunity to cold, DR 5/bludgeoning, fast healing 3. Undead traits.			

Cell **B** contains a decaying corpse of some humanoid race, with only a putrid loincloth on it. Manacles are tying its feet to the wall, so that it's hanging upside down. There's a pool of dried blood, vomit, and unidentifiable fluids under it. Cell **E** contains yet another rotting human corpse. He somehow managed to hang himself with the loincloth. If the PCs enter the cell, as soon as someone touches it, it suddenly animates as a zombie and attempts to grapple and strangle the hero.

Hanged zombie	Al. Neutral Evil	Medium undead (Abyss)	CR: ½
Str: 20 (+5) Dex: 4 (-3) Con: - Int: - Wis: 10 (+0) Cha: 1 (-5)	HP: 2d12+3 (19) AC: 12 (+2 natural) Initiative: -3 dex Ref: -3 dex For: +0 Will: +3 base	Speed: 9 Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +1 Melee: +6 (+1 base, +5 strength) Ranged: -2 (+1 base, -3 dexterity)	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +6
<u>Attacks</u> Slam, +6 melee, damage grapple			
<u>Feats and special abilities</u> Feats: Toughness Single actions only (it can only perform a single move or attack action per round). Undead traits.			

Being hanged, it can't move from the middle of the cell, though. If the character escapes, the PCs can safely retreat. Cell **G** contains three humanoid skeletons and two corpses (a human female and a dwarf), all hanging from manacles on the wall. The dwarven corpse is old and rotten, while the woman seems to have died just a few days ago. The body is covered in blood from a hundred cuts all over her body.

Cell **I** contains a still-living prisoner. He is a tiefling, his name is Liviux and he is a spy for the baatezu. Well, he was – when the forces of Ithla-Sathlo attacked, he was no different from the other fortress defenders in their eyes. However, he had the savvy to surrender and the intelligence to surrender to the human mercenaries instead of the tanar'ri commanders, who would have killed him outright. The mercenaries threw him into this cell, manacled him to the wall, and then forgot about him. He has bit through his left hand to free himself from the manacles, and used his loincloth to stop the blood loss (so he's naked). He managed to survive by eating his own hand, and then by chewing some rocks and a bit of moss scraped from the walls, but he's starving nonetheless. Additionally, he has 4 points of Constitution damage due to infection, though he is slowly recovering. When the PCs arrive, Liviux is desperately attempting to fend off three creatures of darkness that are trying to get him through the cell bars.

You hear pitched growls, and see movement near one of the rusty grates. Three animals are throwing themselves at the iron bars. They look like large black dogs, though there is something unnaturally sleek about the way they move. Their speed and agility are unnerving. When they notice you, they briefly turn and emit a pitched growl. Even their faces are deeply black, including their eyes. Despite this, you have the strong feeling that they are staring at your throat.

Hyenas of darkness (3)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 2
Str: 14 (+2)	HP: 2d8+4 (13)	Speed: 21		
Dex: 19 (+4)	AC: 16 (+4 dex, +2 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 15 (+2)	Initiative: +4 dex	% fail.: 0%		Check pen.: 0
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +7 (+3 base, +4 dex)	BAB: +1		Grapple: +3
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +5 (+3 base, +2 con)	Melee: +3 (+1 base, +2 strength)		
Cha: 6 (-2)	Will: +1 (+0 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +5 (+1 base, +4 dexterity)		
<u>Attacks</u>			<u>Skills</u>	
Bite +3 melee, damage 1d6+3			Hide +12 (+4 dex, +8 racial)*	
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>			Listen +6 (+3 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)	
Feats: Alertness, Mobility			Move silently +12 (+4 dex, +8 racial)	
Sneak attack +2d6 as a rogue			Spot +4 (+1 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)	
Low-light vision, darkvision 18 mt, Blindsight 36 mt, Scent.			* it has a +4 racial bonus in areas of tall grass or undergrowth, but this won't likely come up in this place	
Trip (ex): if it hits with the bite attack, it can attempt to trip the opponent as a free action without making the touch attack or drawing an attack of opportunity; if it fails, the opponent can't react to trip the hyena.				

Liviux		Al. Chaotic Evil	Tiefling Rogue 3 rd (Gehenna)	CR: 3
Str: 10 (+0)	HP: 3d6-3 (7)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 17 (+3)	AC: 13 (+3 dex)	Armor: none		
Con: 8 (-1)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 13 (+1)	Ref: +7 (+4 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +2 Grapple: +2		
Wis: 11 (+0)	For: +2 (+1 base, +1 con)	Melee: +3 base		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: +3 (+1 base, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +6 (+3 base, +6 dex)		
<u>Attacks</u>		<u>Skills</u>		
Unarmed strike, +3 melee, damage 1d3 non-lethal		Bluff +8 (+6 ranks, +2 racial)		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>		Diplomacy +4 synergy		
Feats: Stealthy, Iron will.		Hide +13 (+6 ranks, +3 dex, +2 racial, +2 stealthy)		
Darkvision 18m; cold, fire and electricity resistance 5, darkness 1/day.		Intimidate +2 synergy		
Sneak attack +2d6, trapfinding, trap sense +1, evasion.		Listen +6 ranks		
Currently has 4 points of Constitution damage due to infection, but he is recovering (1 point per day as usual).		Move silently +11 (+6 ranks, +3 dex, +2 stealthy)		
<u>Equipment</u>		Open locks +9 (+6 ranks, +3 dex)		
Filthy loincloth (used as bandage).		Profession (cook) +7 (+6 ranks, +1 int)		
		Search +7 (+6 ranks, +1 int)		
		Sense motive +6 ranks		
		Spot +6 ranks		
		Survival +2 synergy**		
		*when he is being observed and tries to stay in character		
		** when searching for or following tracks		

There is a prisoner inside this cell. He is pale, naked and wounded; a filthy rag, soaked in blood, is tied around his left wrist. The hand is missing. His eyes are full of fear and his dark hair is encrusted with blood. He has exceptionally pointy teeth, but given his conditions, he doesn't look dangerous.

If the PCs help him, he thinks for a moment and then reveals them his status as Baatezu spy. He says that he knows about the prison, and that there is no way for him or the PCs to escape. He says that if he can somehow contact the devils, then they will attack the fortress and free them (well, free *him* at least. Probably). Even though it is a relatively unimportant place, they can use it as a beach-head into the Abyss, striking at their ancestral enemies' territory. He needs to recover his ring, held in room 5, through which he can communicate with his superiors. Then, he must find some way into the fortress for them to use – they won't attack unless it's an easy victory. Maybe the mysterious lower prison holds the key.

The area marked with **J** was a guard post. There's an alarm rope here. There are also a couple of old swords on a rack, a

TRUST ME, WE'LL BE
SAFE WHEN THE
BAATEZU WILL HAVE
CONQUERED THIS HOLE.
- LIVIUX, ANOTHER
OPTIMIST

table, and some broken chairs, but that's about it. The secret passage can be noticed with a Search check, DC 20, and then easily opened.

19. This cave and the others in the area were dug from the rock some months ago. They have no lighting, and are completely dark. The walls have been hastily reinforced with the metal bars that cover the rest of the prison. It is possible to remove the bars in three hours, but unless the PCs make a successful Profession (Miner) check, DC 10, they will cause the ceiling to collapse. All characters within the room take 5d6 damage immediately, and during subsequent rounds they have to roll a Reflex save, DC 18, or take further 5d6 damage. When a character passes the save, he manages to get out of the room. Additionally, the noise will alert all the guards of the prison. Even if the PCs work correctly, the noise involved in taking apart the metal sustains increases the chance for a patrol getting near from 10% to 30%. The PCs may attempt to set some sort of trap, so that striking a carefully placed beam will cause the ceiling to collapse. This requires a Craft (Trap making) or Profession (Miner) check, DC 20. If they miss the DC by 10 or more, the ceiling immediately collapses.

20. Like room **19**, this cave is empty and the characters might try to remove the bars from the walls.

21. This big cave is used as a warehouse. There are several crates of salted meat, a few barrels of clean water, and a chest with six bottles of strong liquor. There are a couple of torches on the walls, and another of the crates contains more torches and lantern oil.

22. Another empty cave.

23. The cave here looks empty. However, the bottom is covered in rubble from what appears to be a ceiling collapse. Have each PC roll Spot versus DC 18 (15 if they *don't* have any kind of light with them). Those who succeed notice a very faint light coming from below the rubble. It takes three hours to dig away the rocks and stones. If the PCs do it, they find an *everburning torch* and a passage to another cave, room **24**.

24. Boulders and large stones are everywhere on the floor of this cave. There are several dretch corpses, crushed by the rock. There's also a single tiefling corpse. His leg is trapped under a huge boulder, and his fingernails are all broken as if he tried to dig through the rubble. There is another *everburning torch* here, and the tiefling has a bag with 100 gold coins and a gold ring worth 130 gold.

25. Another empty cave.

26. The cave is empty, but the wall far from the door bears a horrible sight.

A woman is embedded into the wall, her beautiful face a mixture of surprise and terror. The face, the hands and a knee are all that sticks out of the wall and through the metal bars. The right hand is still holding an empty glass flask. Weirdly, there is some dust on the glass but the corpse doesn't look much rotten.

In fact, the woman is an erinyes baatezu, who was captured and then tragically failed an escape attempt. PCs that have spent some time on Baator or near devils may roll a Wisdom check, DC 14. If they succeed, they recognize that the corpse was a baatezu.

If the PCs somehow manage to pull the body down from the rock (it takes one hour of digging, provided they have the tools), then they see the erinyes' feathery wings. Before attempting to escape, she managed to get access to her equipment; she didn't waste time taking clothes (the body is only wearing the usual loincloth), but she did take a *wand of fireballs* (moderate evocation, it has 11 charges left) and her *bracers of armor* (moderate abjuration, AC +3). The bracers are on her arms, and the wand is tied to the loincloth.

27. This cave contains digging equipment – shovels, picks, and a small cart – and many steel beams of varying size as well as the tools needed to put them in place.

28. A dark corridor. The secret passages are fairly evident from the inside. If the PCs are coming in from room **29**, they will be attacked by a creature of darkness about halfway in.

Brown bear of darkness		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 5
Str: 27 (+8)	HP: 6d8+24 (51)	Speed: 18		
Dex: 17 (+3)	AC: 17 (-1 size, +3 dex, +5 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 19 (+4)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +8 (+5 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +4 Grapple: +16		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +10 (+5 base, +5 con)	Melee: +11 (+4 base, +8 strength, -1 size)		
Cha: 6 (-2)	Will: +3 (+2 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +6 (+4 base, +3 dexterity, -1 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, +11 melee, damage 1d8+8, and		Hide +7 (+8 racial, +3 dex, -4 size)		
Bite +6 melee, damage 2d6+4		Listen +4 (+3 ranks, +1 wis)		
Feats and special abilities		Move silently +11 (+8 racial, +3 dex)		
Feats: Endurance, Run, Track, Mobility		Spot +7 (+6 ranks, +1 wis)		
Sneak attack +2d6, improved grab (claws), low-light vision, darkvision		Swim +12 (+4 racial, +8 str)		
18 mt, blindsight 36 mt, scent.				

29. This area contains five cells that are enveloped in an anti-magic field. The cells are used to keep prisoners that have powerful magical abilities that would allow them to escape. Currently, Rothakon's troops are using these cells for everyone they aren't sure about. The corridor is lit with torches, and there is the usual 10% chance for a patrol team to show up every ten minutes.

The PCs are initially kept in the cells marked **A** and **B**.

You wake up on a cold stone floor. You smell dust and hear a distant sound of metallic steps. When you can focus again, you see that you are in a big cell within a prison. There is a single door, made of solid metal. You have been stripped of all items, even your clothes. You are wearing a dirty loin-cloth, but that's all.

The doors are made of steel, with a slit that can be opened or closed from the outside. The surveillance is very sloppy; canny PCs can escape in a number of ways. First of all, it seems that no one has noticed that cell **B** was damaged during the attack. The anti-magic field has failed and spellcasting PCs in room **B** can use their spells or abilities normally (but they still lack material components). Furthermore, the hinges are slightly damaged and the DC to break down the door is only 24.

A single guard will come every 12 hours to give some salted meat and water to the PCs. On the off chance that Ithla-Sathlo is interested in the intruders, the mercenaries are going to keep them alive (at least for a while). The guard passes the food through the bars; PCs might attempt to grapple her as she does so (though they take a -5 to hit penalty on the touch attack), or pick pocket her for the keys (DC 20). In any case, the first time that a patrol team comes here and doesn't see the PCs, they'll sound the alarm. The heroes had better be somewhere else when this happens.

Cell **C** contains one of the former tanar'ri leaders of the fortress. He is safely chained to the walls, and wailing his fury at everything that passes near. If the PCs pass in front of the cell, he starts cursing at them and threatens a multitude of horrible fates, thinking them to be part of the mercenary force. The heroes just might be able to reason with him, and offer freedom for assistance, but the tanar'ri isn't a reliable ally. He burns with rage – he will attack patrol teams on sight, demand the party to follow his orders, and may even attack the PCs if they don't obey.

Hezrou		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 11
Str: 21 (+5)	HP: 10d8+93 (138)	Speed: 15		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 23 (-1 size, +14 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 29 (+9)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 14 (+2)	Ref: +7 (+7 base, +0 dex)	BAB: +10 Grapple: +19		
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +16 (+7 base, +9 con)	Melee: +14 (+10 base, +5 strength, -1 size)		
Cha: 18 (+4)	Will: +9 (+7 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +9 (+10 base, +0 dexterity, -1 size)		
<u>Attacks</u>		<u>Skills</u>		
Bite +14 melee reach 3 mt, damage 4d4+5, and 2 claws, +9 melee reach 3 mt, damage 1d8+2		Climb +18 (+13 ranks, +5 str)		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>		Concentration +22 (+13 ranks, +9 con)		
Feats: Blind-fight, Cleave, Power attack, Toughness		Hide +9 (+13 ranks, -4 size)		
Improved grab (must hit with both claws)		Escape Artist +13 (+13 ranks)		
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>chaos hammer</i> (DC 18), <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22,5 kg of objects only), <i>unholy blight</i> (DC 18); 3/day – <i>blasphemy</i> (DC 21), <i>gaseous form</i> . Caster level 13 th .		Intimidate +17 (+13 ranks, +4 cha)		
DR 10/good, darkvision 18 mt, immune to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, SR 19, telepathy within 30 mt.		Listen +23 (+13 ranks, +2 wis, +8 racial)		
Stench: non-demons within 3 mt. must roll a Fortitude save versus DC 24 or be nauseated for as long as they remain in the area plus 1d4 rounds. Those that save are sickened for as long as they remain in the area. Creatures that succeed are unaffected by following exposures for 24 hours. <i>Delay poison</i> or <i>neutralize poison</i> removes the condition; creatures that are immune to poison are immune to this effect; poison resistance applies.		Move Silently +13 (+13 ranks)		
Summon demon: once per day it can attempt to summon 4d10 dretches or another hezrou with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 4th-level spell.		Search +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int)		
		Spellcraft +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int)		
		Spot +23 (+13 ranks, +2 wis, +8 racial)		
		Survival +2 wis*		
		Use Rope +0**		
		* +2 synergy when following tracks		
		** +2 synergy when binding		

Cell **D** contains the former jailmaster. He's a cunning cambion named Kunthem and he managed to convince the winners that he has useful information for them. He'll try to do the same for the PCs in return for his freedom. Fact is, he does have good chant for the heroes – here's what they can gather from him if they offer him freedom and barter smartly (use Diplomacy; they gain a piece of information for every 4 points scored on the test, progressively from this list).

- He knows where the equipment of the PCs is being kept. He will tell this to the PCs easily, since he wants them to cause as much damage as possible to the invaders.
- He will warn the PCs not to attempt getting out of the prison through room 1; it is far too well protected and they have no chance of getting through. Again, he is interested in not getting the PCs killed immediately.
- He will suggest them to enter the lower prison through room **12**. The way he puts it – they won't get out, but at least they will survive. He explains that no prisoner has ever escaped from the fortress, but the lower prison is huge, abandoned, and unguarded, and several prisoners have fled there. They might find help. Kunthem knows that during the assault virtually all of the prisoners have escaped to the lower prison, and he secretly hopes that the PCs may mount a revolt and route the invaders. He doesn't have much hope, but it's worth trying.
- He knows about the secret passage to room **29** on both sides, and will present it to the PCs as a fast way to get to a place that is safe from the guards. If the PCs successfully roll Sense Motive versus his Bluff, they will sense that there is something more, and if pressed, Kunthem will admit that occasionally there are dangerous creatures around there. He doesn't know that the invaders haven't kept them in check, and that area **18** is now extremely dangerous, otherwise he would warn the PCs against it.
- He knows about the hole in room **18** that leads to the lower prison, and will warn the PCs not to enter it.
- Kunthem knows the structure of the whole fortress, even the lower prison, but he won't tell the PCs all the details. He can tell them about the areas of the upper and lower prison.

- He knows all about the physical and magical effects of the layer, and can tell everything about them to the PCs.
- He knows all about the horrible atrocities that were committed in this prison, since he ordered several of them himself. He knows that goody two-shoes don't take kindly to that kind of chant, and won't mention it unless explicitly asked.

Kunthem		Al. Chaotic Evil	Half-fiend Orc Barbarian/Wizard 3 rd /3 rd (Abyss)	CR: 8
Str: 18 (+4)	HP: 3d4+3d12+6 (32)	Speed: 12, fly 12 (average)		
Dex: 19 (+4)	AC: 15 (+4 dex, +1 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +4 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 14 (+2)	Ref: +8 (+4 base, +4 dex)	BAB: +5 Grapple: +5		
Wis: 8 (-1)	For: +5 (+4 base, +1 con)	Melee: +9 (+5 base, +4 str)		
Cha: 12 (+1)	Will: +3 (+2 base, +2 iron will, -1 wis)	Ranged: +9 (+5 base, +4 dex)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, +9 melee, damage 1d4+4, and bite, +7 melee, damage 1d6+2		Bluff +10 (+9 ranks, +1 cha)		
Feats and special abilities		Craft (blacksmith) +5 (+3 ranks, +2 int)		
Feats: Iron will, Multiattack, Eschew materials.		Diplomacy (+9 ranks, +2 synergy, +1 cha)		
Darkvision 18m; light sensitivity (dazzled in bright light)		Gather information (+9 ranks, +1 cha)		
Smite good (su): 1/day he can make a normal melee attack to deal 6 extra damage to a good creature.		Intimidate (+9 ranks, +2 synergy, +1 cha)		
Darkness 3/day, desecrate and unholy blight 1/day.		Listen (+9 ranks, -1 wis)		
Immunity to poison, resistance to acid, fire, cold and electricity 10, DR 5/magic, his natural weapons are considered magic for the purpose of overcoming DR, SR 16.		Search (+6 ranks, +2 int)		
Barbarian rage 1/day, uncanny dodge, trap sense +1		Sense motive (+9 ranks, -1 wis)		
Wizard spells/day: 4/3/2 (DC 12+spell level)		Spot (+9 ranks, -1 wis)		
Equipment		Survival +2 synergy*		
Filthy loincloth.		* when finding or following tracks		

Prepared spells:

0th level: Detect magic, Detect magic, Prestidigitation, Read magic

1st level: Expeditious retreat, Magic weapon, Ventriloquism

2nd level: Blur, Invisibility

AHH... UHITI... YEAH, THERE'S
SOME CRITTER, NOTHING
TO WORRY ABOUT
- KUNTHEM, YET
ANOTHER OPTIMIST

Once the PCs have let the cambion out, he will cast *invisibility* and *expeditious retreat* and flee to room **18** as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, the creatures of darkness

will prove more numerous than he thought, and overwhelm him. The PCs might find the remains of his corpse in the isolation cellblock. Such is the nature of the Abyss.

30. The wider part in this corridor is occupied by several weapon racks. There are many swords, quarterstaves and daggers, and three battle axes. There is a two-handed cold iron sword. One of the swords is an exceptional weapon, and enchanted as well (it has a +1 enhancement bonus). Unless the PCs cast *detect magic*, it will take a Search check (DC 20) to find it.

Most of the rooms around here are empty. They are supposed to be large, common cells, but they either weren't used, or the prisoners escaped during the strike.

31. An empty cell; the door is bashed in.

32. Empty.

33. Empty; the door has been destroyed.

A Cutter with Potential

Kunthem might be used as a new PC, though bear in mind that this probably means that the party will get all the information he knows.

Also, he is irredeemably chaotic evil, with everything this entails.

He won't feel any loyalty towards the PCs, but neither he wants to keep serving Rothakon either. Also, he has no desire to leave the Abyss for now.

Unusual parties

The corridor with the weapon racks is where the PCs are supposed to get the minimal equipment needed to survive until they can recover their stuff.

They need to be able to deal damage to the babau in room **3**, hence the cold iron weapon. If the PCs lack another source of DR-bypassing firepower (such as prepared offensive spells), consider adding another small cold iron weapon here, to prevent the fight from becoming determined by whether the sword breaks or not against the babau's slime.

34. This room is a big latrine. As is to be expected, it stinks a lot. There's nothing unusual, though; a bunch of filthy holes (dropping into the lake of the lower prison, and protected by a rusty iron grid), and a barrel of murky water, that's about it.

35. Though this large room was designed to be a kitchen, it has never really been used. There are benches, chairs, and several empty barrels. Most of the fortress inhabitants don't really care about well-cooked food, and neither they care much about the inmates' nutrition.

36. This is a guard dormitory. There are 25 mercenaries sleeping here at all moments. There's a 15% chance of one of them being awake, though. Five of them are elites (see room I), and the rest have the same stats as patrol team members.

37. Same as room **36**.

38. Empty room; the door is broken.

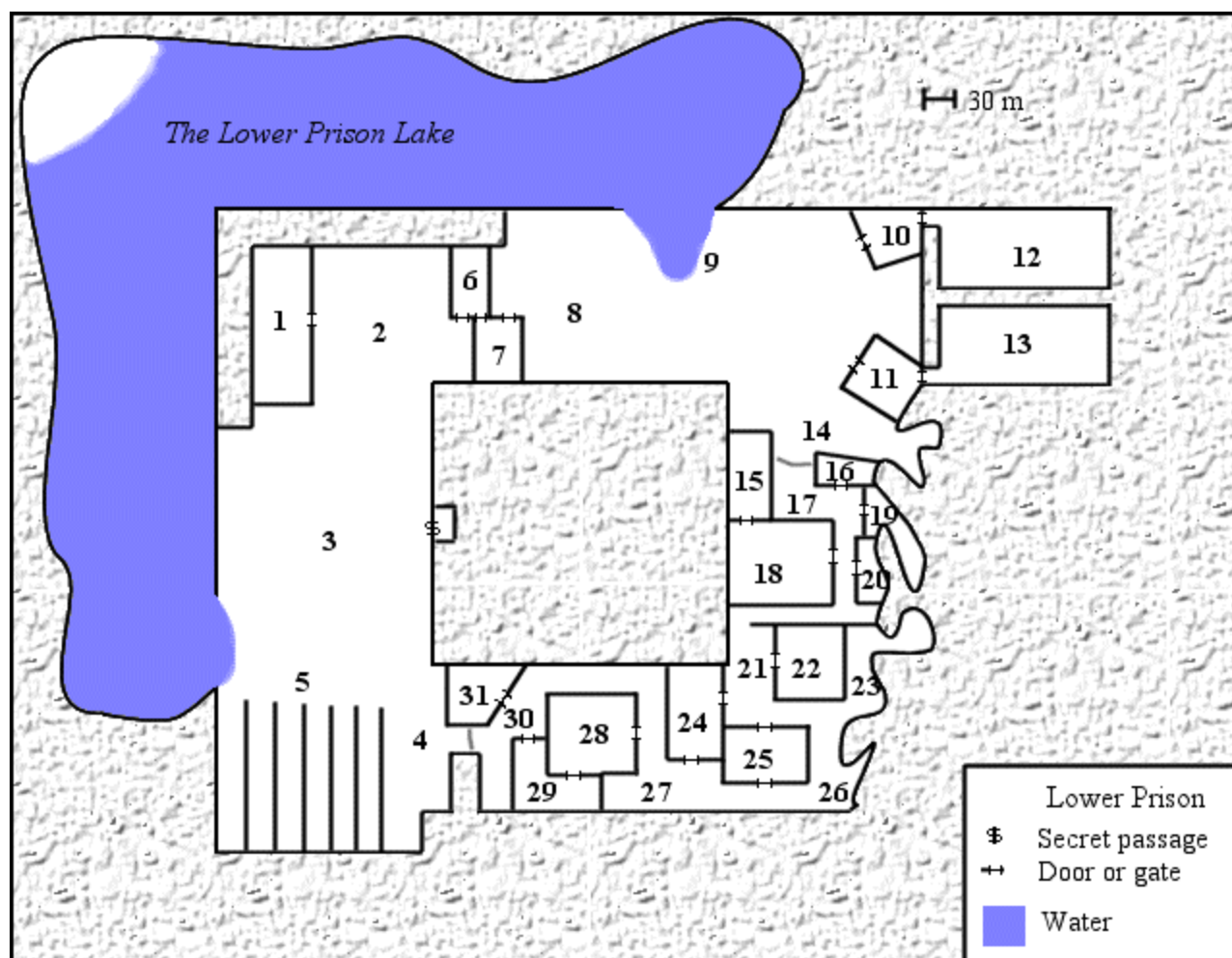
39. Empty common cell.

40. This room was used as a warehouse. However, most of the stuff has been moved to the caves, in room **21**. There are some empty crates, a barrel of clean water, and a chest with 30 meters of rope, manacles, 20 meters of chains, and a dozen torches. There's also a crate of coal.

41. This room is another latrine. It isn't as used as room **34**, but it has two troubles. First, someone dumped a couple of corpses in here. Second, the grids under the holes were too rusty and fell off, and a few carrion crawlers somehow managed to get into the room.

Carrion crawlers (3)		Al. Neutral	Large Aberration (Abyss)	CR: 4
Str: 14 (+2)	HP: 3d8+6 (19)	AC: 17 (−1 size, +2 dex, +6 natural)	Speed: 9, climb 4.5	Check pen.: 0
Dex: 15 (+2)	Initiative: +2 dex		Armor: none	
Con: 14 (+2)	Ref: +3 (+1 base, +2 dex)	For: +3 (+1 base, +2 con)	BAB: +2	Grapple: +8
Int: 1 (−5)	Will: +5 (+3 base, +2 wis)		Melee: +3 (+2 base, +2 str, −1 size)	
Wis: 15 (+2)			Ranged: +3 (+2 base, +2 dex, −1 size)	
Cha: 6 (−2)				
<u>Attacks</u>			<u>Skills</u>	
8 tentacles, +3 melee, damage paralysis, and			Climb +12 (+2 ranks, +2 str, +8 racial*)	
Bite, −2 melee, damage 1d4+1			Listen +6 (+2 ranks, +2 wis, +2 alertness)	
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>			Spot +6 (+2 ranks, +2 wis, +2 alertness)	
Feats: Alertness, Combat reflexes, Track			* can always take 10 when climbing	
Paralysis (su): on a tentacle hit, DC 13, paralyzes for 2d4 rounds.				
Darkvision 18m, scent.				

The Lower Prison



The Lower Prison is in a state of complete abandon. Even before the assault by Ithla-Sathlo's forces, the vast caves were no longer patrolled or maintained. Nevertheless, over the course of the years many prisoners found their way to the immense halls of the lower prison. Sometimes the jailers would send them there themselves, but more frequently the lower prison's inhabitants are people that escaped from the upper prison somehow and were chased down to the caves. The prison masters never bothered about recovering them. The only known way out of the lower prison goes through the upper prison, so there is no way for them to get out.

This area is located more than 30 meters below the upper prison, and it is mostly composed of two vast empty spaces, about half a kilometer long with their ceilings between 25 and 27 meters high, and an area of huge abandoned rooms. There is a big underground lake as well, accessible from either of the two main areas. The roomed area is known to the inmates as "monster zone", as it is infested by creatures of darkness. The prisoners have erected two barricades to prevent the monsters from entering their living area. The lake's water is poisonous; characters that attempt to drink it are affected unless they save on Fortitude versus DC 14. The initial damage is 1d4 Strength, the secondary damage is 1 Strength. A character immersed in the water must save every round (though he takes the secondary damage only once, if he gets out of the water). Despite the toxicity, there are several dangerous creatures in the water. All of them, naturally, are immune to the poison in the water, and all of them cause the same effects if they are eaten without special preparation.

Every worked stone in the lower prison is a twisted, contorted element of demonic architecture. The huge columns bend and turn on themselves, darkish water trickling down them like blood. The gates and doors are adorned of spikes and bones. The walls in the roomed area are lined with chains and manacles of all sizes, each chain spiked, each handcuff barbed on the inside. The two main areas have their floor dotted with short iron spikes, so that whenever a character attempts to run he

must roll a Reflex save (DC 15) or be affected as if by caltrops, provided that he has a light source or darkvision. Otherwise, the DC is 25. There are ropes for the alarm system here, but almost all of them (or the devices they connect to) are broken.

There are a few people, mostly tieflings, that were born here. The majority of the lower prison's inhabitants, though, are prisoners fled from above. There are about 200 people, of which about 70 are human, another 70 are tieflings, and the rest of assorted species. The people that live in the lower prison have managed to organize themselves in some sort of loose self-government. There is a leader, who may be ousted through defeat in combat. The current leader is the dark elf Skralekos.

Skralekos		Al. Chaotic Evil	Drow Barbarian/Fighter 5 th /6 th (Prime material)	CR: 12
Str: 16 (+3)	HP: 5d12+5d10+10 (70)	Speed: 12		
Dex: 20 (+5)	AC: 22 (+5 armor, +3 shield, +4 dex)	Armor: light		
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +4 dex	% fail.: 25%		Check pen.: -1
Int: 15 (+2)	Ref: +8 (+3 base, +5 dex)	BAB: +11/+6		Grapple: +14
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +8 (+9 base, +1 con)	Melee: +14/+9 (+11 base, +3 str)		
Cha: 16 (+3)	Will: +6 (+3 base, +1 wis, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +16/+11 (+11 base, +5 dex)		
Attacks			Skills	
<i>Adamantine rapier</i> +1, +18/+13/+8 melee, damage 1d6+4, crit 18-20/x2, or			Climb +2 (+2 ranks, +1 str, -1 armor)	
<i>Cold iron shortsword</i> , +16/+11 melee, damage 1d6+1, crit 19-20/x2			Hide +16 (+8 ranks, +4 dex, -1 armor, +5 competence)	
Feats and special abilities			Intimidate +16 (+13 ranks, +3 cha)	
Feats: Blind-fight, Dodge, Iron will, Mobility, Quicken spell-like ability (<i>darkness</i>), Spring attack, Weapon finesse, Weapon focus (rapier).			Jump +5 (+3 ranks, +3 str, -1 check pen)	
Immunity to sleep spells and effects; +2 on Will saves versus spells and spell-like abilities, SR 22, Low-light vision; can Search for a secret or concealed door automatically; light blindness (exposure to bright light blinds him for 1 round; during subsequent rounds, he is dazzled until the light is removed).			Listen +11 (+8 ranks, +2 racial, +1 wis)	
<i>Dancing light</i> , <i>darkness</i> , <i>faerie fire</i> 1/day.			Move silently +16 (+8 ranks, +4 dex, -1 armor, +5 competence)	
Barbarian rage 2/day, improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +1			Search +4 (+2 racial, +2 int)	
Equipment			Speak Abyssal	
<i>Ghostrings</i> (shadow chain mail +1 of light fortification of silent moves; AB +5, max dex +4, check penalty -1, arcane failure 20%; +5 competence to hide and move silently; 25% chance of ignoring a critical) (strong abjuration, CL 13)			Spot +3 (+2 racial, +1 wis)	
<i>Buckler</i> +2 (AB +3, check penalty 0, arcane failure 5%) (moderate abjuration, CL 6)			Survival +14 (+13 ranks, +1 wis)	
<i>Adamantine rapier</i> +1 (damage 1d6+1, crit 18-20/x2) (faint evocation, CL 3)				
<i>Cold iron shortsword</i> (damage 1d6, crit 19-20/x2)				
<i>Potion of expeditious retreat</i> (faint transmutation, CL 3)				
<i>Potion of flying</i> (faint transmutation, CL 5)				
<i>Everburning torch</i>				

He's been trapped in the lower prison for over a century and has led it for a couple of decades, and he knows every inch of it, even every spike on the ground. There's currently a small crisis, because of the sudden influx of new prisoners, and as a result, Skralekos is more aggressive than usual in his dealings. The people living down in the lower prison live off the fishes in the lake (they know how to detoxify them) as well as small mushrooms they grow on the walls in the southern area. They also gather water from the thick air moisture, using wide sails and cloths, and from the few trickling streams of drinkable water from above. They spend most of their time guarding the barricades against the creatures of darkness, gathering food, and fighting among themselves. There is some sort of economy based on barter; light sources are especially valuable because the only spellcaster in town capable of casting *continual light* charges absurd prices for it. If the characters wish to trade, assume that no inmate will accept money, preferring to barter for useful items instead. A torch or a flask of lantern oil is worth 5 gold, while an *everburning torch* is worth 1000 gold. The prisoners have learnt to distil some kind of lantern oil from the poisonous fishes, but the process isn't very efficient and the oil doesn't abound. Most people wear some kind of hide cloth, sewn from the lake creatures or the occasional dead creature of darkness.

Characters that are born in this place, or that have spent several years here, may take low-light vision as a feat with no prerequisites, unless they already have it.

Here are sample stats for Skralekos' guards. You can use them for reference whenever the PCs encounter them. Feel free to change their equipment occasionally; they use whatever they can put their hands on.

Skralekos' guards (2)		Al. Neutral Evil	Human Fighter 6 th (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: 13 (+1)	HP: 6d10+9 (42)	Speed: 6		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 15 (+5 armor)	Armor: medium		
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +4 improved initiative	% fail.: 30% Check pen.: -5		
Int: 9 (-1)	Ref: +2 base	BAB: +6/+1 Grapple: +7		
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +6 (+5 base, +1 con)	Melee: +7/+2 (+6 base, +1 str)		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: +2 base	Ranged: +6/+1 base		
<u>Attacks</u>				<u>Skills</u>
Cold iron two handed sword, +8/+3 melee, damage 2d6+1, crit 19-20/x2				Climb +5 (+9 ranks, +1 strength, -5 armor)
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>				Heal +2 self-sufficient
Feats: Weapon focus: two handed sword, Low-light vision, Power attack, Toughness, Improved initiative, Self-sufficient, Cleave, Blind-fight				Intimidate +9 ranks
<u>Equipment</u>				Jump +5 (+9 ranks, +1 strength, -5 armor)
Chain mail (AB +5, max dex +2, check penalty -5, arcane failure 30%)				Survival +2 self-sufficient
Cold iron two handed sword (damage 2d6, crit 19-20/x2)				
Hide clothes, 2 torches				

More of the dark

Skralekos was born on the prime world of Toril almost two hundred years ago. As a young male in that matriarchal society, he was destined to be a servant to the house matron forever. Skralekos never accepted this, and always thirsted for freedom. He kept pushing his luck with small disobediences, until the matriarch of his House got tired and sold him to a tanar'ri in return for some petty service.

Skralekos dreaded the slavery, and managed to escape, but while he was wandering the Abyss a bunch of fiends from Maldithar spotted him, beaten him senseless, and scragged him. He endured their tortures for almost ten years, and then fled to the Lower Prison in a daring pitch for freedom.

The freedom he got wasn't much; the leader of the caves at that time was an arrogant tanar'ri, every bit as oppressive as his old matron. Eventually, Skralekos ousted him, and now he leads his own small hellhole. This is about the best he ever got from life, and he doesn't want to change it. He *likes* to dominate these wretches.

Skralekos knows all the secrets of the prison. Fact is, about ten years ago he secretly ventured into the monster zone with a comrade, a cleric of Thoth named Sajah. In the deepest area of the complex, they found an ancient prison logbook. Among other things, it revealed that a portal found on the other side of the underground lake could lead outside the prison.

While Sajah, excited, wanted to immediately go back and use the portal to get away, the dark elf felt worried. If the way to escape were to be known, his reign would be over. So, he backstabbed and killed the priest, but he was almost immediately attacked by a swarm of creatures of darkness, and he couldn't burn the logbook as well.

GOLD? LISTEN BERK, GIVE ME
SOMETHING I CAN EAT, OR
SOMETHING I CAN BURN, OR
SOD OFF.

— LOWER PRISON DWELLER

broken with a Strength check (DC 22) or by picking its lock (DC 20). When the PCs approach the gate, the guards in the next area spot them if they have any lights with them. They'll startle and slowly approach the gate.

2. There are two of Skralekos' guards here. They are supposed to welcome visitors, and run to warn the village if tanar'ri come through.

You reach a wide steel gate. The walls adjacent to it are chiseled with hundreds of humanoid faces, each one bearing a different expression of untold torment. Beyond the gate, you see two men – one is a human, the other looks like a tiefling. They are wearing an old and patched chain mail and carry large swords on their back. They turn to look at you: they seem more surprised than you are.

After a moment, one of them slowly approaches the PCs, telling them not to attack. The other waits until the PCs have started talking with the guards, and then goes to inform the leader. The guard quickly explains to the PCs the situation in the lower prison, and tells them that Skralekos is arriving to welcome them. They must not offend him, they must not contradict him, and they must do what he says.

The dark elf arrives after a few minutes, and greets the PCs.

You see a light approaching. A couple of armed men, one of whom is carrying a torch, are escorting a third person. When he gets closer, you can see that he looks like an elf, except for the black hue of his skin. He's wearing a jet-black chain mail; a short sword and a rapier hang from his belt. His bearing is neither hostile nor friendly, just cold. Unlike the people you've met until now, the dark elf and his bodyguards look clean and well fed.

He tells them that they can do whatever they want, as long as they don't cause trouble and obey him and his guards, and suggests them to head the way he came from, in order to reach their "village". They have some days to get used to the place, then Skralekos will assign them some duties. The dark elf doesn't even wait for an answer; he turns and quickly gets back.

If the PCs wish to speak with Skralekos again, they just have to ask around. The dark elf is always doing something somewhere, be it checking the integrity of the barricades, doing an inventory of supplies, giving orders to the guards, or any number of other tasks. To tell the truth, there just isn't that much to do here, so he is never in a hurry.

3. This is the main settled area of the cave.

The immense room is sustained by wide columns, bending and twisting in every direction. The people of the lower prison live in about fifty skin tents, held up by bones or metal poles; only a few torches carried by a couple of persons give off lights. Everyone walks slowly, keeping his eyes on the ground. Within the village, the iron spikes have been removed or bent down, but most villagers are used to walking safely.

There aren't "shops" here; everyone may or may not be willing to trade something for something else. It takes a Gather Information check to find

What if...?

Let's see what the various people which the PCs may have rescued do, now that they have a limited freedom.

Liviux sticks with the PCs, hoping that they can find some way for his masters to enter the fortress. If he's dead, the party may still be able to use his ring to communicate with the Baatezu, and strike an agreement.

Briwan is going to join the guards. He's a capable fighter and will have no trouble.

Trevoc will act overprotective towards Tilana, and try to find some way to feed both of them. The elf is going to die in a matter of a couple of days no matter what, unless the PCs can come up with some manner of powerful healing that can cure her catatonic state. Only *greater restoration*, *healing*, *wish*, *miracle*, or *limited wish* will do, however. Alternatively, a member of the Bleak Cabal might be able to use his faction abilities to cure her. In any case, Tilana doesn't remember clearly what happened while she was imprisoned, though she feels a very strong urge to stay away from Briwan and Trevoc.

Jillon is going to sneak back into the Upper Prison, hoping to re-enter the graces of his superiors. Not so. He won't be heard of again.

something; the check takes one hour to make. If a character scores at least 25 on any of these checks, not only he finds what he was looking for, but he also meets someone who is willing to trade a rare item decided by the DM (for example, a magical item, an exotic weapon, or a heavy armor). To reflect the random nature of the market in the lower prison, it is impossible to take 10 on this check.

- Finding someone willing to trade vital goods such as food, water, or lantern oil: DC 5.
- Finding someone willing to trade goods that can be produced here or that come in good supply from above, such as simple and martial weapons, light and medium armor, or basic equipment such as rope or a tent: DC 10.
- Finding someone willing to trade uncommon goods that can't be easily produced here and don't often come from above, such as potions, alchemical items, or specific spell reagents: DC 20.

Naturally, if the PCs come to know someone who specifically deals with a specific kind of supply, they don't have to make a check to find him.

Apart from the village, the hall contains several wide cloths used to collect moisture, and many skin recipients placed under points where drinkable water trickles down from the ceiling.

There is a secret passage on the room wall on the eastern side. The passage (and the room behind it) has been carefully crafted by the prisoners and is fairly difficult to spot (DC 27), though everyone here knows about it. It leads to a room, 25 meters by 30 meters, where in theory all the prisoners could hide should the need arise (for example, should the creatures of darkness escape). The room contains several large skin barrels full of clean water, and nothing else.

One of the most picturesque figures in the community is Abrit Atticus, a wizard who has been here for almost 30 years. He helped Skralekos in the little coup which gave him the leadership, and he still helps him by casting *detect thoughts* in secret every now and then to make sure that no one plots against the dark elf. In return, Abrit has whatever privileges are worth having in this hole; he gets halfway-decent food and free basic supplies. Also, Skralekos makes sure to warn spellcasting newcomers not to spoil the old man's market for *everburning torches*. Not that it's needed – the spell takes a ruby to cast, and only Abrit seems able to make do without. To tell the truth, the wizard, in his long stay, has learnt to make do without spell components of any kind!

Abrit is an old human, wearing a faded old robe and a large leather cap. Chains of small bones dangle from his long, dirty beard, and deep shadows lurk around his eyes. He *always* talks as if he were angry at the listener, but people tolerate his rudeness because he's just too useful to the community, and Skralekos' thugs will beat the snot out of anyone who attempts to touch him. He is the only one capable of making *everburning torches*, even though he won't do so except for an exceptional offer.

Abrit Atticus		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Wizard 8 th (Outlands)	CR: 7
Str: 6 (-2)	HP: 8d4 (20)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 9 (-1)	AC: 12 (-1 dex, +3 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 10 (+0)	Initiative: -1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 17 (+3)	Ref: +1 (+2 base, -1 dex)	BAB: +4 Grapple: +2		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +2 (+2 base, +0 con)	Melee: +2 (+4 base, -2 str)		
Cha: 7 (-2)	Will: +5 (+6 base, -1 wis)	Ranged: +3 (+4 base, -1 dex)		
Attacks				Skills
Unarmed attack, +2 melee, damage 1d3-2 non-lethal				Concentration +12 (+11 ranks, +1 con)
Feats and special abilities				Decipher script +8 (+6 ranks, +3 int)
Feats: Still spell, Eschew material, Greater spell penetration, Greater eschew material (he can cast a spell requiring a costly material component without using the component, provided that he spends XP equal to one fifth of the component's value, rounding up; he can also substitute an inexpensive focus for a costly one if he pays XP equal to one fifth the cost of the original focus as he crafts it), Spell penetration, Scribe scroll				Knowledge (Abyss) +16 (+11 ranks, +2 synergy, +3 int)
Wizard spells/day: 4/5/5/4/2/1 (DC 13+spell level, +1 evocation)				Knowledge (Outlands) +14 (+9 ranks, +2 synergy, +3 int)
Equipment				Knowledge (Arcana) +14 (+11 ranks, +3 int)
Amulet of natural armor +3 (moderate transmutation, CL 9)				Spellcraft +17 (+11 ranks, +3 int, +2 synergy)
Tattered robe and an assortment of bones.				
Spellbook (0 th level: all core; 1 st level: Identify, Jump, Magic missile, Magic weapon, Protection from chaos, Shield, Summon monster I; 2 nd level: Acid arrow, Blindness/deafness, Continual flame, Detect thoughts, Knock, See invisibility; 3 rd level: Dispel magic, Fireball, Flame arrow, Haste, Hold person, Rage; 4 th level: Lesser globe of invulnerability, Remove curse).				

Prepared spells (metamagic is marked in **bold**):

0th level: Acid splash, Detect magic, Prestidigitation, Resistance

1st level: Magic missile, Magic missile, Protection from chaos, Shield, **Still** Message

2nd level: Acid arrow, Blindness/deafness, Detect thoughts, See invisibility

3rd level: Dispel magic, Fireball, Fireball, Haste

4th level: Lesser globe of invulnerability, **Still** Flame arrow

4. There are four guards here at all times. They control the barricade – a tall heap of whatever stuff the prisoners could grab, blocking passage to and from the monster zone. This barricade is made of lots of big metal things. Looking closely, they are hundreds of torture instruments. They have been taken from the monster zone and used to build the barricade. The guards here are reluctant to let the PCs enter. They'll warn the PCs that the last bunch of people that went through – all newcomers like them – haven't returned in days and were certainly killed. If the PCs make it clear that they definitely intend to enter no matter the danger, the guards shift mental gear and ask for a share of any loot found, in return for passage. The details can be negotiated, but if the PCs don't accept to share at least a bit of loot, the guards won't let them pass.

5. It is not quite clear what these long walls were supposed to do, but the prisoners are now using them to cultivate fungi. A dozen people are usually here, carrying water in buckets from the lake to the fungal cultures. These fungi don't suffer from the poison in the water, and greatly reduce its toxicity. Characters that eat a significant amount of mushrooms during a single day must save on Fortitude or take 1 point of Strength damage. As a result, most people in the lower prison are slightly weakened at all times, though some have been here for so long that they've become resistant to the poison and don't suffer from the fungi.

The prisoners don't fish here as they do in area 9, because for some reason the lake creatures attack twice as frequently in the waters around this point.

6. This room as well as room 7 are designed to separate the two main areas. The room is generally empty. The only notable feature is a lever that can cause a heavy grate to fall between this room and room 7, effectively separating them. The grate is parallel to the door, and can be broken with a Strength check (DC 30).

7. This room is similar to room 6. It has a lever, used to cause another identical grate to fall parallel to the door.

8. There are two guards at all times in this area. They mostly serve as messengers between the fisher zone and the village.

9. This area has been turned into a small, primitive harbor. A few of the prisoners have built small hide and bone boats, and use them to fish in the lake. Even if the fishermen never get more than one or two hundred meters from the harbor, it's a dangerous job, because of the hostile creatures of the lake, and the poisonous water; no one ever sails into the lake alone and the fishers are respected by the other inmates. The fish must be treated by exposing it to the cave fungi and then removing its skin, before it can be eaten safely. The whole process takes several days; as a result, the fish is never quite fresh. Still, it's better than eating mushrooms for all your life.

Some of the fishermen also carry skin recipients, and position their ships under several points where a consistent stream of drinkable water falls into the lake. This is a dangerous operation, because the creatures are more frequent near those streams, but it allows the fishermen to collect a good amount of water in a few hours.

If you want to add some combat to the game, have a boat go out to collect water, and have it be attacked by one of the creatures of the lake. It takes a lot of the prisoners' resources and time to make a boat, and the PCs will earn some respect from the people here if they save it (the actual people manning it aren't as important for them). You can find the stats for the creatures in the lake later in this chapter.

10. This room is manned by two guards at all times. The door to enter is a heavy metal door. There are two stone benches here, and a lever that shuts down the eastern passage (which has two heavy grates in place of a door). The guards have orders to keep the door to room **12** shut, always, and to pull the lever should they even just have the feeling that something isn't right. The PCs may convince them to let them look into room **12**, but the guards will stay right behind them with their weapons drawn. There is a rope for the alarm system here, and it's working. A sickly yellow-orange glow comes from the passage to room **12**.

11. This room is similar to room **10**. There are two guards, and the same security system. An eerie green glow comes from the passage to room **13**.

12. Besides the double grates leading to room **10**, there is a steel slab 10 cm thick blocking entrance to this room. The slab has a small square hole to look inside, and what's inside isn't pretty.

The cave contains a colossal creature, held here for who knows how many centuries and hopefully forever. The monster is wormlike, two hundred meters in length and ten meters wide, with ten-meters-long tentacles all around its body. The walls of the cave are covered in fluorescent slime, and ooze tendrils stick from ceiling to floor and all around the creature.

Nothing is known about this creature, but just about everyone agrees that it'd better not be freed, ever.

13. If possible, the horror contained in this room is even worse than the worm of room **12**.

A treelike creature is rooted in the middle of the room. Its trunk is 60 meters wide and it grows up to the ceiling (24 meters) and then bends 90-degrees and follows it for 100 more meters. Snakelike tentacles grow from the floor of the cave, flailing around constantly, and the entire trunk pulsates with green light. What makes the whole scene twice as horrible is the desiccated human corpse that lies just a few meters from the door, in clear sight. It is turned to face to trunk, so its face is hidden, and it looks as if it was drained of all fluids, and it is enveloped in the green tentacles. Every now and then, a hand or shoulder twitches.

If asked, the guards shudder and relate that the body has been there for decades, maybe centuries; no one has any idea of who it was, but everyone, even the most degenerate of the lower prison inhabitants, hopes that it is actually dead despite the twitching. The alternative is too horrific to contemplate. It is not clear whether the plant could extend beyond the door if it were to be opened, or whether the corpse could be retrieved, but no one is willing to experiment.

14. There are four guards here at all times. They control the barricade that prevents the creatures of darkness from entering the settled area. The barricade is mostly composed of bones, metal bits, and rubble. If the PCs wish to enter the monster zone, the guards want a small share of any loot in return for allowing passage, but a good diplomat could convince them that there's no need for that. The caverns on the eastern side are used as storage zones; there are several hide sacks full of raw fish and some waterskins. There are also wide cloths hanging in the caves, used to collect moisture.

If you want to add some combat to the game, you may have one of the monsters beyond the barricade crawl out and attack. You can find the stats for several creatures of darkness below.

The Monster Zone

While the PCs stay in the monster zone, there's a 50% chance every ten minutes they stay here that they are attacked by one of the creatures lurking here. The monsters employ hit and run tactics, using their superior speed and nerve-wracking stealth. Most creatures of darkness are fast enough to close and strike with a partial charge during a surprise round, dealing sneak attack damage. Then they'll try to retreat to the shadows and disappear until the next attack.

All doors in the monster zone are Large sized and wide open, though they are almost too broken to be useful anyway.

Don't be afraid of throwing nasty odds at the PCs, forcing them to retreat and rest before mounting another raid. If the PCs retreat from the monster zone, the numbers of the creatures will be quickly replenished. Assume that any room the PCs clear will be infested again by creatures of similar CR within 12 hours.

An assortment of creatures of darkness for use in this chapter follows. You can also use the template to make more varied monsters. Chapter 3 contains several more creatures of darkness, though it should be noted that dire animals of darkness are very rare inside the prison.

Cheetah of darkness		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 3
Str: 16 (+3) Dex: 23 (+6) Con: 15 (+2)	HP: 3d8+6 (19) AC: 17 (+6 dex, +1 natural) Initiative: +6 dex	Speed: 21 Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 3 (-4) Wis: 12 (+1) Cha: 6 (-2)	Ref: +9 (+3 base, +6 dex) For: +5 (+3 base, +2 con) Will: +2 (+1 base, +1 wis)	BAB: +2 Melee: +5 (+2 base, +3 strength) Ranged: +8 (+2 base, +6 dexterity) Grapple: +5		
Attacks Bite +8 melee, damage 1d6+3, and 2 claws, +3 melee, damage 1d2+1		Skills Hide +16 (+2 ranks, +8 racial, +6 dex) Listen +4 (+1 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness) Move silently +16 (+2 ranks, +8 racial, +6 dex) Spot +4 (+1 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Alertness, Weapon Finesse, Mobility Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, darkvision 18 mt, blindsight 36 mt, scent. Sprint (ex): 1/hour can charge up to 210 meters away. Trip (ex): if it hits with a claw or bite, it may attempt to trip the opponent as a free action without drawing an attack of opportunity; the opponent cannot counter-trip if the attempt fails.				

More of the dark

The inmates don't have the strength to clear out the monster zone, and the PCs don't have the numbers. Still, a party of PCs at this level can wipe the floor with a sizable number of them. But no matter what, after a few hours the creatures are as numerous as ever within the monster zone.

Maybe the unexplored tunnels that connect the upper and lower prison are linked to the outside as well. Maybe the Abyss itself generates more and more of the creatures.

Whatever the answer, the monster zone can't be fully and permanently secured, not without an army.

Ape of darkness		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 3
Str: 21 (+5)	HP: 4d8+11 (29)	Speed: 15		
Dex: 19 (+4)	AC: 16 (-1 size, +4 dex, +3 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 14 (+2)	Initiative: +4 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +8 (+4 base, +4 dex)	BAB: +3 Grapple: +12		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +6 (+4 base, +2 con)	Melee: +7 (+3 base, +5 strength, -1 size)		
Cha: 7 (-2)	Will: +2 (+1 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +6 (+3 base, +4 dexterity, -1 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, +7 melee reach 3 mt, damage 1d6+5, and		Climb +14 (+3 ranks, +8 racial, +5 str)*		
Bite +2 melee reach 3 mt, damage 1d6+2		Hide +7 (+8 racial, +3 dex, -4 size)		
Feats and special abilities		Listen +5 (+2 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)		
Feats: Alertness, Toughness, Mobility		Move silently +11 (+8 racial, +3 dex)		
Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, darkvision 18 mt, blindsight 36 mt, scent.		Spot +5 (+2 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)		
		Swim +8 (+4 racial, +8 str)		
		* it can always take 10		

Wolf of darkness		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 2
Str: 13 (+1)	HP: 2d8+4 (13)	Speed: 21		
Dex: 19 (+4)	AC: 16 (+4 dex, +2 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 15 (+2)	Initiative: +4 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +7 (+3 base, +4 dex)	BAB: +1 Grapple: +2		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +5 (+3 base, +2 con)	Melee: +2 (+1 base, +1 strength)		
Cha: 6 (-2)	Will: +1 (+0 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +5 (+1 base, +4 dexterity)		
Attacks		Skills		
Bite +3 melee, damage 1d6+1		Hide +12 (+8 racial, +4 dex)		
Feats and special abilities		Listen +3 (+2 ranks, +1 wis)		
Feats: Track, Weapon Focus (bite), Mobility		Move silently +13 (+1 ranks, +8 racial, +4 dex)		
Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, blindsight 36 mt, scent.		Spot +3 (+2 ranks, +1 wis)		
Trip (ex): if it hits with a bite, it may attempt to trip the opponent as a free action without drawing an attack of opportunity; the opponent cannot counter-trip if the attempt fails.		Survival +1 wis*		
		* +4 racial bonus when tracking by scent		

Polar bear of darkness		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 5
Str: 27 (+8)	HP: 8d8+32 (68)	Speed: 18		
Dex: 17 (+3)	AC: 17 (+3 dex, +5 natural, -1 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 19 (+4)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +9 (+6 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +6 Grapple: +18		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +10 (+6 base, +4 con)	Melee: +13 (+6 base, +8 strength, -1 size)		
Cha: 6 (-2)	Will: +3 (+2 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +8 (+6 base, +3 dexterity, -1 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, +13 melee, damage 1d8+8, and		Hide +8 (+1 rank, +8 racial, +3 dex, -4 size)*		
Bite +8 melee, damage 2d6+4		Listen +5 (+4 ranks, +1 wis)		
Feats and special abilities		Move silently +11 (+8 racial, +3 dex)		
Feats: Endurance, Run, Track, Mobility		Spot +7 (+6 ranks, +1 wis)		
Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, darkvision 18 mt, blindsight 36 mt, scent, improved grab (claw)		Swim +16 (+8 racial, +8 str)**		
		* the polar bear of darkness, being actually black, lacks the racial bonus to hide in snowy environments		
		** it can always take 10, and it can run while swimming (in a straight line only)		

Eagle of darkness		Al. Chaotic Evil	Small Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 1
Str: 10 (+0)	HP: 1d8+1 (5)	Speed: 12, 30 fly (average)		
Dex: 19 (+4)	AC: 16 (+4 dex, +1 natural, +1 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +4 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +6 (+2 base, +4 dex)	BAB: +0 Grapple: -4		
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +5 (+2 base, +1 con)	Melee: +1 size		
Cha: 6 (-2)	Will: +2 wis	Ranged: +5 (+4 dex, +1 size)		
<u>Attacks</u>		<u>Skills</u>		
2 talons +5 melee, damage 1d4, and		Hide +12 (+8 racial, +4 dex)		
Claw, +0 melee, damage 1d4		Listen +2 wis		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>		Move silently +12 (+8 racial, +4 dex)		
Feats: Weapon Finesse, Mobility		Spot +4 (+4 ranks, +2 wis, +8 racial)		
Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, blindsight 36 ft.				

After the PCs have performed their first raid in the monster zone, Skralekos will show up to check with them. He will politely ask them to leave half of the loot they found for use by the community, and take the occasion to mention that he wants to keep tabs on who has magic in the lower prison, so they should inform him immediately should they give or trade for magical items with anyone. He will also ask several casual questions, such as what kind of creatures they met, and how far they got. This last one, though, is what he is really interested in. He is afraid that the PCs find the book, read it, and discover the portal. Unless the PCs are real leatherheads, they won't mention it, and canny characters should overinflate their difficulties and say that they didn't get far.

In any case, the minute Skralekos starts thinking that the PCs have a chance to reach the book, he will try to get rid of them. However, he doesn't want to directly confront them, not wanting to have to give explanations to the rest of the prisoners. He will wait for them to begin another raid, and then he will kill the guards at the barricade the PCs crossed, using a slashing weapon. Hopefully, the heroes will try to get back there when they are too exhausted to fight any more, but they'll find the barricade closed with no one on the other side to help them opening it. Skralekos can say that some creatures of darkness must have escaped and killed the guards; naturally, he will deny any involvement on his part. The real confrontation is postponed to when the PCs will pull out their knowledge of the portal leading out.

15. This bloodied room is largely empty.

Like all the rooms in this area, pools of dried blood dot the floor and the walls are lined with rusty steel manacles. The chains are spiked, and the manacles have barbs and serrated blades on the inside, making them a torture implement by themselves.

Since this room contained rows and rows of torture tables, the prisoners of the lower prison often targeted it for their raids, to collect wood and metal. Often, the creatures of darkness would take advantage of the men carrying the bulky tables, and strike at the most unexpected moments. There are several skeletons, mostly near the door (the raiders never saw the need to explore the 40x70 meters room completely). Near the end of it, though, there's a foreign corpse. The body is half-eaten and surrounded by fetid fluids. The unlucky sod escaped from his cell above, fled to the isolation block in the upper prison, and climbed down the hole, fighting dozens of creatures of darkness. He arrived in the middle of the monster zone, and ran into the darkness up to this room. Once he reached the opposite wall, he was in a dead end and the monsters got him.

They didn't get the stuff he brought back from the prison, though: a dagger, a cold iron mace, 20 gold coins, a chain shirt and two *potions of bull's strength* (faint transmutation, CL 3) that he stole from a guard. Three eagles of darkness are pecking at the remains, trying to get to the flesh under the chain shirt. When they spot the PCs' lights, they fly high near the ceiling and wait for them to get near the corpse, then attack.

16. This room is empty. Being very close to one of the barricades, it has been thoroughly raided.

17. The wide, utterly dark corridors of the monster zone are silent and still. Except for the occasional flicker just beyond the range of the light, and for the hiss or step of some unknown enemy

IN THE ZONE,
NOONE CAN HEAR
YOU SCREAM!
- A BARRICADE
GUARD

waiting in ambush. If the PCs pass in front of the door to room **20** without opening it, the monsters in that room will get out and strike at their back. It could be interesting to note that the door to room **19** has been bashed down – from the inside.

18. This room is *huge*, almost 100 meters long and 80 meters wide.

As the PCs wander it in the darkness, they find huge iron cages, shattered splinters of wood, wheels, iron maidens and other large torture implements, steel chains dangling from the roof, skulls and bones lying on the floor, and lots of other rubbish. Though everything useful and small enough to be carried has been taken away during the raids by the most daring of the prisoners, there's still enough junk here to give plenty of hiding places to all manner of dark things.

Every time that the PCs stop for more than a few seconds to search, talk, cast spells, or anything else, they will be attacked by one or more of the creatures, striking from hiding and then going back.

19. As soon as the PCs enter this room, a wolf of darkness strikes at them ferociously. They'll likely dispatch it easily and check the area: the room seems to extend into a fairly deep cave. At less than 20 meters from the entrance, they find a pile of steel chains in relatively good condition. If finding good items that haven't been raided this close to the barricade doesn't tip them off, and they walk into the cave, they'll find themselves right in the middle of a lair of wolves of darkness. There are 40 of them, and if the PCs disturb them, they'll chase them until they are either dead, or until they flee out of the monster zone.

If the PCs manage to patiently wipe them out, they can find the remains of dozens of other creatures, and of a few humanoids as well, at the bottom of the cave. The wolf dragged the bodies here, so there are several useful items, including a lantern, six torches, a still-intact *potion of greater magic fang* +3 (moderate transmutation, CL 9), a steel mace, three daggers, a longsword and a chain mail. If the PCs search the room and roll at least 25 on the check, they can also find a set of masterwork thieves' tools and a *ring of jumping* (faint transmutation, CL 2).

20. There are two cheetahs of darkness lurking in this room. They are mighty hungry and will strike at the first poor berk that enters the room. Apart from this, the room is mostly empty. There's a huge (4 meters tall, 2 meters wide) filing cabinet on the northern side. *Detect magic* shows an aura of faint necromancy, and it is trapped:

CR 3; mechanical; touch trigger; manual reset; lock bypass (Open Lock DC 30); Atk +12 ranged (1d8 plus poison, arrow); poison (Large monstrous scorpion venom, DC 14 Fortitude save resists, 1d4 Con/1d4 Con); Search DC 19; Disable Device DC 15.

The cabinet contains bunches of magically preserved, if disturbing, human organs, alphabetically sorted, maybe by one of the less chaotic tanar'ri.

21. The wall on the western side of this area has a wide hole leading into a cave, which snakes upwards into the rock. It eventually leads to the isolation cellblock in the upper prison, after several hundreds of meters and assuming that one doesn't get lost in a side cave. Or eaten by any of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of creatures of darkness of all kinds that lurk in the tunnels.

Four polar bears of darkness get out of the hole as soon as the PCs approach and attack. After a couple of rounds, however, they let out some fearful high-pitched shrieks and run back into the tunnel as fast as they can. Then there's a moment of complete silence. A low growl. Out of room **22**, barely fitting through the door, enters a large and terrifying dark beast. Spawned by the pitch darkness of this layer, it has only fed on others of its kind up to now, and is eager to taste some fresh flesh.

ACTUALLY, WE HEAR YOU
ALRIGHT. ONLY, WE DON'T
GIVE A DAMN.
- ANOTHER BARRICADE
GUARD

Dire tiger of darkness		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 10
Str: 27 (+8) Dex: 19 (+4) Con: 17 (+3) Int: 3 (-4) Wis: 12 (+1) Cha: 10 (+0)	HP: 19d8+57 (142) AC: 19 (-1 size, +4 dex, +6 natural) Initiative: +4 dex Ref: +15 (+11 base, +4 dex) For: +14 (+11 base, +3 con) Will: +7 (+6 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 18 Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0 BAB: +14 Grapple: +26 Melee: +21 (+14 base, +8 strength, -1 size) Ranged: +17 (+14 base, +4 dexterity, -1 size)		
Attacks 2 claws +22 melee, damage 2d4+8, and Bite +16 melee, damage 2d6+4		Skills Hide +14 (+4 ranks, +8 racial, +4 dex, +2 stealthy, -4 size) Jump +14 (+6 ranks, +8 str) Listen +6 (+3 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness) Move silently +17 (+3 ranks, +8 racial, +4 dex, +2 stealthy) Spot +7 (+4 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness) Swim +10 (+2 ranks, +8 str)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Alertness, Improved Natural Attack (claw), Improved Natural Attack (bite), Run, Stealthy, Weapon Focus (claw), Mobility, Spring Attack Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, blindsight 36 ft, scent, improved grab (bite). Pounce (ex): can make a full attack on a charge, including two rake attacks at +20 for 2d4+4 damage.				

The dire tiger of darkness will pounce on the closest member of the party during the surprise round. After that, it will make use of its spring attack to avoid full attacks from the party's strong fighters and staying in the darkness as much as possible. It will attempt to sunder torches, lanterns and other light sources carried by the party (the AC of a torch is 14 + dex modifier of the character holding it; its hardness is 5, and it has 20 hit points; a lantern has the same AC, hardness 10 and 10 hit points).

Killing the dire tiger of darkness will cause the other creatures around to become wary of the PCs for a while. They won't suffer any random encounter for the next two hours.

22. This is the room where the tiger was lurking. It is empty of creatures of darkness now. Living, at least. There are the mangled corpses of four apes of darkness, and several bones. The room has lots of steel cages. Some are several meters tall and wide, while some are less than one meter in each dimension. From the skeletons within, it seems that the demons enjoyed putting people in far too small cages for long periods of time. Some of the skeletons are even deformed because of this. In the back of the room, there's a bunch of *staves of healing*. Presumably, the fiends didn't want their toys to die too soon. However, only one still has magic (moderate conjuration, CL 8, 29 charges).

23. The passage leads to a cave into the rock. Odd enough, a faint reddish light can be seen radiating from the bottom of the cave. When the PCs get there, they find themselves in an old library or archive.

There are frail shelves stacked against the cave walls, with many ancient books and tomes. A couple of the wooden frames have crashed on the floor, so the floor near the walls is littered with books, many of which have crumbled to dust. On the middle of the floor, the source of light. A human skeleton, its clothes long ripped to shreds, still holding firmly a holy symbol and a mace.

This last item is what gives off the light. It is a +1 *flaming mace* (moderate evocation, CL 10), its head still wrapped in flames. If the PCs search the body, they can't find anything else, but if they roll at least 20 on the Search check, they can notice something strange. The cloth on its back, where it hasn't been shredded by the monsters, is pierced at hearth height, with a way smaller and more precise hole than what the claws of the creatures of darkness could do. The corresponding rib is chipped, too. A healing check (DC 20, trained only) can confirm that a piercing weapon did this.

Near the flaming weapon, at just a few centimeters, lies a huge leather-bound book; it is slightly scorched, extremely old, and covered in blood, but the inside is readable. It is written in Abyssal language – if the PCs can't read it, someone at the village certainly can, but this means letting someone know whatever it contains. It can also be read with a decipher script check, DC 25.

The book is a log of events for a specific year in the lower prison. It seems like it dates back to when the place was actually used. Though most of the pages are faded, missing, or crumbled, the most interesting part is still clear. The tanar'ri found a portal on the other side of the lake, and ana-

lyzed it, determining that it leads to Oinos on the Gray Waste, and that it can be opened with some salt, rubbed on the fresh wounds of a mortal. According to the log, the portal was used to gather troops there and fight some Blood War battle, but canny PCs should realize that the events are so far away in time that currently anything could be on the other side.

As soon as he knows this, Liviux will contact his Baatezu superiors and tell them. They will order him (or the PCs if the tiefling is dead) to go through the portal and determine the exact location of its destination. A small but sufficient quantity of salt can be found at the village.

There are other books as well. They are all similar logs, though they vary in size and format. Some are fairly accurate, detailing most relevant events, but many are very sparse, only noting very important stuff such as the discovery of a new torture technique, or the achievement of some milestone in prisoner survival. Some vary wildly from maniacal detail to bunches of blank pages even within the same log. The dates are approximate at best and in a system that is currently unknown, but the PCs can broadly tell the most ancient logs from the most (so as to say) recent ones.

One of the oldest ones even tells about the two gigantic monsters locked in the rooms **12** and **13**. Apparently, each of them was the scourge of an entire layer of the Abyss, and the tanar'ri teleported them into specially built rooms of this prison in order to get them out of the way. Plus, when they figured how to control them, they could sic them on the baatezu.

The immense worm was caught on a slimy, gooey, swampy layer, where it viciously attacked anything getting in. Apparently, it could sense everything within the layer, and travel very quickly there through some unknown mean. Its tentacles paralyze anything tough enough not to get killed on the first strike (this is actually false), and it regenerates quickly.

The huge tree comes from no other place than Infestant itself. The 329th layer housed this monstrosity long before Ithla-Sathlo claimed it. The tanar'ri had to fight it viciously for literally days before being able to finally teleport its roots to its specially prepared cage. The plant had slowly extended its tentacled area to the whole layer. The flailing roots can grab a person, drain the life out of him, and still keep him alive for decades, indefinitely, until it finally dies of old age. At which point, it becomes a bodak, and *still* prisoner.

24. This room has lots and lots of rusty spiked chains attached to the ceiling and coming down like vines in patches. Some of the patches have skeletons entangled within them. The chains give plenty of places to hide, but it is fairly difficult to go around without accidentally hitting one, so attempts to move silently here suffer a –4 circumstance penalty.

When the PCs come in, they can hear an eerie tingling of chains coming from some place near the middle of the room, coupled with grunts. One of the chain patches has a dead ape of darkness, trapped in much the same way. Another ape is tearing at it with its claws and eating it. Shortly after the PCs have entered, it will spot their lights, stop, and try to hide to attack them. When the PCs spot it, two wolves of darkness rush in from the opposing door as well, ignoring the noise they make.

25. This room contains dozens of braziers, and racks of small torture instruments. A polar bear of darkness is hiding and waiting to jump at the PCs.

26. There are a half dozen half-eaten corpses here, all that remains of the last expedition. They have their equipment: a half plate armor, a chain mail armor, a hide armor, a +1 sword (faint evocation, CL 3), a greataxe, a masterwork falchion, two daggers, a large wooden shield, a bone buckler, three potions of *cure light wounds* (faint conjuration, CL 1) and a bunch of scattered gold coins (134 of them).

27. Six eagles of darkness circle on the roof, at 24 meters height. The PCs can't see them, but the eagles can see them. The evil birds will strike as the PCs cross the corridor, attempting to deal damage and escape without getting killed.

28. This room contains another of the tanar'ri twisted torture games. The central part is occupied by a 60 meters by 60 meters labyrinth made of black metal panes, and the inside is magically lit. The panes are about 6 meters tall, and raised platforms placed at the four corners of the room allow a full view from the above of the whole structure.

The creatures of darkness don't go into the maze, but that doesn't make it a safe place. The maze is trapped with dozens of lethal devices, more and more dangerous as one comes close to the center. All the traps are mechanical and automatically reset (though some need to have their supply of ammunition replenished every now and then), and vary from the common arrow trap to insane whirling, burning, crushing, poisoned devices of doom. Currently though, any given device has a 40% chance to malfunction due to age.

GOOD FISHING
TODAY
- A BOATTIAN,
GLAD BECAUSE HE'S
STILL ALIVE

If the PCs for some reason decide to go into the maze, assume that there is a random mechanical trap every 1d6 meters. The first 10 traps are CR 1, the second 10 are CR 2, and so on. There's nothing special in the middle. It's a tanar'ri death game, what do you expect? They told the prisoners that they would be freed if they reached the end alive. When, every now and then, one did, they laughed, reloaded the traps, and left him there.

29. Whatever this room was used for, it has been thoroughly raided. There are several empty pits around it. They are one meter deep, but the length and width vary from one to two meters. There's some mud on the bottom, and steel rings stuck to the floor, under the mud, but nothing else. For some undefined reason, even though there doesn't seem to be anything particularly dangerous in this moment, this room feels even creepier than the others.

Truth is, while any place in this prison is good to break the body and maybe mind of a sod, this is the place where the tanar'ri broke their prisoners' souls. The captives were chained inside a hole, and then subjected to every kind of psychological abuse and forced to perform evil acts on their companions, over and over again, if they wanted to get out. Over and over again, until they got used to it, and then over and over again, until they enjoyed it. *Then* the demons killed the sod, certain that he would be back to the Abyss as a petitioner soon enough. That's the same treatment they planned and performed on the group to which Tilana, Briwan and Trevoc belonged. This place gained more souls to the Abyss than a whole brothel of succubi, and there's some mental residue still floating around.

However, the PCs can't find this dark (unless maybe they pick up all the books in room **23** and read them carefully).

30. There are four cheetahs of darkness prowling this corridor. If the PCs are entering from room **4**, then as soon as part of the barricade is removed to let the characters in, the cheetahs run outside and attack the guards and PCs.

31. This room contained lots of assorted torture devices, and many of them have been used to build the barricades. There are still racks of big weirdly shaped metal tools, their exact use not quite clear to people not expert of this field.

The Lower Prison Lake

The lake is a flat, cold surface, broken by ripples created by the unknown monsters lurking in its depths. The sounds of water dropping and pouring from above can be heard in the darkness. The underground lake is largely unexplored; the last person who did the full tour from area **9** to area **5** was Skralekos, and that was many years ago.

If the PCs want to explore the lake, the best thing they can do is fly. Almost all of the monsters in the water (except for the squirtfish) can't do a thing to a blood a few meters up in the air, so flying characters can tour the site quickly and without too much danger. Failing that, the PCs may hope to borrow a boat. The locals won't want to even hear about it though. It takes lots of time and re-

sources to build a boat, and “exploring” the lake is suicidal in their eyes. Not that they care much about the PCs, but they don’t want to lose a boat. Unless the characters can make an extraordinary offer (say, useful magical items), there is no way they can convince the fishers to let them take a boat.

Building a boat from bones and leather, should the characters decide that they are in no hurry after all, can be done with any appropriate Craft skill. A rowboat here is valued 900 gold pieces, and the time to craft it goes up accordingly, because of the scarcity of appropriate materials (good leather, wood or bones of the appropriate size and shape, decent wire and rope, etcetera) and the lack of good tools. The DC to build a rowboat in these conditions is 15.

Finally, the PCs might decide to steal a boat. That’s hard, because there’s almost always someone fishing near the harbor and there’s no way they can fail to notice a missing boat.

The entire lake is toxic (DC 14, initial damage 1d4 Strength, secondary damage 1 Strength), and all of the creatures that live in it are just as bad if not worse. Here are the stats for a couple of the monsters of the lake. There’s also a variety of relatively harmless fiendish fishes as well, though they tend to have stronger teeth and a worse temper than usual.

Squirtfish		Al. Neutral	Medium animal (Abyss)	CR: 2
Str: 10 (+0)	HP: 4d8+8 (26)	Speed: 12 swim		
Dex: 14 (+2)	AC: 16 (+2 dex, +4 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 15 (+2)	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 1 (-5)	Ref: +4 (+4 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +3 Grapple: +3		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +6 (+4 base, +2 con)	Melee: +3 base		
Cha: 2 (-4)	Will: +2 (+1 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +5 (+3 base, +2 dex)		
Attacks		Skills		
Bite +5 melee, damage 1d6		Move silently +5 (+3 ranks, +2 dex)		
Feats and special abilities		Spot +5 (+4 ranks, +1 wis)		
Feats: Ability focus (poison spray), Weapon finesse.				
Low-light vision, blindsight 36 mt.				
Poison spray (ex): can shoot a stream of poison once per hour as a ranged touch attack within 36 meters; the poison has DC 16 based on constitution, and deals 1d6 strength as initial damage and 1d4 strength as secondary damage.				

This annoying fishy creature is dangerous in packs. As a by-product of its respiration within the toxic water, it maintains a sac of concentrated venom which it can squirt at fairly long distances with nasty accuracy, and which can affect even creatures that live in the lake (though they have a +2 bonus to save against the poison). A school of squirtfishes will concentrate fire on a target until it is completely paralyzed, and then chew on it as it lays helpless.

Squid, giant		Al. Neutral	Medium animal (Abyss)	CR: 9
Str: 26 (+8)	HP: 12d8+18 (72)	Speed: 24 swim		
Dex: 17 (+3)	AC: 17 (+3 dex, +6 natural, -2 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 13 (+1)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 1 (-5)	Ref: +11 (+8 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +9 Grapple: +29		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +9 (+8 base, +1 con)	Melee: +15 (+9 base, +8 str, -2 size)		
Cha: 2 (-4)	Will: +5 (+4 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +10 (+9 base, +3 dex, -2 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
10 tentacles +15 melee reach 9 mt., damage 1d6+8, and		Listen +10 (+7 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)		
Bite +10 melee reach 4.5 mt., damage 2d8+4		Spot +11 (+8 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)		
Feats and special abilities		Swim +16 (+8 str, +8 racial*)		
Feats: Alertness, Diehard, Endurance, Toughness (2).				
Low-light vision, blindsight 36 mt, improved Grab (tentacle), constrict (1d6+8 damage), +4 racial bonus on grapple checks.				
Jet (ex): can jet backward 1/round as a full-round action, at a speed of 96 meters. It must move in a straight line, but does not provoke attacks of opportunity.		* for special actions and avoiding hazards; can always take 10 while swimming; can run in a straight line while swimming		

The variety of giant squid that lives in the lower prison lake lacks the ink cloud attack (as it would be mostly useless here). It does have a big advantage, though: it can grapple people out of boats while staying submerged, and drag them in the water, where the poison will paralyze them quickly. This makes the giant squid a lethal encounter. Fortunately, only a few of these beasts exist in the lake. Much like the creatures of darkness themselves, it is not clear whether there actually is an ecological system going on or the Abyss itself spawns these monsters.

At the far corner of the lake, the floor rises until the water is just a few centimeters deep. The cave proceeds into the darkness; grayish water covers its floor entirely. The portal is at its bottom, closed. Analyze portal or similar magic can tell that it leads to some place on the Gray Waste.

If the PCs attempt to use the portal, they suffer 3d10 damage and are flung back into the cave. The spell is as strong as ever. However, anyone else can pass through with no problems. When the baatezu know about this, they require someone (Liviux, for example) to get through and find where the portal is connected to. If Liviux is still around, he'll volunteer and warn the PCs that he isn't getting back until the army arrives; otherwise, the PCs have got to find someone else, capable to survive Oinos for the time (hours or days at DM's discretion, depending on the skill of the person) needed to discover his position. After that, they'll have to use Liviux's ring to tell the devils where the portal is located. Then they have to wait for the army to arrive.

Unless the PCs have taken extraordinary care not to be seen while traveling through the river, by this time Skralekos knows that they've been there. Remember, the dark elf already has suspicions on the PCs, he has spies throughout the lower prison community, and Abrit the wizard can cast *detect thoughts* for him (he'll only cast it on the PCs as a last resort, but he will use it on any other person they contact). When the devil troops are just about to start pouring in through the portal, the dark elf together with Abrit and four of his thugs will find and confront the PCs.

Skralekos has learnt combat from the creatures of darkness. Under the effect of Abrit's *haste* spell, he'll strike and retreat, leaving the thugs to soak up most of the damage. The wizard himself will cast a globe of invulnerability and stay outside the PCs' field of vision, in the darkness. There, he'll ready actions to counterspell. If the PCs are heavy on magic, Skralekos may eventually retreat to the globe of invulnerability for protection.

In the middle of the combat, the baatezu troops start arriving. If the action is taking place near the portal, there is a shimmering and dozens of barbazus start marching in, shortly followed by a gelugon who starts freezing the lake to let the troops across. Skralekos sees this and, after a short moment of disbelief, quaffs his *potion of flying* and vanishes in the darkness, moving as fast as possible back to the lower prison's halls. If the combat is happening somewhere else, the baatezu have already started crossing the lake. A gelugon and several barbazus march towards the scene of the fight; Skralekos spots them before anyone else thanks to his superior darkvision and starts running away.

Whatever the case, there are little chances of catching him immediately. Thanks to *haste*, if flying his speed is 27, and on land he moves at 21. Additionally, since he is perfectly familiar with the ground of the lower prison, he can run normally despite the spiked floor. The dark elf heads eastwards, to the cells containing the two monsters. He plans on killing the guards and free the worm, then run to the village and hide in the secret room with his most faithful followers. Hopefully, the

What if...?

Good PCs may decide to tell everyone in the lower prison about the portal, before the baatezu arrive. Remember, though: good deeds in the Abyss have a tendency to backfire. Specifically, if the PCs haven't yet figured out that Skralekos already knows about the portal and doesn't want anyone to use it, they are in for some big trouble.

The dark elf will try to persuade the people that the PCs are lying, and a verbal duel between him and the PCs will ensue. The PCs start with the upper hand, thanks to the sudden flame of hope in the inmates' hearts. However, they might be forced to reveal that they are going to let the baatezu in, and that will be a potent fuel for Skralekos' arguments – especially if the PCs initially attempt to hide it. Most of the people here are on the chaotic evil side of the spectrum, and they will be (correctly) dubious of the baatezu's good intentions.

If they are convinced that the PCs were lying and possibly attempting to trap them, the characters will better flee or they'll be lynched. Fortunately, the lower prison doesn't lack places to hide while waiting for the devils to show up.

worm will destroy the baatezu and then... well, the *then* can take care of itself; the dark elf doesn't have the time or clarity of mind to think his plan through. He figures he can blame everything on the PCs afterwards.

Unless the PCs are extraordinarily quick in some way, they will arrive far too late. They'll hear screams from the darkness, inhuman roaring so loud that it sounds like the walls might shatter, and then something impossibly huge crawling towards the village. Opening the door has automatically ended the spells that prevented the worm from bashing down the wall. The antechamber to its cell has been destroyed, leaving only some blood-spattered stones and some bits of the guards; the cell itself is empty, Skralekos is nowhere to be seen. The silence of darkness is shattered by screams, cries, the shouts of baatezu giving orders, readying for battle, and the earth-shaking roar of the titanic monster.

The Worm		Al. Chaotic Evil	Colossal Aberration (Abyss)	CR: 29
Str: 48 (+19)	HP: 90d8+1170 (1575)	Speed: 12		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 28 (+26 natural, -8 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 36 (+13)	Initiative: +0 dex	% fail.: 0%	Check pen.: 0	
Int: -	Ref: +30 base	BAB: +67	Grapple: +102	
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +43 (+30 base, +13 con)	Melee: +78 (+67 base, +19 str, -8 size)		
Cha: 2 (-4)	Will: +47 base	Ranged: +59 (+67 base, -8 size)		
Attacks				
Bite +78 melee reach 4.5 mt., damage 4d8+19, and				
100 tentacles +73 melee reach 12 mt., damage 3d6+9				
Feats and special abilities				
Size: the creature is 200 meters long and 10 meters wide. It has about a hundred tentacles, but it can only attack a single creature with three tentacles at a time.				
Darkvision 18 meters, regeneration 50 (nothing currently known deals normal damage; any attack that would slay it instantly such as <i>disintegrate</i> or <i>finger of death</i> deals 1585 nonlethal damage instead). Mindless.				
Tremorsense (ex) extending to any square it has passed on, through the goo it leaves behind.				
At will – <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus any creature it is grappling). However, the worm is subject to the usual limitations of the 76 th layer of the Abyss.				
If the worm decides to grapple with a tentacle, then each tentacle can grapple a different creature with no penalties.				
The tentacles can be attacked separately from the body; they have AC 22 and 20 hit points. A severed tentacle regenerates back in 1d4+1 rounds.				
Improved grab (bite, huge or smaller creatures only), swallow whole (2d8+10 physical damage and 10 acid damage per round, a creature can cut the worm open to get out by dealing 30 damage against AC 14; the hole regenerates back after the creature has exited).				
Spit (ex): it can spit a stream of brownish goo within 30 meters that entangles the creature it hits and creatures around him. The worm makes a ranged touch attack; the creature hit is automatically entangled, while creatures within 9 meters can save on Reflex versus DC 55 (dex based) to avoid it. Entangled creatures can escape with a Strength or Escape artist check versus DC 68 (con based). The goo becomes weak enough to escape automatically after 90 minutes.				

It's not long before the forces of Rothakon above start wondering what the hell is going on and decide to check up. Soon, a three-way battle between the baatezu, the tanar'ri, and the worm creature rages throughout the lower prison and slowly expands upwards. The folks of the lower prison aren't really a factor; some hide in their secret room while the rest get mercilessly crushed by one force or the other. The situation quickly evolves to this point:

- The lower prison is hell. Screams and the stench of the worm's gooey secretions fill the air. The flashes and flames of heavy combat magic illuminate the scene like lightning strikes in a stormy night, enabling the PCs to see the impossibly huge monster devouring demons and devils alike, and the fiends ripping at each other.
- The upper prison is in panic. Tanar'ri and guards are rushing downwards as fast as they can, to try and contain the tide, while others flee upwards in terror. Noone is going to mind the PCs much here, unless they really try to draw attention.

- The first floor of the fortress is more organized, though barely so. Tanar'ri captains are struggling to keep the troops in line. If the PCs choose to go here, then they can probably bluff their way to the doors. The passages to the upper floors, however, are well guarded by mercenaries, babaus and bulezaus.
- The second and third floors are on full alert and guarded by elite tanar'ri troops and mercenaries. It will be very hard for the PCs to get here and look around; they'd better just get out and wait for the chaos to increase.

Assuming that the PCs try to head upwards as soon as possible, when they are in the upper prison, the ground shakes and a loud rumbling noise is heard. Then, a cloud of dust and debris hits them violently (they take 2d6 non-lethal damage). When the smoke clears, they see that a relatively small section of the fortress has apparently collapsed on itself. There is now, a short distance from them, a huge hole full of dust, boulders and debris that extends from the lower prison up to the sky. The PCs can climb the pile of rubble and get out of castle Maldithar fairly easily. The explosions, lightning strikes and other magic flashing down below allow them to see relatively well. The majority of the mass has landed directly on the worm. It is pinned, but it isn't dead and it is inexorably freeing itself. It seems that the battle is going to rage on for some more time.

Outside Maldithar

By this time, many of the mercenaries are running away, out of the fortress. Since they seem to know where to go, smart PCs will follow them and possibly question them (it's not like they have any interest in the PCs now). They are heading towards point where they arrived; a barge led by marraenoloths is supposed to take them away.

Outside, the darkness stretches into infinity. From the rubble you just crawled out of, you can see more flashes of light, and you can hear the roar of the worm. The only other source of illumination is the torches of the fleeing mercenary forces, about five hundred men. They form a line snaking through the darkness, headed away from the castle.

Unfortunately, the lights immediately start attracting creatures of darkness by the dozen. If the PCs join the mercs' column – none of the bashers care much about them – they see tired faces, becoming progressively more worried. Every minute or so, a series of screams from somewhere in the flanks announces another strike by the layer's denizens. A light goes out, then it's over; the march doesn't even stop. If it seems that the PCs can take it, the DM could have them too get attacked.

Alternatively, the PCs could decide to follow the soldiers from afar. This is easy; the mercenaries are the biggest light source by far and in the utter darkness of the layer, they can be seen from miles. If the PCs have their own light sources, however, they are too easy targets for the layer's creatures. Most of the biggest monsters are busy attacking the column, but that won't prevent some of the weaker creatures from paying a visit to the PCs.

If, instead, the PCs are somehow proceeding in the dark, the

What if...?

It should be fairly clear that even if the PCs could bring the Orb back to the Gardener, it would be too late to save his plants. Besides, even the most loyal and dedicated character by now should be only thinking about getting out of this place.

If the PCs, instead, stick around to see the end of the battle, they find out that the tanar'ri are losing and fleeing the fortress. However, the monster worm is proving too much for the baatezu to handle.

The devils eventually decide that it would take them far too much effort to drive the worm away and defend the fortress, so they decide to retreat through the portal.

If the PCs had some kind of agreement with the baatezu, they should realize that the fiends aren't going to be happy about the outcome, and that whatever they agreed to (as well as the PCs' lives) will be forfeit on the basis that the fortress wasn't conquered.

The fortress is left unapproachable. It is swarmed by creatures of darkness, and the worm roams the surrounding area.

What if...?

If the PCs choose to avoid the mercenary column and head elsewhere, there's no problem. For what they know, it's a bad idea because they are wasting a chance to flee on the barge. In fact, though, they don't actually have that chance, so they don't lose anything except some more information on their condition.

Anyway, the adventure can proceed normally.

creatures won't bother with them for now. Remember that creatures that can't see have a 50% miss chance against any target, lose their Dexterity bonus to AC, take -2 to AC, move at half speed, and take a -4 to any check requiring sight. Being vulnerable to sneak attacks is suicide in this place; the PCs might get away with it now but only because the soldiers are attracting all the monsters.

The mercenaries are headed towards the rendezvous point with a forced march. A character who walks for more than 8 hours must make a Constitution check, DC 10 (+2 for each extra hour), or become fatigued and take 1d6 nonlethal damage. By the time the soldiers reach the portal, many of them have fallen to exhaustion. Their comrades aren't going to pick them up; they'd rather leave them to certain death than slow down.

If the PCs ask around, they are told that the course they are going to take on the Styx will lead them to Pandemonium. A Gather Information check, DC 20, also reveals that the infernal boatmen aren't going to wait forever; if the soldiers keep marching, they'll arrive just in time. After that, no marraenoloth has been hired to come here before at least one full month. Some of the soldiers know about the forest and the portal it contains – however, they don't know its exact location, and all they know is that the portal leads to Rothakon's home layer. The PCs can only find this dark if they beat DC 35.

When the deserters reach the rendezvous point, they meet a huge barge, constructed of wood and bones, handled by the gaunt marraenoloths, the boatmen of the Styx. They look like tall humanoids, wrapped in hooded robes.

The mercs already have an agreement, and the fiends don't seem to be bothered by the fact that these soldiers have left the field of battle. They lower a plank and the men climb into the boat. If the PCs try to board, however, a hooded fiend stops them. He states that the PCs are not included in the deal, and no amount of persuasion will make he change his mind. The PCs have to make an offer in return for a hike. The fiend will accept any offer without question. Real bloods will know that if the marraenoloth isn't satisfied with the payment, he'll say nothing, but he'll betray them for sure.

That isn't really important though. Both the fiend and the characters are in for a surprise. As the barge sails down the river, after several hours the PCs see the boat, the fiends and the mercenaries slowly become traslucid and vanish. Seconds after the strange phenomenon begins, purple and blue lightning starts crackling around the PCs, dealing 1d6 damage per round. This isn't actual electricity though – it's damage not unlike the one from a botched *teleport*, and no resistance will help against it. The transparent people look surprised and walk away from the PCs. Even the fiends seem slightly puzzled. Nothing the characters can do will stop this, unless they jump out of the barge. In this case, the damage stops and they find themselves in the water of the river with no sign of the boat anywhere. Otherwise, after 5 rounds the boat has completely vanished and the remaining characters fall into the water all the same. They are still on the 76th layer, somewhere between the rendezvous point and the fortress.

Now the characters are free, but they are truly, horribly lost.

Challenge Summary

All combat-related ELs should be increased by 2 as long as the PCs are without any equipment, and by 1 as long as they only have minimal equipment found in the prison.

More of the dark

What is Rothakon doing right now? The retriever came back *without* the orb, even though Lianne reported that it had the item.

Depending on what the PCs did, Lianne may or may not have returned to Castle Maldithar. If so, she was punished by Rothakon for what happened, and then sent back to Infestant to explain everything to her grandfather.

In any case, Rothakon is still in the castle when the attack begins, but not for long. He sneaks out of the castle with an elite guard and heads towards the shifting gate leading out of the 76th layer. By this time, the gate's destination has changed; the half-fiend knows this, but he just wants to get away from the Baatezu and the Worm.

YES! GUYS, WE'RE FINALLY
OUT!

– ONE OF THE HEROES. OPTIMISM
IS HARD TO SHAKE OFF

<i>Challenge</i>	<i>EL</i>
Avoiding capture upon entering Maldithar	17
Upper Prison	
Escaping the prison through room 1	15
Defeating a small patrol team	5
Defeating a large patrol team	8
Saving Jillon in the first cages room	7
Defeating the Jailmaster	6
Surviving the trap in room 4	7
Defeating the ghoul in the second cages room	1
Defeating Briwan and Trevoc (fatigued, hungry and without equipment)	6
Defeating Briwan and Trevoc (in good health and with some equipment; +1 if they have good equipment given by the PCs)	9 or 10
Defeating Briwan and Trevoc (in good health and with adequate equipment)	10
Avoiding the tiefling guard in room 11	3
Defeating the mercenaries in room 13	10
Defeating the mercenaries in room 14	10
Defeating the animated bone heap in the isolation block	9
Defeating the hanged zombie in the isolation block	1
Saving Liviux in the isolation block	5
Defeating the brown bear of darkness in corridor 28	5
Defeating the carrion crawlers in room 41	7
Lower Prison	
Defeating two of Skralekos' guards	7
Defeating three eagles of darkness in room 15	3
Defeating a wolf of darkness in room 19	2
Defeating 40 wolves of darkness in room 19	10
Defeating two cheetahs of darkness in room 20	5
Surviving the trap in room 20	3
Surviving the polar bears of darkness in room 21 until they flee	7
Defeating the polar bears of darkness in room 21	9
Defeating the dire tiger of darkness	11
Defeating six eagles of darkness in room 27	5
Reaching the far end of the lake	9
Surviving Skralekos, his thugs and Abrit Atticus until the baatezu arrive	10
Defeating Skralekos, his thugs and Abrit Atticus	13

<i>Challenge</i>	<i>EL</i>
Getting out of the prison, avoiding the tanar'ri, the baatezu and the Worm	9
Defeating the Worm (yeah, right)	29
Reaching the Styx and boarding the barge	6

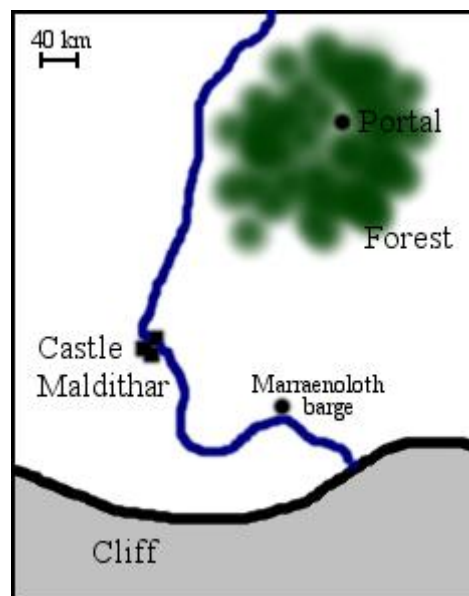
CHAPTER III

In which the Heroes realize that they fled a cage, only to find themselves in a larger one

Survivors

The layer – at least, the part of it that the PCs are in – doesn't have many features. Following the river upstream from the fortress leads to the rendezvous point of the mercenaries. Beyond that, travelers will reach a seemingly infinitely tall cliff, dotted by cracks and caves, infested by creatures of darkness. The river originates from a waterfall, crashing down from above. It is about 30 meters wide and its water is dirty but drinkable. Unfortunately, it is also infested by crocodiles of darkness, and some of them grow to be similar to giant crocodiles.

Following the river downstream, eventually the outskirts of a forest can be reached. The vegetation quickly becomes thick as a body gets close to the center, where it clears somewhat. The rest of the layer is a vast rocky plain, mostly barren except for occasional areas of tall grass. It is also rich in caves and narrow crevices, where the monsters hide. The river doesn't enter the forest; after several hundreds of kilometers it leaves it and proceeds onwards.



Crocodile of darkness		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 3
Str: 19 (+4)	HP: 3d8+9 (22)	Speed: 12, 15 swim		
Dex: 16 (+3)	AC: 17 (+3 dex, +4 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 17 (+3)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +6 (+3 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +2 Grapple: +6		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +6 (+3 base, +3 con)	Melee: +6 (+2 base, +4 str)		
Cha: 2 (-4)	Will: +2 (+1 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +5 (+2 base, +3 dex)		
Attacks		Skills		
Bite +6 melee, damage 1d8+6, or		Hide +28 (+3 skill focus, +4 ranks, +8 racial, +3 dex, +10 cover*)		
Tail slap +6 melee, damage 1d12+6		Listen +4 (+1 ranks, +2 alertness, +1 wis)		
Feats and special abilities		Move silently +11 (+8 racial, +3 dex)		
Feats: Alertness, Skill focus (Hide), Mobility		Spot +4 (+1 ranks, +2 alertness, +1 wis)		
Improved grab (bite), can hold breath for 4 times its Constitution before drowning		Swim +12 (+4 str, +8 racial**)		
Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, blindsight 36 mt.		* if it lies in the water with only its eyes out		
		** with special actions or avoiding hazards; it can always take 10; it can run while swimming, though only in a straight line		

Giant crocodile of darkness		Al. Chaotic Evil	Huge Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)		CR: 5
Str: 27 (+8)	HP: 7d8+28 (59)	Speed: 12, 15 swim Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0	BAB: +5 Grapple: +21 Melee: +11 (+5 base, +8 str, -2 size) Ranged: +6 (+5 base, +3 dex, -2 size)		
Dex: 16 (+3)	AC: 15 (+3 dex, +4 natural, -2 size)				
Con: 19 (+4)	Initiative: +3 dex				
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +8 (+5 base, +3 dex)				
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +9 (+5 base, +4 con)				
Cha: 2 (-4)	Will: +4 (+2 base, +1 wis)				
<u>Attacks</u>		<u>Skills</u>			
Bite +11 melee reach 3 mt, damage 2d8+12, or		Hide +22 (+3 skill focus, +6 ranks, +8 racial, +3 dex, +10 cover*, -			
Tail slap +11 melee reach 3 mt, damage 1d12+12		8 size)			
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>		Listen +5 (+2 ranks, +2 alertness, +1 wis)			
Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Skill focus (Hide),		Move silently +11 (+8 racial, +3 dex)			
Mobility		Spot +5 (+2 ranks, +2 alertness, +1 wis)			
Improved grab (bite), can hold breath for 4 times		Swim +16 (+8 str, +8 racial**)			
its Constitution before drowning		* if it lies in the water with only its eyes out			
Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, blindsight 36		** with special actions or avoiding hazards; it can always take 10;			
mt.		it can run while swimming, though only in a straight line			

Traveling the layer poses many problems, some of which have already been mentioned. If the PCs carry any light, they are like a beacon for the creatures of darkness. If they don't, the attacks will be a lot less frequent, but they'll have to find some way of seeing where they are going. Any character that can't see at all will have to move at half speed. Additionally, the layer is subject to violent storms.

More likely than not, the PCs have the means to feed themselves indefinitely by magic. Even if they don't, there should be no problem. Starvation is not the way this layer kills you. The river's water is dirty but it can be drunk with no ill effects, and the flesh of the creatures of darkness is tough but edible. The bashers will have to risk lighting a fire if they want to cook it, though.

The PCs have no idea of where to go. They can't leave the Abyss, and they don't know the only way to leave the layer without leaving the plane (the portal in the forest). They can't teleport, either. As per the rule of threes, they have three choices: follow the river upstream, follow it downstream, or choose a random direction and start walking.

It's likely that they'll try to get back to the fortress. It's the only place they know in the layer. They'll reach it in three days of march. However, the Worm is currently furious for the wounds it received during the battle. The entire area surrounding the fortress is covered in its slimy secretions in a radius of about a half-kilometer. Its enormous body is wrapped around the fortress like a snake, its tentacles flailing wildly all around and reaching almost as high as the towers. There are several fires going on in the building, so the monstrous scene can be seen from far away. There is no real way to get in the fortress right now.

What if...?

If the PCs don't head towards the fortress and instead follow the river upstream or head into the plains, nothing changes. Have them meet the merc survivor somewhere, and proceed normally from there.

After another day, as the PCs wander around in frustration, they get a rare strike of luck.

You hear someone shouting from the darkness, no more than a few meters from the limit of where they can see. It's a human voice, calling for help. When you get near, you see a man lying on the ground, wearing the uniform of the fortress' mercenaries. He is badly wounded, his legs are broken and torn. The corpse of a dead wolf of darkness lies no more than half a meter from him.

He saw the PCs' light and waited for them to pass near before speaking – he learnt on his skin the virtues of silence during the past few days.

Rob Benton		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Fighter 6 th (Outlands)	CR: 6
Str: 15 (+2)	HP: 6d10+9 (42)	Speed: 6		
Dex: 11 (+0)	AC: 21 (+8 armor, +3 shield)	Armor: heavy		
Con: 13 (+1)	Initiative: +4 improved initiative	% fail.: 50% Check pen.: -4		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +2 base	BAB: +6/+1 Grapple: +8		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +6 (+5 base, +1 con)	Melee: +8/+3 (+6 base, +2 str)		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: +5 (+2 base, +1 wis, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +6/+1 base		
<u>Attacks</u>				<u>Skills</u>
Cold iron long sword +1, +10/+5 melee, damage 1d8+5, crit 19-20/x2				Climb +7 (+9 ranks, +2 strength, -4 armor)
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>				Jump +7 (+9 ranks, +2 strength, -4 armor)
Feats: Weapon focus: long sword, Weapon specialization: long sword, Power attack, Toughness, Improved initiative, Quick draw, Cleave, Iron will				Ride +9 ranks
Between wounds and blood loss, he currently only has 2 hit points left.				
<u>Equipment</u>				
Banded mail +2 (AB +8, max dex +1, check penalty -5, arcane failure 35%) (moderate abjuration, CL 6)				
Heavy steel shield +1 (AB +3, check penalty -1, arcane failure 15%) (faint abjuration, CL 3)				
Cold iron long sword +1 (damage 1d8+1, crit 19-20/x2) (faint evocation, CL 3)				
Two empty flasks.				

The soldier's name is Rob Benton. He is one of those who were left behind during the forced march away from the fortress. Instead of pushing himself to unconsciousness, he left the column and found a cave. He killed a couple of hyenas of darkness there, and rested. Then he got out and tried to return to the fortress. Unfortunately, he didn't have enough torches. Eventually, the last one went out, and he could no longer defend himself effectively; the creatures got him. The last wolf ripped at his legs so hard that they are practically torn to pieces. He won't be able to stand without a *regeneration* spell.

A Cutter with Potential

Rob Benton could become a PC (maybe with a couple of extra levels, and let the poor sod find a *regeneration* somewhere). He's chaotic evil, but not strongly so; you may even change his alignment to suit the party if you wish.

The mercenary is going to barter information for help. He has seen the Worm blocking access to the fortress, and he knows that attempting to leave the layer through Castle Maldithar is suicide. However, he knows of another portal. If the heroes accept to carry him to safety, he will guide them to it. Rob doesn't know the exact location of the portal; what he knows is that the forest can be reached by following the river downstream from the fortress and that the portal is in a clearing in the middle of the thickest part of the forest. This is hardly enough to actually locate it, but he'll act as if he knew the path perfectly and just didn't want to reveal anything about it. He is afraid that if the PCs found out that all he knows can be related in a minute, then they'd just leave him there and find the exit on their own.

COULD BE WORSE.
COULD BE RAINING.
- ROB BENTON

The PCs reach the river again, taking a wide detour around the fortress, and follow it downstream according to Rob's indications. It will take them at least four days to reach the forest's outskirts. If they carry lights, however, they will be repeatedly attacked by packs of creatures of darkness, at least once every two or three hours. This may force them to rest more often, slowing them down.

What's worse, during the third day, as the characters are crossing a hill, a nasty storm breaks out.

The wind drives the raindrops so hard that it feels as if a hundred tiny hammers were battering each of you. Lightning bolts arc around the sky constantly. For the first time, for brief instants, you can see clearly in the distance and behold the landscape of the layer. You see the jagged plain, and you see figures of all sizes and shapes darting around, stalking each other, running from rock to crevice. Everywhere, as far as the eye can see, the creatures of darkness roam the land. Many of them, it seems, are following you and waiting for a good moment to strike. It seems that most of them are looking for shelter now.

Any penalty for acting in the dark is halved during the storm, because of the frequent flashes of light. However, the rain is so thick and heavy that any character caught on the outside during a

storm takes 1 point of non-lethal damage per minute (no damage if he wears a medium or heavy armor, or has a natural armor bonus of +4 or better). Additionally, any character has a 5% chance per hour of being struck by lightning (15% if wearing metal armor) and taking 8d6 electricity damage. A reflex save, DC 14, halves the damage. After an hour or so, hail starts coming down as well, and if the PCs haven't started looking for shelter, they should do so now. The damage is now normal (or non-lethal if he wears a medium or heavy armor, or has a natural armor bonus of +4 or better).

The heroes can easily find a cavern or crevice, but almost all such locations are the lair of some monster or another. If the characters look for a cavern, it takes them half an hour to find one big enough, minus one minute for each point they score on a Search check, minimum five minutes. Unless the PCs split, only one of them can make the roll (though the others can aid him normally).

When they do find a shelter, they see a wide crack on the ground, reaching down into the darkness. Well, the same darkness as outside, really. When another lightning lets them see clearly for an instant, the characters can spot something moving in the crevice.

Advanced dire bats of darkness (4)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 4
Str: 17 (+3)	HP: 6d8+18 (45)	Speed: 12, 18 fly (good)		
Dex: 26 (+8)	AC: 22 (+8 dex, +5 natural, -1 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 17 (+3)	Initiative: +8 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +13 (+5 base, +8 dex)	BAB: +4 Grapple: +11		
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +8 (+5 base, +3 con)	Melee: +6 (+4 base, +3 str, -1 size)		
Cha: 6 (-2)	Will: +7 (+5 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +11 (+4 base, +8 dex, -1 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
Bite +11 melee, damage 1d8+4		Hide +12 (+2 stealthy, -4 size, +8 racial, +8 dex)		
Feats and special abilities		Listen +12 (+4 ranks, +2 alertness, +2 wis, +4 racial*)		
Feats: Alertness, Stealthy, Mobility, Weapon finesse		Move silently +19 (+3 ranks, +2 stealthy, +8 racial, +8 dex)		
Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, blindsight 36 mt.		Spot +10 (+2 ranks, +2 alertness, +2 wis, +4 racial*)		
		* unless blindsight is negated		

These vicious beasts attack by flanking one character at a time and dealing as much sneak attack damage as possible. They attempt to bring down the most wounded character first (including Rob Benton).

The crack extends into a small cave, whose floor is covered in bat guano. In a corner, there is a pile of bleached bones. If the PCs rummage through them, they find an old leather belt, with two scroll cases and a smelly pouch attached. The cases contain a scroll of *wind wall* and one of *greater heroism*, while the pouch is full of sulphur. Under the guano crust on the floor, there's a silvered dagger, though it'll take a Search check (DC 20) to find it.

The storm outside is going to last for at least five hours. If the PCs choose to rest here, they'd better set up guard turns, because they are going to be attacked by two more dire bats a few hours after they've gone to sleep. These bats, however, have taken 20 nonlethal damage each from the sleet outside.

Eventually, the storm subsides and the PCs can resume their march.

As the PCs walk through the darkness, they hear a cacophony of growls and shrieks. The noise grows louder and louder, until a horde of several dozens of assorted creatures of darkness runs out of the black, passes right around and through the PCs, and keeps running as if fleeing from something.

Seconds after the strange event, you hear a high-pitched laughter and see a small light some tens of meters from them. After a while, a man approaches you. His age is undefined, though he is thin and bears a long white beard. He is wearing leather travel clothes, which look quite battered and patched in many points. He's looking at you and chuckling, but he doesn't seem hostile. He carries a lantern inside which a large flame burns. However, the flame gives off no more light than that of a small candle.

Wilmer	Al. Chaotic Neutral (Bleak Cabal)	Human Diviner 6 th (Pandemonium)	CR: 5
Str: 6 (-2)	HP: 6d4+30 (46)	Speed: 9	
Dex: 13 (+1)	AC: 11 (+1 dex)	Armor: none	
Con: 20 (+5)	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0%	Check pen.: 0
Int: 16 (+3)	Ref: +3 (+2 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +2	Grapple: +3
Wis: 7 (-2)	For: +7 (+2 base, +5 con)	Melee: +1 (+2 base, -2 str)	
Cha: 7 (-2)	Will: +4 (+5 base, -2 wis, +1 insanity)	Ranged: +4 (+2 base, +2 dex)	
Attacks		Skills	
Unarmed attack, +1 melee, damage 1d3-2 non-lethal		Concentration +10 (+9 ranks, +1 con)	
Feats and special abilities		Knowledge (Abyss) +14 (+9 ranks, +2 synergy, +3 int)	
Feats: Eschew material, Create wondrous item, Endurance, Manic-depressive (insanity: 2), Insanity buffer, Scribe scroll		Knowledge (Pandemonium) +14 (+9 ranks, +2 synergy, +3 int)	
Forbidden school: evocation, can prepare 1 bonus divination spell per day.		Survival +9 (+4.5 ranks, +3 int, +2 synergy*)	
Wizard spells/day: 4+1/4+1/3+1/2+1 (DC 13+spell level, +1 evocation)		Knowledge (Arcana) +12 (+9 ranks, +3 int)	
Equipment		Spellcraft +14 (+9 ranks, +3 int, +2 synergy)**	
<i>Amulet of health</i> +2 (moderate transmutation, CL 8)		* on the Abyss or Pandemonium	
<i>Eyeballs of Allsight</i> (faint divination, CL 5)		** +2 when learning divination spells	
<i>Dark lantern</i> (faint enchantment, CL 5).			
Several meat chunks and a small waterskin.			
Spellbook (0 th level: all core; 1 st level: Protection from chaos, Summon monster I, Comprehend languages, Expeditious retreat; 2 nd level: See invisibility, Bear's endurance, Misdirection, Levitate; 3 rd level: Blindsight, Clairaudience/Clairvoyance, Nondetection, Deep slumber).			

Prepared spells:

0th level: Detect magic, Detect magic, Prestidigitation, Resistance

1st level: Protection from chaos, Summon monster I, Comprehend languages, Expeditious retreat, Expeditious retreat

2nd level: See invisibility, Bear's endurance, Levitate, Levitate

3rd level: Blindsight, Clairaudience/Clairvoyance, Deep slumber

Darkvision

Transmutation

Level: Sor/Wiz 3

Duration: 10 minutes/level

This spell is identical to darkvision except as noted, and it grants blindsight within 9 meters instead.

Wilmer is a mad wizard from Pandemonium. He went a bit too far into the Bleaker credo that nothing in the multiverse is significant and that truth only lies within the self. He entered this layer several years ago through the Styx much like the mercenaries did, except that he managed to piss off the boatmen somehow and was left here. He had several able bodyguards, and before they all got killed he managed to enchant a device that somehow keeps the creatures of darkness away. After that, he eventually discovered the forest and the portal within it, but he didn't use it. His reasoning is that if truth can only be found within oneself, then the place where you are is irrelevant. Who cares about getting anywhere, it's useless. Notice that, since Wilmer is a Bleaker himself, his madness can't be cured.

All the knowledge he has, though, is worthless for the PCs, because talking to Wilmer is a mighty task in itself. He chuckles and giggles constantly, talks nonsense, lies thinking that he's telling the truth, and vice versa. Sometimes he just goes off on a tangent. Even when he does say something useful, he speaks in riddles.

Wilmer's magical device – an enchanted lantern inside which an almost-lightless fire burns – creates a radius of about 20 meters which affects creatures of darkness like an *antipathy* spell, with no saving throw. The result is that there always is a horde of creatures circling around him, alternately running away and trying to return to eat him. With his little magical skills, how he could create such a powerful item is a real puzzle. Unfortunately, his descriptions of the process are as nonsensical as everything else he says. The PCs might be able to figure out that the item, instead of actually using *antipathy* magic, somehow interferes with the creatures' blindsight. Creatures that are attacked by someone within the circle are free to attack, but their blindsight is still negated within the circle, they take a –4 penalty to their Dexterity, and they can't sneak at-

MONSTERS?
WHAT MONSTERS?
– WILMER

tack.

The lantern isn't the only interesting thing Wilmer is carrying. He's drawn a map of the layer, similar to the one at the beginning of this chapter. He's also got several dozens of crusty eyeballs in his belt pouches. Disgusting as they are, if a cutter is willing to eat one, they work like a potion that grants blindsight within 36 meters, for a duration of six hours. Again, the secret to their creation isn't something that can be pried from Wilmer's mad mind.

Wilmer is headed in the opposite direction from the PCs, for some unfathomable reason, and nothing can change his mind. Which means that even if the magical lantern would be incredibly useful to the PCs, they won't be able to have it unless they kill or kidnap the old geezer (which Rob Benton will suggest if he's still there). Even worse, as soon as he leaves, at least a part of the creatures surrounding him are going to throw themselves at the PCs. The Abyss keeps nudging them to evil. Still, there is something they can obtain from Wilmer. The old man is willing to part with some of his magical eyeballs in exchange for simply other, "normal" eyeballs. He can give as many as 30 of them. He may also show the PCs his map, which will be useful especially if the merc Benton is dead and can no longer guide them.

If the PCs attempt to follow Wilmer, he won't object (Benton will, though). However, with his total +9 modifier on the forced march check, the man is virtually unstoppable. He can take 10 on the forced march Constitution check and still look fresh even as most of the PCs are fatigued, and he's not going to stop until he gets fairly tired. It will be very hard for the PCs to keep up with him. If they do manage it somehow, Wilmer will proceed in a wide, meaningless arc, eventually leading to the forest. Keep in mind that, like many Bleakers, every day there's a 5% chance for Wilmer to be depressed; if this happens, he'll sit around for the whole day, sulking and telling the PCs to go away.

The Dark Forest

The river eventually reaches the outskirts of a forest. On the right side of the water, the trees grow out of a wet soil, similar to a marsh. On the left side, the rocky plain stretches outward as usual. The forest doesn't seem to be very thick from here, and the trees – a mixture of wide-leafed plains vegetation – aren't very lush or tall. The marsh is quiet, but not entirely silent. The cries of some kind of bird can be heard, and sometimes a gust of wind will cause the leaves to rustle.

As always, the PCs can only see as far as their lights or darkvision will allow. The forest is inhabited by the usual creatures of darkness, but there are also several new surprises for the heroes. First of all, there are some local will'o'wisps along the river's course and one of them has decided to harass the PCs.

Fiendish will'o'wisp	Al. Chaotic Evil	Small Aberration (Air) (Abyss)	CR: 8
Str: 1 (-5) Dex: 29 (+9) Con: 10 (+0) Int: 15 (+2) Wis: 16 (+3) Cha: 12 (+1)	HP: 9d8 (40) AC: 29 (+1 size, +9 dex, +9 deflection) Initiative: +13 (+9 dex, +4 improved init.) Ref: +12 (+3 base, +9 dex) For: +3 base Will: +9 (+6 base, +3 wis)	Speed: 15 (perfect) Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +6 Melee: +2 (+6 base, -3 str, +1 size) Ranged: +16 (+6 base, +9 dex, +1 size) Grapple: -3 Check pen.: 0	
Attacks Shock, +16 melee touch, damage 2d8 electricity		Skills Bluff +13 (+12 ranks, +1 cha) Diplomacy +3 (+2 synergy, +1 cha) Disguise +3 (+1 cha, +1 synergy*) Intimidate +3 (+1 cha, +2 synergy) Listen +17 (+2 alertness, +3 wis, +12 ranks) Search +14 (+12 ranks, +2 int) Spot +17 (+2 alertness, +3 wis, +12 ranks) Survival +5 (+3 wis, +2 synergy**) Languages: common, auran	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Alertness, Blind-fight, Dodge, Improved initiative, Weapon finesse. Smite good 1/day (+9 damage), darkvision 18 mt, resistance to cold and fire 10, DR 5/magic, SR 14. Immune to any magical spell or effect that allows spell resistance, except for magic missile and maze. It can extinguish its glow, becoming invisible, as an extraordinary ability.		* when acting in character ** when following tracks	

It will attempt to lead the characters to the lair of several dire boars of darkness and then attack them.

Dire boar of darkness (3)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 5
Str: 27 (+8) Dex: 14 (+2) Con: 17 (+3) Int: 3 (-4) Wis: 13 (+1) Cha: 8 (-1)	HP: 7d8+28 (59) AC: 17 (+2 dex, +6 natural, -1 size) Initiative: +2 dex Ref: +7 (+5 base, +2 dex) For: +8 (+5 base, +3 con) Will: +5 (+2 base, +1 wis, +2 iron will)	Speed: 18 Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0 BAB: +5 Grapple: +21 Melee: +12 (+5 base, +8 str, -1 size) Ranged: +6 (+5 base, +2 dex, -1 size)		
Attacks Gore +12 melee, damage 1d8+12		Skills Hide +6 (+8 racial, +2 dex, -4 size) Listen +8 (+5 ranks, +2 alertness, +1 wis) Move silently +10 (+8 racial, +2 dex) Spot +8 (+5 ranks, +2 alertness, +1 wis)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Alertness, Endurance, Iron will, Mobility Ferocity (ex): it can fight normally while disabled or dying. Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, blindsight 36 ft.				

If the PCs defeat the fiendish will'o'wisp and the boars, as they stop and catch their breath, they feel putrefaction in the air. Following the nasty smell, they reach the rotting corpse of a dretch. It is relatively fresh, maybe less than a day old.

This dretch is part of Rothakon's escort. The half-fiend has reached the forest about a day before the PCs. All the remaining mercenaries have deserted him, and he's passed through here with just a bunch of dretches, six babau and three vrocks. Still, more than enough to defend himself against all the dangers of this forest. As the PCs travel to the center of the woods, they can clearly see a trail of destruction – broken and burned trees, scorched earth, and, every now and then, mangled corpses of creatures of darkness lying in pools of blood. They even reach an area which was blasted by the vrocks' dance of ruin.

You see a sixty-meters wide clearing where the trees seem to have literally exploded, leaving nothing but splinters and still-smoking tree stumps. The entire area is littered with the remains of a huge pack of wolves of darkness. The flesh has been torn from their bones, and blood has coalesced in large pools all around the place.

Have everyone roll Spot versus DC 25 (or Search versus DC 20 if the PCs search the clearing). Those that succeed will notice a human corpse among all the gory remains. It's one of the few mercenaries that made it this far. Apparently, the tanar'ri don't really take care of collateral damage.

One day later, the characters are in the thickest part of the forest, and are likely wandering around hoping to see something strange that could reveal the portal's location. Suddenly, they hear a roaring voice, speaking Abyssal. Assuming that either someone in the party understands the language or can cast an appropriate spell, they hear: "I DON'T CARE! You will stay here, guard the gate, and search for that blasted Selthian Orb, FOREVER if need be! It can only be on this layer, and it can only get out through here! It will take me a long time to get back now that the gate has shifted, and by all the powers of the Abyss, I'LL HAVE YOUR FAT ASSES PLUCKED AND READY FOR MY DINNER UNLESS YOU FIND IT BEFORE THAT TIME!!!"

If the PCs sneak towards the voice, they reach a wide clearing, where Rothakon is about to enter the gate leading out of the layer.

Rothakon is almost as tall as a vrock. His skin is a very dark shade of green, bulging with muscles. He has light green eyes, and a streak of brown hair running from the top of his head to the middle of his back. He's equipped with some of the best stuff his father could gather – the most prized possessions being a black leather and fur belt, with a bronze horned skull symbol in the middle to cover his manhood; and his two handed sword, a powerful weapon the color of pale, sickly flesh. For the half-fiend's stats, see page XXX.

More of the dark

Rothakon has no clue as to where the orb is. He has seen the retriever come out of the portal, without the item. Worse, the construct doesn't know where to go, which can only mean that the orb is on another plane or layer for which the retriever doesn't know of a portal.

In the middle of the clearing, about one hundred meters from you, you see a group of tanar'ri (three vrock, six babau and thirteen dretches), gathered around a tall stone structure. The structure is composed of three megaliths arranged in a crude arch, and just before it stands a dark winged, humanoid figure, almost as tall as the vrock. Tiny flames dance around his skin, giving off enough light to see. He terminates his speech stating that he'll send reinforcements as soon as possible. Then, for no apparent reason, he grabs a white-hued two handed sword hanging from his back and cleaves the nearest dretch almost in half. While the rest of the smallish, stupid fiends reel back, he picks up the corpse and tosses it through the gate, which flares into life. The fiend steps through the gate, which closes after him.

This leaves a bunch of tanar'ri around the gate, apparently almost as confused as the PCs themselves. They argue for a while, a couple of the babaus start fighting each other, the vrock forcefully divide them, the dretches start running away, the rest of the demons round them up, and after some more time they somehow manage to divide themselves in three teams, each composed of one vrock, two babaus, and four dretches. One team guards the portal, while the other two leave in opposite directions.

The three teams are supposed to rotate between guarding the gate and looking for enemies. For a day or so, it works; but vrock aren't really made to command. If the PCs wait, eventually the shifts become irregular and the tanar'ri end up having sometimes almost everyone at the gate, and sometimes a vrock gets bored and flies away leaving only two babaus and a half dozen or so dretches. The best thing the PCs can do is remember about the dretch corpse they found some time before, go get it, wait for the surveillance to become weak, and then create a distraction for the time needed to enter the gate. They might also adopt guerrilla tactics to reduce the fiends to a manageable number. The worst thing they can do, though, is wait too much. After some days – the DM should decide when – the reinforcements arrive, including a better-trained fiend that can at least organize the patrol and surveillance. It will become much more difficult for the PCs to get through.

Or, of course, they could just charge. It will be a tough battle, especially if the heroes don't at least wait for a moment during which all three vrock are out.

Dretch (6)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Small Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 2
Str: 12 (+1)	HP: 2d8+4 (13)	Speed: 6		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 16 (+1 size, +5 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 14 (+2)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 5 (-3)	Ref: +3 base	BAB: +2 Grapple: -1		
Wis: 11 (+0)	For: +5 (+3 base, +2 con)	Melee: +4 (+2 base, +1 strength, +1 size)		
Cha: 11 (+0)	Will: +3 base	Ranged: +3 (+2 base, +1 size)		
Attacks				Skills
2 claws, +4 melee, damage 1d6+1, and				Hide +9 (+5 ranks, +4 size)
Bite +2 melee, damage 1d4				Listen +5 ranks
Feats and special abilities				Move Silently +5 ranks
Feats: Multiattack				Spot +5 ranks
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.				Search +2 (+5 ranks, -3 int)
Damage reduction 5/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and				Survival +2 synergy*
poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 14, telepathy within 30				
mt.				
Spell-like abilities: 1/day – <i>scare</i> (DC 12), <i>stinking cloud</i> (DC 13); caster level 2 nd .				
Summon 1 dretch 1/day with 35% success, equivalent to a 1 st level spell.				
Telepathy (su): can communicate with any creature that speaks Abyssal within 33 me-				
ters.				

Babau (3)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: 21 (+5) Dex: 12 (+1) Con: 20 (+5) Int: 14 (+2) Wis: 13 (+1) Cha: 16 (+3)	HP: 7d8+35 (66) AC: 19 (+1 dex, +8 natural) Initiative: +1 dex Ref: +6 (+5 base, +1 dex) For: +10 (+5 base, +5 con) Will: +6 (+5 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 9 Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +7 Melee: +12 (+7 base, +5 strength) Ranged: +8 (+7 base, +1 dexterity)	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +12	
Attacks 2 claws, +12 melee, damage 1d6+5, and Bite +10 melee, damage 1d6+2		Skills Climb +15 (+10 ranks, +5 str) Disable Device +12 (+10 ranks, +2 int) Disguise +13 (+10 ranks, +3 cha) Escape Artist +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex) Hide +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex) Listen +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis) Move Silently +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex) Open Lock +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex) Search +20 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +2 int) Sleight of Hand +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex) Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*) Use Rope +3 (+1 dex, +2 synergy**)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Cleave, Multiattack, Power attack All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Sneak attack +2d6, damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 14, telepathy within 30 mt. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); caster level 7 th . Protective slime (su): any weapon or character touching the babau takes 1d8 damage, ignoring hardness; magic weapon and characters may roll a Reflex save, DC 18, to avoid. Summon 1 babau 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.		* when following tracks ** when binding someone		

Vrock		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 9
Str: 23 (+6) Dex: 15 (+2) Con: 25 (+7) Int: 14 (+2) Wis: 16 (+3) Cha: 16 (+3)	HP: 10d8+70 (115) AC: 22 (-1 size, +2 dex, +11 natural) Initiative: +2 dex Ref: +9 (+7 base, +2 dex) For: +14 (+7 base, +7 con) Will: +10 (+7 base, +3 wis)	Speed: 9, fly 15 Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +10 Melee: +15 (+10 base, +6 strength, -1 size) Ranged: +11 (+10 base, +2 dexterity, -1 size)	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +20	
Attacks 2 claws, +15 melee reach 3mt, damage 2d6+6, and Bite +13 melee reach 3mt, damage 1d8+3, and 2 talons +13 melee reach 3mt, damage 1d6+3		Skills Concentration +20 (+13 ranks, +7 con) Diplomacy +5 (+3 cha, +2 synergy) Hide +11 (+13 ranks, +2 dex, -4 size) Intimidate +16 (+13 ranks, +3 cha) Knowledge (abyss) +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int) Listen +24 (+13 ranks, +8 racial, +3 wis) Move Silently +15 (+13 ranks, +2 dex) Search +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int) Sense motive +16 (+13 ranks, +3 wis) Spellcraft +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int) Spot +24 (+13 ranks, + racial, +3 wis) Survival +7 (+3 wis, +2 synergy*, +2 synergy**)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Cleave, Combat reflexes, Multiattack, Power attack All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 18, telepathy within 30 mt. Dance of ruin (su): three or more vocks can dance for three rounds, if they are not interrupted by stunning, paralyzing or killing one of them, a wave of energy deals 20d6 damage to every non-demon within 33 meters. Reflex half, DC 18. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>mirror image</i> , <i>telekinesis</i> (DC 18), <i>greater teleport</i> (self and 22.5 kg only); 1/day – <i>heroism</i> ; caster level 12 th . Spores (ex): 1/3 rounds, free action, they deal 1d8 damage to every adjacent creature and 1d4 damage/round for 10 rounds; <i>bless</i> , <i>neutralize poison</i> , <i>remove disease</i> or holy water kills them. Stunning screech (su): 1/hour, all non-demons within 10 meters must save on Fortitude, DC 22, or be stunned for 1 round. Summon 2d10 dretches or 1 vrock 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.		* when following tracks ** in the Abyss		

In case of a fight, the tanar'ri aren't much coordinated. The vrock will prompt the rest to charge while it casts *mirror image* and *heroism*. One or two of the babaus could decide to throw a *darkness* spell or ready an action for *dispel magic*. The dretches will use *scare*, or *stinking cloud* if they are far enough, and then start summoning outright. The rest of the fiends will only summon if the fight goes badly; like most fiends, they dislike being in debt with someone.

Whatever the characters do, they'll hopefully sooner or later be able to open the gate with the mangled corpse of a dretch and step through it. Like Rothakon said, the gate no longer leads to Infestant; it has shifted and now leads (as it usually does) to the first layer, the Plain of Infinite Portals.

The Plain Of Infinite Portals

If the PCs have stepped through the gate in the middle of a battle, they'd better not think it's over, because the tanar'ri they left behind aren't going to give up so easily. Unless they are already too damaged to stand a chance, they charge through before the gate closes (it takes one full round for the passage to vanish), or open it again. Nevertheless, both the fiends and the PCs have been in complete or near-complete darkness for weeks – after stepping through the gate into normal light, they are dazzled (-1 to hit, Search and Spot) for 1d4 rounds.

You step through the gate and are almost blinded by the sudden light. It takes your eyes several seconds before adjusting to a normal light level. You are standing in the middle of a vast rocky plain, at less than a meter from a wide, dark hole in the ground. Only a few bushes and some low, sickly tree can be found as far as you can see. A glaring red sun gives a slightly crimson tinge to the environment, and you can feel that the air is noticeably warmer. You can clearly see a tall building against the horizon, several kilometers from where you stand.

The PCs have appeared not too far from the city of Broken Reach. The building they can see on the horizon is the iron fortress of Mithrengo. The city lays the opposite way from where the PCs stand; have them roll Spot versus DC 10. Those that succeed can make out several low towers that comprise the outskirts of Broken Reach. Knowledge (the Abyss), DC 20, is required to recognize Broken Reach from this distance.

The heroes can decide to go towards the iron fortress Mithrengo, or towards the abyssal city Broken Reach. In the first case, when they get at about one kilometer from the fortress, they notice a tanar'ri patrol heading towards them. It includes a hezrou and a half-dozen babaus – the PCs have better make a good impression.

The fiends won't attack on sight, which is good because the PCs' chances of victory in a fight would be slim even if they hadn't just escaped another combat. They are a patrol from Mithrengo: recently, the fortress' master has grown worried that Broken Reach is preparing an attack on him, and he has ordered his patrols to capture and question anyone that passes nearby. The fiends have just eviscerated a bunch of rival tanar'ri that came too near, and the PCs can see the hezrou munching on a piece of someone's guts as he approaches.

Now, the best thing to do with tanar'ri is to stay as far away from them as you can, possibly on another plane entirely. Since that's not an option for the PCs, they'll have to learn the three basic ways of dealing with demons. First, you can bribe them. Some will content themselves with money, many will want lots of it, others will want magic. Some will want something else (possibly something very unpleasant). But they have no real sense of duty, and they'll do whatever brings them the greatest gain. Second, you can make them paranoid. Everyone in the Abyss has enemies, and the most powerful the

The fiend talks sarcastically to the PCs while the babaus just stand around and grin. He'll demand to know whether they come from the city, what they are doing around here, and then will casually mention that he has orders to carry them back to the fortress to have them horribly tortured "...that is, unless you pay the fine for trespassing, you know". If someone needs to roll Sense Motive to understand that the basher wants some garnish, let him. DC 5. The demon feels slightly frustrated at having to perform simple guard duty, and he wants to earn some easy money at his boss' expenses. Nothing less than 1000 GP will do the trick, but daring and knowledgeable PCs could attempt to outsmart the fiend. Hezrous excel in combat, not in subtlety, and they can't detect magic at will. He could be bluffed into believing that a shiny masterwork item is enchanted, for example. And if he

doesn't then maybe one of the babaus will – and then one or more of the fiends could be convinced that the others are trying to rip him off.

In the meantime, one of the babaus could attempt to pickpocket one of the PCs... if he gets discovered, it could add further confusion to the talks.

Hezrou		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 11
Str: 21 (+5)	HP: 10d8+93 (138)	Speed: 15		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 23 (-1 size, +14 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 29 (+9)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 14 (+2)	Ref: +7 (+7 base, +0 dex)	BAB: +10 Grapple: +19		
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +16 (+7 base, +9 con)	Melee: +14 (+10 base, +5 strength, -1 size)		
Cha: 18 (+4)	Will: +9 (+7 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +9 (+10 base, +0 dexterity, -1 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
Bite +14 melee reach 3 mt, damage 4d4+5, and 2 claws, +9 melee reach 3 mt, damage 1d8+2		Climb +18 (+13 ranks, +5 str)		
Feats and special abilities		Concentration +22 (+13 ranks, +9 con)		
Feats: Blind-fight, Cleave, Power attack, Toughness		Hide +9 (+13 ranks, -4 size)		
Improved grab (must hit with both claws)		Escape Artist +13 (+13 ranks)		
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>chaos hammer</i> (DC 18), <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only), <i>unholy blight</i> (DC 18); 3/day – <i>blasphemy</i> (DC 21), <i>gaseous form</i> . Caster level 13 th .		Intimidate +17 (+13 ranks, +4 cha)		
DR 10/good, darkvision 18 mt, immune to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, SR 19, telepathy within 30 mt.		Listen +23 (+13 ranks, +2 wis, +8 racial)		
Stench (ex): non-demons within 3 mt. must roll a Fortitude save versus DC 24 or be nauseated for as long as they remain in the area plus 1d4 rounds. Those that save are sickened for as long as they remain in the area. Creatures that succeed are unaffected by following exposures for 24 hours. <i>Delay poison</i> or <i>neutralize poison</i> removes the condition; creatures that are immune to poison are immune to this effect; poison resistance applies.		Move Silently +13 (+13 ranks)		
Summon demon: once per day it can attempt to summon 4d10 dretches or another hezrou with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 4th-level spell.		Search +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int)		
		Spellcraft +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int)		
		Spot +23 (+13 ranks, +2 wis, +8 racial)		
		Survival +2 wis*		
		Use Rope +0**		
		* +2 synergy when following tracks		
		** +2 synergy when binding		

Babau (6)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 7
Str: 22 (+6)	HP: 9d8+45 (85)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 12 (+1)	AC: 19 (+1 dex, +8 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 20 (+5)	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 14 (+2)	Ref: +7 (+6 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +9 Grapple: +15		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +11 (+6 base, +5 con)	Melee: +15 (+9 base, +6 strength)		
Cha: 16 (+3)	Will: +7 (+6 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +10 (+9 base, +1 dexterity)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, +15 melee, damage 1d6+6, and Bite +13 melee, damage 1d6+3, or +1 cold iron spear, +17/+12 melee, damage 1d8+10, crit x3, or +1 cold iron spear, +13 range 6 mt, damage 1d8+7, crit x3		Climb +18 (+12 ranks, +6 str)		
Feats and special abilities		Disable Device +13 (+11 ranks, +2 int)		
Feats: Cleave, Multiattack, Power attack, Weapon focus: spear		Disguise +14 (+11 ranks, +3 cha)		
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.		Escape Artist +12 (+11 ranks, +1 dex)		
Sneak attack +2d6, damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 16, telepathy within 30 mt.		Hide +20 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex)		
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); caster level 9 th .		Listen +20 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis)		
Protective slime (su): any weapon or character touching the babau takes 1d8 damage, ignoring hardness; magic weapon and characters may roll a Reflex save, DC 18, to avoid.		Move Silently +20 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex)		
Summon 1 babau 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.		Open Lock +12 (+11 ranks, +1 dex)		
Equipment		Search +21 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +2 int)		
+1 cold iron spear (damage 1d8+1, crit x3, range increment 6 m)		Sleight of Hand +12 (+11 ranks, +1 dex)		
		Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*)		
		Use Rope +3 (+1 dex, +2 synergy**)		
		* when following tracks		
		** when binding someone		

When the PCs head towards Broken Reach, they reach the city fairly quickly. As they get near, they see lots of random spiked barricades, trenches and walls, followed by a number of watchtowers. Some are made in stone, some in wood; some are half-destroyed, some still stand. Noone stands guard in most of them, except for maybe five or six towers scattered around the city and manned by tough tiefling or human warriors. Their duty is more to inform the city should a large force come, rather than actually defend it.

The PCs eventually reach the center of the towers complex. They are just in time for a neat show: a big barbarian (half-orc barbarian 6th/Ysgard/chaotic neutral, Independent League) has decided to show off and make himself a reputation by challenging a green-haired elf who, he says, has insulted him.

You reach an area that seems to hold some interest. A wide, low building stands in the middle of the city. Around it, you see several small groups of well-armed humans, tieflings, and some other humanoid chatting or standing guard. As you go around the building to find the entrance, you hear shouting from a larger group of people. You see a tall, muscular half-orc warrior in leather armor, carrying a huge warhammer, making his way through the crowd, followed by a shorter humanoid – an elf it seems, with a strange greenish tinge to his hair. They reach a clear area and then the barbarian bellows “You have mocked me once too many times, pointy-ears! Get ready to meet your maker!”. The elf doesn’t seem too impressed. He just crosses his arms, and states “You are still in time to change your mind...”. This seems to have the only effect of further enraging the half-orc, who raises his weapon and charges his victim. After a minute or so, the elf hasn’t even drawn a weapon, but thanks to his speed and agility he is still not severely wounded.

Then, the green-haired elf stands still for a moment. “Well, this is getting fairly tiresome...”. He extends his fingers, and as he does so, they turn into talons. His hair turns to black strands. His skin becomes gray and leathery, and he becomes taller, though more hunched, looking like a ghoul. The barbarian seems fairly surprised. Then the monster snaps his fingers and the half-orc seems to become paralyzed. It walks closer, and grabs the warhammer. Even if paralyzed, the half-orc is still holding it firmly. The monster lifts the warrior’s arm to its mouth and suddenly throws his head at it, sinking its fangs into the limb, ripping away a large chunk of flesh. The half-orc can’t even scream, but the look of horror and pain on his face more than explains his feelings.

The “elf” is actually a powerful maurezhi named Mobley, a tanar’ri that feeds on its victims to assimilate their minds and become stronger. This particular maurezhi has lived on the Prime for a century or so, during which he has accumulated a ream of knowledge and abilities. Now he has returned to the planes to continue his collection – however, he’s being hunted by a glabrezu who wants to press him into the Blood War. He’s finding shelter in Broken Reach for now, but he won’t miss an occasion for a good meal when it so kindly presents itself.

Mobley		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 12
Str: 29 (+9)	HP: 15d8+75 (142)	Speed: 9, jump 3		
Dex: 16 (+3)	AC: 25 (+3 dex, +12 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 20 (+5)	Initiative: +7 (+3 dex, +4 improved init)	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 21 (+5)	Ref: +12 (+9 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +15 Grapple: +24		
Wis: 18 (+4)	For: +14 (+9 base, +5 con)	Melee: +24 (+15 base, +9 strength)		
Cha: 12 (+1)	Will: +13 (+9 base, +4 wis)	Ranged: +18 (+15 base, +3 dexterity)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, +24 melee, damage 1d6+9, and		Bluff +19 (+18 ranks, +1 cha)		
Bite, +19 melee, damage 2d4+4, or		Diplomacy +21 (+18 ranks, +1 cha, +2 synergy)		
2 +3 daggers, +22/+22/+17/+12 melee, damage 1d4+9 (1d4+4 with off-hand attack) plus poison, crit 19-20/x2		Disguise +21 (+18 ranks, +1 cha, +2 synergy*)		
Feats and special abilities		Escape Artist +21 (+18 ranks, +3 dex)		
Feats: Dodge, Improved initiative, Two-weapon fighting, Two-weapon defense, Combat expertise, Power attack. Mobley has many other combat feats while in other forms.		Hide +21 (+18 ranks, +3 dex)		
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.		Intimidate +3 (+1 cha, +2 synergy)		
Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 19, telepathy within 30 mt.		Jump +19 (+8 ranks, +9 str)		
Feed (su): Mobley is already at the top of his power. He adds 1d2 to his Intelligence score by feeding on an individual smarter than himself.		Listen +26 (+14 ranks, +8 racial, +4 wis)		
Alter Form (su): He can assume the appearance of his victims at will. Only a <i>true seeing</i> spell or similar magic reveals his identity. The maurezhi can use any of the physical talents his victims possessed, including the use of weapons the victim was proficient in and feats. He can also access any Knowledge skill (even when in its own shape), but not use magical abilities such as spells or some class-related abilities. He can speak while in assumed form and knows all the languages the victim did.		Search +23 (+18 ranks, +5 int)		
Mobley can also assume a variety of identities, skilled in many different combat styles and fields of physical expertise.		Spot +26 (+14 ranks, +8 racial, +4 wis)		
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>animate dead</i> , <i>blur</i> , <i>cause fear</i> (DC 12), <i>chill touch</i> (DC 12), <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only), <i>hold person</i> (DC 13), <i>invisibility</i> ; 3/day – <i>fear</i> (DC 15); caster level 15 th .		Survival +6 (+4 wis, +2 synergy**)		
Summon 1d4 ghouls 1/day as if through <i>summon monster III</i> ; caster level 15 th .		Use Rope +5 (+3 dex, +2 synergy***)		
Summon 2d4 manes 1/day with 60% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.		* when acting in character		
Equipment		** when following tracks		
+3 dagger (poisoned with greenblood oil) (moderate evocation, CL 9)		*** when binding someone		
+3 dagger (poisoned with greenblood oil) (moderate evocation, CL 9)		Assimilated Knowledge skills:		
10 doses of greenblood oil (injury DC 13, initial damage 1 Con, secondary damage 1d2 Con)		Abyss (+20)		
200 merts, 50 jinxes		Arcana (+15)		
		Baator (+13)		
		Carceri (+5)		
		Dungeoneering (+18)		
		Factions and Guilds (+19)		
		Gehenna (+18)		
		Gray Waste (+13)		
		Pandemonium (+12)		
		Mechanus (+13)		
		Mount Celestia (+10)		
		Nature (+16)		
		Nobility and Royalty (+10)		
		Religion (+19)		
		Ysgard (+8).		

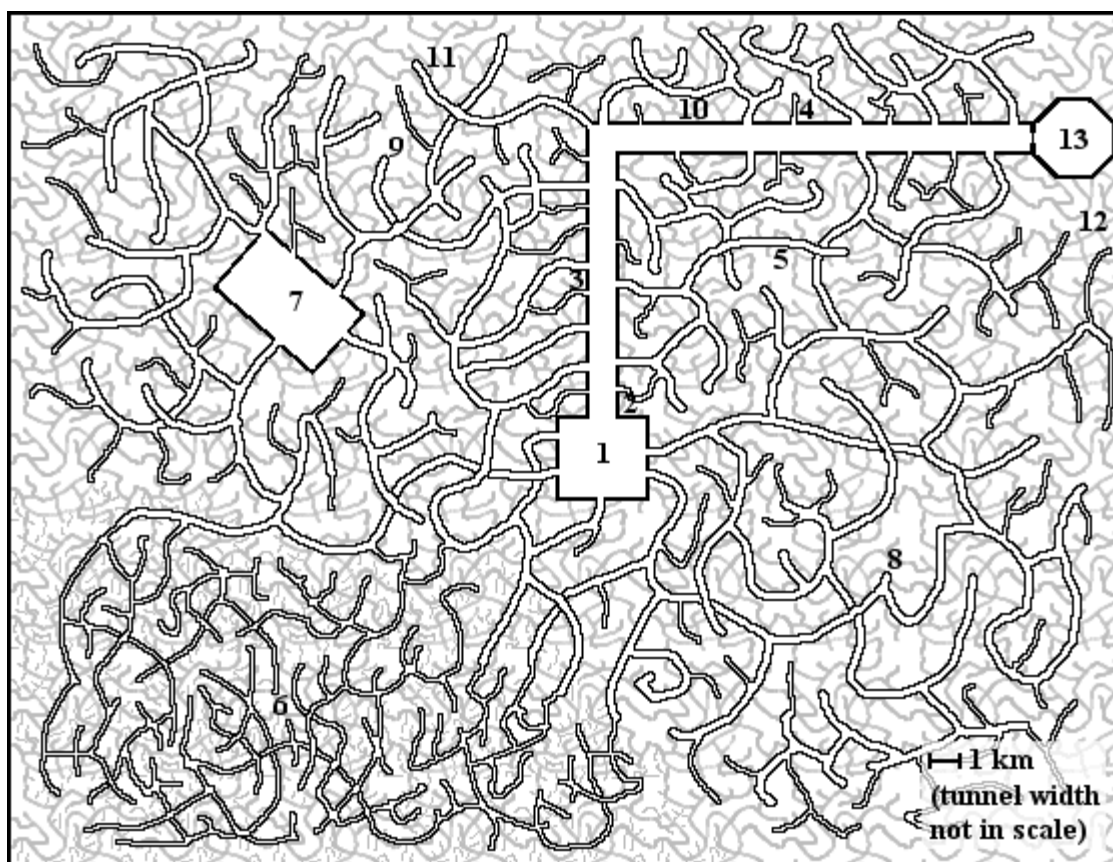
There isn't much the PCs can do. The maurezhi is just showing off, and trying to gain some new knowledge in the process. If they decide to attack him to save the barbarian, noone in the crowd will help them (they might start taking bets, though). The maurezhi will fight just to test their strength, and then he'll flee while invisible, or teleport away. Later, he will remember them and prove more difficult to deal with.

Mobley's alternate forms

Mobley has assimilated a variety of humanoids during his travels on the Prime and planes. He specifically hunts for skilled warriors and wise sages, to add to his impressive array of skills. Here are some of his most used forms. He also has dozens, maybe hundreds of weak forms with no great combat skills, of all humanoid races. Some of them he acquired by devouring wizards and sages, acquiring their knowledge in the process.

- **A green-haired elf.** This form gives Mobley the feats Combat reflexes, Improved feint, Mobility, Weapon finesse, Weapon focus (rapier) and Weapon specialization (rapier). He also has the skills Tumble, Jump, Climb and Swim at +14, and the abilities of a 7th level Duelist. With the incredibly high AC he can reach in this form when not attacking, he often uses it to mock enemies.
- **A big gnoll barbarian.** This form gives Mobley the feats Cleave, Exotic weapon proficiency (bastard sword), Great cleave, Weapon focus (bastard sword) and Improved critical (bastard sword). He also has the skills Jump, Climb, Ride and Swim at +10. He uses this form when confronted by multiple weak enemies, using power attack and great cleave to destroy them quickly.
- **A nimble female halfling.** This form gives Mobley the feats Greater two-weapon fighting, Greater weapon focus (dagger), Greater weapon specialization (dagger), Improved critical (dagger), Improved disarm, Improved feint, Improved initiative, Improved two-weapon fighting, Spring attack, Weapon focus (dagger) and Weapon specialization (dagger). He also has the abilities of a 3rd level rogue, including evasion, trap sense +1, trapfinding and 2d6 sneak attack damage. His full attack becomes: 2 +3 *daggers*, +25/+25/+20/+20/+15/+15 melee, damage 1d4+13 (1d4+8 with off-hand attacks) plus poison, crit 17-20/x2, and his AC improves by 1 due to his small size. This is what he uses when the combat gets tough, his most prized form. It has taken all of his cunning to set a trap for the powerful halfling, kill her in a very unfair combat, and devour her.

Broken Reach



The low stone building which the PCs are facing is the entrance to Broken Reach. The building is empty, except for a wide stairway going down into the rocky ground of the Plain. The stairway goes down a fairly long way, and there are several other people – tough-looking mercenaries, for the most part – climbing it up and down, besides the heroes. Every few meters, there are narrow and dark passages, smaller stairs, and barred doors, leading elsewhere within the underground city of Broken Reach. The wide stairway ends in a large and long cave, dimly lit by some torches, which is what passes for the “main street” of Broken Reach. The fortress-city is relatively busy: people come

and go from its many weapon shops and armories, small crowds of mercenaries talk hushedly near dark alleyways, prostitutes market their “wares” openly and chat among themselves. A few tanar’ri walk the streets – everyone gives way to them. There are no kids, not even street urchins; people don’t come to Broken Reach to set up a family. No beggars, either. Everyone in town – about a thousand souls, and several more people – is either tough enough to defend himself or under the wing of one or more of the various powerful “protectors” which run the town. Or he’s holed up in the Ratholes – just read on.

And the top dog of the town is Red Shroud, the red-haired succubus who has managed to establish Broken Reach as the safest – well, less dangerous – place in the Plains of Infinite Portals. She prevents the Molydei, the tanar’ri press-gang leaders, from coming in to get “volunteers” for the Blood War, she discourages other tanar’ri from rampaging around the place, and she makes sure that rowdy citizens take their business outside. In return, she expects everyone to obey her and help keep order while they are within the fortress town – therefore, there isn’t a fixed guards corp. Several of the mercenaries wandering the Reach’s hallways work for Red, but she also has spies everywhere in town and an impressive assortment of contacts and favors to use for getting rid of any specific troublemaker. Like all tanar’ri, she doesn’t know mercy and kills on a whim.

Many of the Reach’s inhabitants are mercenaries waiting for a good contract. However, thanks to its key position and relative safety, Broken Reach is a trade town as much as a recruitment center; weapons of all kinds, even magical ones, can be found easily and quickly, and Red herself controls a city armory capable of outfitting a small army. Besides weapons, most other basic goods can be found as well, and the city is well stocked with reserves of food and drinks. Red Shroud puts a hefty levy on every good sold within the town, and as a result all prices are tripled. As well, PCs that sell stuff are expected to give two thirds of the money they earn to the succubus. Of course, this means that they’ll be able to sell at much higher prices, up to three times as normal. Sometimes, shady deals are made to evade the succubus’ greed, but the risk to get discovered and subsequently drawn and quartered is high. She seems to have spies *everywhere*.

The PCs are free to do whatever they want in Broken Reach, except getting to the gate to Plague-Mort. A basher needs Red’s permission for that, and she doesn’t give it easily. The gate lies in an underground chamber, and it’s well protected. Apart from getting to the portal, there are many things that the PCs could do, and they could even spend some downtime here to train, create magical items, or just rest from the terrible travel they’ve just finished. For once, they are in no hurry; though the PCs can’t know for sure, Rothakon has started on the path back to Infestant and it is a rather long trip. This part of the adventure is very non-linear, and the DM should be ready to change the events in response to the PCs’ actions.

The most interesting public places of Broken Reach are detailed here. There are lots of things to do and errands to run to keep the PCs busy while they try to figure out how to get out of the plane. The most important thing, however, is getting on the right side of Red Shroud. Right now, there are two missions she needs accomplished, and if the PCs can manage one of them, she’ll grant them access to the portal. This won’t be much use to them, of course, but it’s worth trying. If the PCs can complete both tasks, she will very pleased, considering them as a truly valuable resource worth protecting. She will introduce them to a very special guest who may hold the key to their freedom.

As for the actual tasks... the first one is to kill her own daughter. And the second is to scout Mithrengo. Hey, noone said they were going to be pleasant. More details are in the section about Red’s palace.

1. This room is the only known entrance to Broken Reach.

This is a large room, with walls and floor composed of big stone slabs. The main feature is the huge stairway leading upwards to the surface. Along the stairway, several passages and tunnels lead outward, but at the bottom there is only one wide tunnel: the “main street” of Broken Reach starts from here. Even though there is no day and night, there are times when it is more or less busy, and you seem to have arrived in the equivalent of peak hour. Sparse torches shed a dim light, barely

enough to see the tall ceiling, giving to the street the appearance of the main road of a normal town in the night. Groups of armored mercenaries walk up and down the street, slapping each other on the back, chatting loudly, drinking and laughing. Near corners and alleyways, dozens of prostitutes, mostly (but not only) human or tiefling, wait for the next mercenary to satisfy. They all wear very little clothing, most are bare-breasted, and some are all but naked. On both sides of the tunnel, small reinforced wood or metal doors lead into shops and alehouses, their respective owners on the entrance trying to draw the attention of passers-by. A few peddlers wander the tunnel and try to sell exotic food, special drugs, or cheap spirits. Further away, you can spot a couple of demons; everyone takes care to step out of their way and to avoid looking directly at them.

As the PCs walk around the street, take a look around, and feel overjoyed for being back to something similar to civilization, they hear a muffled cry for help coming from a dark, narrow side cave. A young female voice, it sounds, full of terror. No one else on the street seem to bother about it; a couple of passersby glance in that direction, another shrugs. Another chuckles. Looking into the tunnel, they can see the light of a torch coming from behind a corner.

If the PCs enter the alley, a passage just little more than one meter wide and two meters tall, they eventually turn a corner and see the following scene. A very comely young woman, long blonde hair, terrified blue eyes, wearing common clothes, is being held against the wall by a tall, grinning mercenary, while another one is frantically untying her clothes with a disgusting lustful expression on his face.

If only one or two male PCs intervene, the mercenaries will stop with a surprised look on their faces, glance at the PCs weapons while still holding the girl pinned, sneer and offer them “a good round, after us of course... or just bugger off; either way no one gets hurt”.

Would-be rapists		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Fighter 6 th (Outlands)	CR: 6
Str: 12 (+1)	HP: 6d10+6 (39)	Speed: 6		Check pen.: -5
Dex: 11 (+0)	AC: 15 (+5 armor)	Armor: medium		
Con: 13 (+1)	Initiative: +4 improved initiative	% fail.: 30%		
Int: 8 (-1)	Ref: +2 base	BAB: +6/+1		Grapple: +7
Wis: 11 (+0)	For: +6 (+5 base, +1 con)	Melee: +7/+2 (+6 base, +1 str)		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: +2 base	Ranged: +6/+1 base		
<u>Attacks</u> Cold iron two handed sword, +8/+3 melee, damage 2d6+3, crit 19-20/x2, or Dagger, +7/+2 melee, damage 1d4+1, crit 19-20/x2				<u>Skills</u> Climb +5 (+9 ranks, +1 strength, -5 armor) Intimidate +9 ranks Jump +5 (+9 ranks, +1 strength, -5 armor)
<u>Feats and special abilities</u> Feats: Blind-fight, Cleave, Improved initiative, Lightning reflexes, Power attack, Toughness, Weapon focus: two handed sword, Weapon specialization: two-handed sword.				
<u>Equipment</u> Chain mail (AB +5, max dex +2, check penalty -5, arcane failure 30%) (only the tall one is wearing his armor; the second armor is on the floor) Cold iron two handed sword (damage 2d6, crit 19-20/x2) (only the tall one can readily draw his two handed sword; the other must use a move-equivalent action to pick it up from the floor, or attack with his dagger) Dagger (damage 1d4, crit 19-20/x2) 2 torches, 30 jinx, 12 stingers, 30 greens.				

If the PCs attack the mercenaries, or if the heroes appear with evidently no intention of parleying, the two fighters will defend themselves as well as they can (for the fight, remember that the tunnel is barely one meter wide), and then flee in the direction opposite of the one where the PCs came from. If the heroes pursue, they'll find the mercenaries trapped in a dead end and ready to surrender. If the PCs turn them to Red's patrols, the criminals are as good as dead.

The young woman quickly gets her clothes back on and profusely thanks the PCs. She says she's named Seranna, she lives in Broken Reach, and if it weren't for the PCs' intervention... the girl shivers. Seranna relaxes quickly and is more than willing to talk with the PCs about any topic they want. If asked about

What if...?

If the PCs decide to let the rapists go (maybe stripping them of their gear before), then they will begin getting a reputation as do-gooders.

How this affects their future dealings is left to the DM.

her, she explains with a smile and lots of innuendo that she is a prostitute. Before the talk can get into any sort of detail, or before the PCs go away, she beams at the heroes, gets as close as possible to the nearest one, and, again with lots of innuendo, says that she has only one thing to offer as a reward and that it will be a great pleasure for her to offer it. She's offering sex and she makes it very clear that she hopes at least one of them accepts. In fact, the more the characters look embarrassed, the more extreme her proposals will get – decide yourself what you can get away with without offending the players.

If the PCs still haven't figured that good actions in the Abyss just don't work, maybe this will drive the point.

Seranna		Al. Chaotic Evil	Succubus Sorcerer 1 st (Abyss)	CR: 8
Str: 10 (+0)	HP: 6d8+1d4+7 (36)	Speed: 9, fly 15		
Dex: 15 (+2)	AC: 21 (+2 dex, +9 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 13 (+1)	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0%	Check pen.: 0	
Int: 17 (+3)	Ref: +7 (+5 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +6	Grapple: +6	
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +6 (+5 base, +1 con)	Melee: +6 base		
Cha: 26 (+8)	Will: +9 (+7 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +8 (+6 base, +2 dexterity)		
<u>Attacks</u>			<u>Skills</u>	
2 claws, +6 melee, damage 1d6			Bluff +20 (+10 ranks, +8 cha, +2 persuasive)	
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>			Concentration +10 (+9 ranks, +1 con)	
Feats: Dodge, Mobility, Persuasive			Diplomacy +12 (+2 ranks, +8 cha, +2 synergy)	
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.			Disguise +19 (+9 ranks, +8 cha, +2 synergy*)	
DR 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 18, telepathy within 30 mt, constant <i>tongues</i> .			Escape Artist +11 (+9 ranks, +2 dex)	
Energy drain kiss (su): Seranna can bestow a negative level on a mortal she lures in some act of passion, or with a successful grapple check. Additionally, the victim must save on Will, DC 21, or be under the effect of a <i>suggestion</i> to kiss her again. The DC to remove the negative level is 21.			Gather information +10 (+8 cha, +2 synergy)	
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>charm monster</i> (DC 22), <i>detect good</i> , <i>detect thoughts</i> (DC 20), <i>ethereal</i> jaunt (self plus 22,5 kg of objects only), <i>polymorph</i> (humanoid form only, unlimited duration), <i>suggestion</i> (DC 21), <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); caster level 12 th . The DCs are based on Charisma.			Hide +11 (+9 ranks, +2 dex)	
Summon 1 vrock 1/day with 30% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.			Intimidate +21 (+9 ranks, +8 cha, +2 synergy, +2 persuasive)	
Sorcerer spells known (DC 18 + spell level): 0 th level: <i>detect magic</i> , <i>touch of fatigue</i> , <i>prestidigitation</i> , <i>resistance</i> ; 1 st level: <i>Seranna's magic aura</i> *, <i>ray of enfeeblement</i>			Knowledge (local) +12 (+9 ranks, +3 int)	
* This <i>magic aura</i> spell works on creatures instead of objects.			Listen +19 (+9 ranks, +8 racial, +2 wis)	
Sorcerer spells/day: 5/5, caster level 1.			Move Silently +11 (+9 ranks, +2 dex)	
<u>Equipment</u>			Search +12 (+9 ranks, +3 int)	
Travel clothes, 34 jinx, 12 stingers			Spot +19 (+9 ranks, +8 racial, +2 wis)	
Scroll of <i>Seranna's magic aura</i>			Survival +4 (+2 wis, +2 synergy**)	
			Use Rope +4 (+2 dex, +2 synergy***)	
			* when acting in character	
			** when following tracks	
			*** when binding someone	

Seranna is the last daughter of Red Shroud. The overlady of Broken Reach kills or sells her children, but Seranna's unusual sorcerous abilities allowed her to escape detection. She is using different forms every day, including male ones, constantly changing location. What's more, she has the mystifying ability to cast *magic aura* on living targets, and she's using it on herself at all times to nullify any magical aura she might have. Often she casts two or more of them, just in case someone uses *dispel magic* on her. It's not paranoia if they really are out to get you.

...SUCKERS!
– SERANNA,
THINKING TO
HERSELF

OH THANKS! I THINK THEY
WERE GOING TO ABUSE
ME...
– SERANNA

Seranna knows Broken Reach very well, but nothing beyond it. As a result, she is still hiding in the city and is unwilling to go elsewhere. Despite her need to lay low, she feels the need to devour one or two souls every now and then, and that's what was going to happen to those two fools before these goody and way more tasty heroes arrived.

Now Seranna is going to try her best to drain as many levels as possible from as many PCs as possible. She's a smart fiend, she recognized the PCs' skill, and she doesn't think it likely for her to be able to completely drain the party. She will do as much as possible and then teleport away. If no PC will consent to her, she will thank them, go away, and remember them for the next occasion.

2. The Crucible is an inn for travelers. It is a surprisingly normal place, and its patrons are mean psychopaths but at least they aren't fiends. The barkeeper is a fat human (Patrid/male human expert 6th/Outlands/neutral evil) and he's cleaning a glass as the heroes enter. Several lanterns give off enough light for the common room, while each of the half dozen rooms upstairs has a single candle. If some PC doesn't pay attention at how he rattles his bone-box, he could easily pick a fight here. Patrid enjoys the show until some of Red's mercs come in and throw the rowdies outside. Then he gets up and demands an exorbitant payment for "damages".

If you want, you can run a small side-quest at the Crucible. One early evening, as the PCs are away, several drunk warriors, back from a tough and well-paid campaign, barge into the inn with several wenches and offer free drinks and food to everyone. Everyone cheers and the night parties on as Patrid gleefully roasts and brings to the tables everything he's got, counting his money and at the same time holding large portions for himself. When the PCs come back, the inn owner belches and tells them that he doesn't have much left, but that he'll heat them up a decent supper as soon as possible.

After they have eaten and most hosts including the PCs are in the common room, chatting and playing cards, one of the patrons who ate the most faints and loudly falls on the table, drawing a round of laughter from everyone else. But this is only the beginning: after a few minutes, several more of the patrons feel very ill. Checking the fainted man reveals a weakening pulse. As worry grows among the patrons, Patrid stumbles out of the kitchen holding his belly and looking chalk-white. He vomits up blood, draws some forced breaths, and then collapses on the floor, dead.

The worry becomes fear. As another couple of patrons faint and die, the fear becomes panic and rage. The bashers around the common room start blaming each other for the poisoning, and begin pulling out blades. A tiefling jumps at the PCs, screaming that they are agents of Mithrengo. Hearing this, another patron lifts an axe and attacks as well.

The Crucible's menu

Best cooking in the Abyss!

- fried lemur, 1 gp
- fish soup, 2 sp
- stewed fireweed, 5 cp
- tamor tubers, 2 cp
- roast ratatosk, 9 sp
- poached varrangoin eggs, 3 sp
- grilled Abyssal bat, 1 sp
- Trav's larval beer, 1 cp
- Redcastle ale, 3 cp
- viperwine (poisonous), 4 gp
- Stygian mineral water, 4 sp
- fermented boar's blood, 5 gp
- curdled aasimon blood, 200 gp

Enraged Tiefling		Al. Chaotic Evil	Tiefling Barbarian 6 th (Abyss)		CR: 6
Str: 15 (+2)	HP: 6d12+6 (45)	Speed: 9	Check pen.: -4		
Dex: 12 (+1)	AC: 18 (+5 armor, +1 dex, +2 shield)	Armor: medium			
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +4 improved initiative	% fail.: 30%	Grapple: +8		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +3 (+2 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +6/+1			
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +6 (+5 base, +1 con)	Melee: +8/+3 (+6 base, +2 str)	Ranged: +6/+1 base		
Cha: 7 (-2)	Will: +3 (+2 base, +1 wis)				
<u>Attacks</u>			<u>Skills</u>		
Silvered warhammer +1, +9/+4 melee, damage 1d8+3, crit 20/x3			Bluff +0 (+2 racial, -2 cha)		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>			Climb +7 (+9 ranks, +2 str, -4 armor)		
Feats: Improved initiative, Power attack, Weapon focus: warhammer.			Hide -1 (+2 racial, +1 dex, -4 armor)		
Darkvision 18m; cold, fire and electricity resistance 5, darkness 1/day.			Intimidate +7 (+9 ranks, -2 cha)		
Fast movement, improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +2, rage 2/day.			Jump +7 (+9 ranks, +2 str, -4 armor)		
<u>Equipment</u>			Ride +10 (+9 ranks, +1 dex)		
Masterwork chain mail (AB +5, max dex +2, check penalty -4, arcane failure 30%)					
Silvered warhammer +1 (damage 1d8+1, crit 19-20/x2) (faint evocation, CL 3)					
Light Wooden Shield +1 (AB +2, arcane failure 5%) (faint abjuration, CL 3)					
12 stingers					

Enraged Patron		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Rogue 6 th (Outlands)	CR: 6
Str: 13 (+1)	HP: 6d6+6 (27)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 17 (+3)	AC: 18 (+5 armor, +3 dex)	Armor: light		
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 20% Check pen.: -1		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +8 (+5 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +4 Grapple: +5		
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +3 (+2 base, +1 con)	Melee: +5 (+4 base, +1 str)		
Cha: 11 (+0)	Will: +2 base	Ranged: +7 (+4 base, +3 dex)		
Attacks		Skills		
<i>Short sword</i> +1, +9 melee, damage 1d8+3, crit 20/x3		Bluff +9 ranks		
Feats and special abilities		Climb +9 (+9 ranks, +1 str, -1 armor)		
Feats: Dodge, Mobility, Weapon finesse, Weapon focus: short sword.		Diplomacy +2 synergy		
Sneak attack +3d6, trapfinding, trap sense +2, evasion, uncanny dodge.		Hide +11 (+9 ranks, +3 dex, -1 armor)		
Equipment		Intimidate +11 (+9 ranks, +2 synergy)		
<i>Chain shirt</i> +1 (AB +5, max dex +4, check penalty -1, arcane failure 20%) (faint abjuration, CL 3)		Jump +9 (+9 ranks, +1 str, -1 armor)		
<i>Short sword</i> +1 (damage 1d6+1, crit 19-20/x2) (faint evocation, CL 3)		Listen +9 ranks		
<i>Potion of invisibility</i> (faint illusion, CL 3)		Move silently +12 (+9 ranks, +3 dex)		
5 jinxes		Spot +9 ranks		
		Swim +9 (+9 ranks, +1 str, -1 armor)		

If the tiefling is defeated by the PCs, the rogue will flee upstairs, where he will bump in a big orc mercenary who, unnerved at the scene, will cut him in two. A big row ensues on the stairs, preventing easy access to the second floor.

The PCs are probably getting worried, since they have eaten the food as well. If a PC has stated that he was eating more than normal, you could have them roll a Fortitude save versus DC 15 or take 1d6 points of Constitution damage. PCs that didn't specifically eat much only have to beat DC 12. Truth is, the poison isn't that dangerous on humanoids; it won't do much more than deal a few points of Constitution damage. The only sods who died from it are those who really gorged themselves, and since the PCs arrived late, this doesn't include any of them.

If the PCs get out of the common room and into the door from which Patrid stumbled in, they see a short corridor leading to two doors to the pantry and kitchen. The doors are both open, and the PCs can see in the pantry a pack of tens of rats, climbing on the shelves and clawing at the bags and crates of food. They aren't common rats – their tiny brain can be seen exposed on the top of their heads. They are cranium rats and most of them are trying to pull down a large jar from the top shelf.

See, Patrid once found an entire bag of beans opened, munched and dirtied by rats, so he cunningly poisoned the rest of the bag to kill off the critters. He didn't know that the rats involved were a colony of cranium rats, who grow more intelligent the more of them are in the same place. The swarm sought revenge in contaminating the inn's food with the same poison. However, as many of them died from the poison they ingested, their collective intelligence quickly dwindled. Now they are trying the same trick, but they can't quite figure out how to pull down the jar from the shelf. When they see the PCs, they stop their work and start chirping and squealing at the PCs. If any of the heroes can talk to animals or communicate with telepathy, they can talk to the rats. The creatures are asking the PCs to help them get the jar (which bears a fairly evident skull-and-crossbones label) in the pantry food. That's not a very smart move on their part – that's because of the fast loss of intelligence they have suffered.

Swarm of Cranium Rats		Al. Neutral Evil	Tiny Magical Beast (Swarm) (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: 2 (-4)	HP: 6d10 (33)	Speed: 4.5, climb 4.5		
Dex: 15 (+2)	AC: 14 (+2 size, +2 dex)	Armor: none		
Con: 10 (+0)	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 6 (-2)	Ref: +7 (+5 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +6 Grapple: -		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +5 base	Melee: +2 (+6 base, -4 str)		
Cha: 6 (-2)	Will: +3 (+2 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +8 (+6 base, +2 dex)		
Attacks		Skills		
Swarm, damage 1d6 + disease		Balance +10 (+8 racial, +2 dex)		
Feats and special abilities		Bluff +0 (+2 ranks, -2 cha)		
Feats: Alertness, Weapon finesse.		Climb +10 (+8 ranks, +2 dex)*		
Disease (ex): Filth fever, Fortitude DC 12, incubation 1d3 days, damage 1d3 Dex and 1d3 Con.		Hide +6 (+4 racial, +2 dex)		
Distraction (ex): any living creature that begins its turn with a swarm in its square must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1 round.		Listen +6 (+3 ranks, +2 alertness, +1 wis)		
Cranium rats have an Intelligence score equal to their Hit Dice. This swarm doesn't have enough Intelligence to have supernatural abilities.		Move silently +6 (+4 racial, +2 dex)		
		Spot +7 (+4 ranks, +2 alertness, +1 wis)		
		Swim +10 (+8 racial, +2 dex)**		
		* can always take 10, uses dex instead of str		
		** can always take 10, uses dex instead of str, can run in a straight line while swimming		

If the PCs kill off the rats and get back into the inn, they can explain to the fighting people in the common room (the combat probably has attracted guards by now) what happened, and restore Broken Reach's relative peace. The inn is left without an owner... it is up to Red Shroud to decide who should take care of it now. If the PCs exercise diplomacy and leverage their role in sedating the row, the whimsical succubus could very well decide to assign it to them. It would be a nice base of operations while they are in Broken Reach.

3. The Stabbity Death is an armory run by a very human-looking tiefling (**Jicky/male human warrior 8th/Outlands/chaotic evil**). He enjoys smoking pipes loaded with the foul stuff from the layer of Sulphanorum, so there's often a hazy fog in the whole place. He also wears a patch on his left eye, but he really only does it for the looks. He can see as well as anyone else, and he often lifts the patch when buying goods, to look at their quality. He is the one who outfitted part of the mercenary company that used to work for Rothakon with cold iron weapons; he recalls a green-striped tiefling girl that was around the place some time ago, recruiting and purchasing equipment.

4. A narrow door leads to an herbalist shop, run by a female orc (**Grondil/female orc expert 7th/Prime Material/chaotic evil**). She's better at business than herbalism, so she is currently looking for a druid or someone who can identify a batch of assorted dried herbs she was sold by a tiefling some days ago. They are practically useless, so she's going to be positively enraged at the cross-trader.

If the PCs are willing, Grondil could hire them to get even with the tiefling. Killing him if possible, but at least getting back her money – 2000 gold coins. In return, she can provide them with a rare good indeed – a spell key, a way to cast Alteration magic without side effects on the entire Plain of Infinite Portals, and maybe on other layers as well. Grondil proudly says that she bought the secret from a planewalker several months ago.

The orc tells the PCs, if they accept, that the tiefling looks like a human, save that he bears two short ram horns on his forehead and his face is a permanent grin. She has no more information, but Broken Reach isn't that big and this should be sufficient. Let the PCs wander the fortress and make Gather Information checks – depending on how well they do, sooner or later they will find this tiefling in a tiny tavern located at the bottom of a narrow cave-alley.

The alehouse consists in a small candlelit room, which contains just a couple of tables and a bar. One of the tables is occupied by several humans. They are wearing battered old clothes, and they are drinking beer without much enthusiasm. The bar owner, a human in his fifties, is standing near them, chatting with them. The other table is more interesting. A tall figure, wearing a reddish-orange tunic and purple cloak, is sitting on a chair near to the wall. With the dim light, his face

can't be seen under the hood, but his hands are gaunt and red-skinned. He's a babau, sitting silent. At the opposite side of the small table, balancing on two legs of his chair, while resting his own legs on the table, sits your quarry. He's wearing some kind of light armor made of chain mail and strips of leather, and carries a dark, wicked-looking spiked chain around his belt. He's smiling at the fiend, chatting in Abyssal about small topics, scratching his forehead between his small horns, and ignoring you.

If the PCs approach the humans, they learn that they are residents of Broken Reach, stuck here for one reason or another, be it business, the will of Red, or simply lack of any place to go. The thought of ending up like them should be enough to give the PCs shivers.

Smiling Sam and the fiend are, in truth, having a telepathic conversation; they are discussing the purchase by the fiend of some magical items without paying Red's taxes. In *truth*, the scammer works for the succubus and is trying to figure out whether the babau works for one of the lords of the near fortresses, and whether he is an agent sent to spy on the Reach's defenses. Layers on layers, that is Smiling Sam's specialty.

The demon is named Balaemoz, and he really is an agent of Mithrengo. Not the brightest of the agents, but still a dangerous enemy. Smiling Sam is almost sure of it, and he knows he's playing a dangerous game. For now, the fiend doesn't know that Sam works for Red.

Smiling Sam		Al. Chaotic Neutral	Tiefling Rogue 6 th (Outlands)	CR: 6
Str: 9 (-1)	HP: 6d6 (21)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 17 (+3)	AC: 17 (+4 armor, +3 dex)	Armor: light		
Con: 10 (+0)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 20% Check pen.: -1		
Int: 16 (+3)	Ref: +8 (+5 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +4 Grapple: +3		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +2 base	Melee: +3 (+4 base, -1 str)		
Cha: 14 (+2)	Will: +3 (+2 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +7 (+4 base, +3 dex)		
Attacks		Skills		
Kyton-possessed spiked chain, +9 melee, damage 2d4+1 reach 3mt, crit 20/x2		Bluff +16 (+9 ranks, +2 cha, +2 racial, +3 skill focus)		
Feats and special abilities		Climb +7 (+9 ranks, -1 str, -1 armor)		
Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency: spiked chain, Skill Focus: bluff, Weapon Finesse.		Diplomacy +13 (+9 ranks, +2 synergy, +2 cha)		
Darkvision 18m; cold, fire and electricity resistance 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.		Gather Information +13 (+9 ranks, +2 synergy, +2 cha)		
Sneak attack +3d6, trapfinding, trap sense +2, evasion, uncanny dodge.		Hide +13 (+9 ranks, +3 dex, +2 racial, -1 armor)		
Equipment		Intimidate +2 synergy		
Masterwork chain and leather shirt (AB +4, max dex +4, check penalty -1, arcane failure 20%)		Jump +7 (+9 ranks, -1 str, -1 armor)		
Kyton-possessed spiked chain (+2 unholy spiked chain; once per day it can cause all chains at least 3 meters long within 3 meters to become +1 dancing spiked chains under the control of the wielder for 1 minute; damage 2d4+2, crit x2) (strong conjuration, CL 15)		Knowledge (local) +12 (+9 ranks, +3 int)		
Potion of Expeditious Retreat (faint alteration, CL 5)		Listen +10 (+9 ranks, +1 wis)		
Feather Token (Tree) (moderate conjuration, CL 12)		Move silently +12 (+9 ranks, +3 dex)		
50 jinxes, 198 stingers		Sense motive +10 (+9 ranks, +1 wis)		
		Spot +10 (+9 ranks, +1 wis)		

Balaemoz		Al. Chaotic Evil	Babau barbarian 6 th	CR: 12
Str: 25 (+7)	HP: 7d8+6d12+65 (135)	Speed: 12		
Dex: 12 (+1)	AC: 19 (+1 dex, +8 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 20 (+5)	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 12 (+1)	Ref: +8 (+7 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +13/+8/+3 Grapple: +20		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +15 (+10 base, +5 con)	Melee: +20 (+13 base, +7 strength)		
Cha: 16 (+3)	Will: +8 (+7 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +14 (+13 base, +1 dexterity)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, +20 melee, damage 1d8+7, and		Climb +23 (+16 ranks, +7 str)		
Bite +18 melee, damage 1d6+3		Disable Device +11 (+10 ranks, +1 int)		
Feats and special abilities		Disguise +13 (+10 ranks, +3 cha)		
Feats: Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Natural Attack (claw), Multiattack, Power attack.		Escape Artist +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex)		
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.		Hide +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex)		
Fast movement, rage 2/day, improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +2.		Intimidate +19 (+16 ranks, +3 cha)		
Sneak attack +2d6, damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 14, telepathy within 30 mt.		Listen +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis)		
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); caster level 7 th .		Move Silently +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex)		
Protective slime (su): any weapon or character touching the babau takes 1d8 damage, ignoring hardness; magic weapon and characters may roll a Reflex save, DC 18, to avoid.		Open Lock +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex)		
Summon 1 babau 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.		Search +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 int)		
		Sleight of Hand +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex)		
		Survival +11 (+8 ranks, +1 wis, +2 synergy*)		
		Use Rope +3 (+1 dex, +2 synergy**)		
		* when following tracks		
		** when binding someone		

If the PCs ask the humans about the tiefling, they can easily learn that he's called Smiling Sam, and that he is sometimes seen dealing with tanar'ri around Broken Reach. Noone in the bar has seen the babau before, and noone really wants to know more about him. Some of the patrons here know more about Smiling Sam, but it will take at least a round of free beer before they loose their lips. The tiefling has at the same time the reputation of being an excellent source of rare goods and information, and a professional scammer and knight of the cross-trade. It is widely supposed that if he is still alive, it can only be because he works for Red.

The room is small, and if the PCs aren't careful they will probably be overheard by Sam, Balaemoz the babau, or both. The tiefling and the fiend will suddenly stand up, shake hands (Sam winces at the contact with the babau's acid skin), and head to the door. Before the PCs can react, the tiefling is out, while the babau stands in the middle of the narrow entrance. The fiend turns and says that it's been a pleasure to rest in this fine establishment, that he'll enjoy coming back (the barman gulps), blah blah blah. He's buying seconds for Smiling Sam, counting on the fact that the PCs will hesitate before asking a babau to get out of the way. Balaemoz is smart enough to know that if he starts killing people he will be thrown out of the city, but if they *do* ask him to get out of the way, he will be surprised for a moment, and then angered – this could quickly lead to a nasty fight.

Meanwhile, Smiling Sam is doing his best to disappear. Unless the PCs somehow get out of the tavern in one or two rounds at most, they won't be able to follow him directly, or at all. They shouldn't give up though, and a few more uses of Gather Information should eventually result in a merchant in a crowded hallway pointing out the tiefling for the PCs. As soon as the heroes move towards Sam, he notices them and runs for it. If there are PCs faster than him, he gulps his *potion of expeditious retreat*. He'll try to put some distance between him and the PCs, and then dash into a side cave and hide.

Unless the PCs manage to catch him now (in this case, skip this paragraph), he'll wonder what the hell they want and gather some information of his own. He'll arrange for a message to be delivered to them: "Damn you berks! What in the Abyss do you want of me? Meet me at Roni's foundry, after closure!" The foundry is detailed at location number 4. Smiling Sam has a copy of the keys to the back door. He's going to sneak in after Roni has closed the shop, and wait for the PCs in hiding.

The heroes will have to get in using some other method. The tiefling will make sure to place himself in a place full of chains, where he can use his weapon's power to full effect if need be.

So, the PCs get an occasion to talk with Smiling Sam. The tiefling doesn't care much about the scam he played on the orc herbalist; he did it just to gain some extra cash. Besides, he feels that the orc screws his clients at least as much as he does. If the PCs don't readily agree to leave him alone, or if they attack him, he'll be quick to point out that he works for Red Shroud, and that they should be very careful. 'course, the heroes could be justified in not believing him at this point! Once convinced that the PCs aren't working for Mithrengo's ruler, he will reveal that the babau he was talking with back at the inn is a spy, and that the work he's doing in thwarting the plans of the iron fortress is way more important than the petty revenge of an orc merchant. All the while, he keeps up his grin, even if the PCs threaten his life.

There are several things Sam can do if the negotiations don't go well; he can run, possibly animating the chains, or call for some mercenary guards, or suggest that the PCs get him to Red's palace to verify his story. The last possibility is what Sam hopes can work. If he can get these pesky annoying adventurers before Red, the succubus is going to solve the matter, one way or another. However, as soon as Sam and the PCs get out of the foundry, they are confronted by Balaemoz!

The babau is better at hiding than even Sam, and has a better hearing as well. He followed the tiefling, and overheard the conversation. And now, he's going to smash into the party with a blind rage, and try to kill Sam. If the PCs win the fight and save the tiefling, he's going to be thankful.

The smiling tiefling leans against a wall to catch his breath. He says: "This wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for you. Now they'll send another agent, and I'll have to identify him, approach him, and dupe him... damn! Again, from the beginning!" He hangs his spiked chain around his belt. "What's worse, chances are that the next one won't be so slow-witted. Ah well, could be worse, at least I'm alive. Say what..." Sam seems to make an effort to straight his face – now he looks like having just a vague grin – and tells you that if you went to Red's palace with him you'd risk your lives. He really does work for the succubus, finding out agents from the iron fortresses and feeding them false information, and Red wouldn't think twice about writing you into the dead book if it turns out that you're interfering with the tiefling's work. He looks too wounded and tired to be lying.

There isn't much more that the tiefling can do now. If the PCs make mention of the reward that Grondil promised them, he'll warn them that selling a fake spell key is the easiest scam of the Abyss. Beyond this, it's the heroes' decision.

If the PCs really decide to kill him and bring his head to Grondil, or if they let the tiefling go and fabricate some proof instead, the orc will tell them about the Alteration spell key for the Plains of Infinite Portals. The creepy ritual requires the sacrifice of the caster's blood, 1 hit point per level of the spell, at the moment the magic is cast. If the spell has a touch range, the blood must be smeared on the recipient. Much like metamagic, a wizard has to prepare the spell in advance using the spell key, and a sorcerer has to increase the casting time to 1 full round.

5. Roni's foundry is a huge cavern surrounded by several smaller caves. The main room is a chaos of furnaces, vats of molten metal held by chains, scaffoldings and walkways, counterweights and racks of tools. Lots of the mercenaries that fight in the Blood War are elite troops armed with magical weapon, because only well-trained and well-equipped professionals have any hope of making a contribution and/or surviving. Still, in Broken Reach there is as large a request of cheap, common weapons as anywhere else; lots of demon lords like to equip their troops with metal arms rather than their claws only, and everyone needs a side weapon. This is the place where they get them. Roni and his dozen assistants deal in good, old, cheap steel. He makes weapons, armors, and also tools.

Roni himself (Roni/male half-fiend dwarf expert 7th/Baator/lawful evil) is a rather unusual cutter. Short and tough, he is just a bit taller than the average dwarf, but he presents evident fiendish features. He has short but powerful leathery wings, his skin's tinge is more reddish than most primes,

and he can bare fangs and claws to rival a demon. Rumor has it that his mother was a baatezu, but don't ask Roni about this or he'll fly into a rage worthy of any tanar'ri!

6. The Ratholes is a fairly large area of the city/fortress that mainly consists of low and narrow tunnels, winding around themselves in a twisted maze. It was created by the poor and weak of Broken Reach, whose only chance for survival was to hide in the dark corners of the city and hope to be insignificant enough that noone would bother them. This underground area is rich in sealed-off natural caves, which suited well these poor folks who couldn't afford diggers or magic. They carved tunnels connecting the caves, and then more tunnels connecting the tunnels. Then some of the passageways collapsed, so new ones were dug. The result is an uncharted, labyrinthic, dark mess of carved and natural stone.

The reaction of most of the people here when confronted by the PCs in their shining magical equipment will probably be of sheer panic. In any case, there aren't many interesting friends for the heroes here. Notable features include several shallow natural lake of filthy, toxic water, and a single pool of still filthy but drinkable water, which drips from the cave ceiling after having been filtered by the particular ground above it.

HITTL...? WHAT ARE YOU
SAYING? OH, DON'T
WORRY. I DON'T WANT TO
KILL YOU!
- ABRETAL, WITH HIS
MOST FRIENDLY GRIN

The area doesn't lack danger. A murderous psychopath has recently started killing off the Ratholes' residents. This is a fiendish derro named Abretal, who was born on the Prime from a tiefling derro woman, and who later found his way to the Plains of Infinite Portals. After a few days on the Abyss, his fiendish blood became strong enough that he was no longer capable of controlling his racial madness. Abretal sought to hide in the Ratholes, but he eventually became its nightmare. In his warped mind, he saw with

clarity what he had to do. Make them suffer. Torture them beyond the limits of sanity. Then kill them slowly. And when he would become good enough at it, as good as a demon, he will kill himself. This way, his soul will be forged anew into a demon, and the power of the Abyss would be his to command.

Abretal		Al. Chaotic Evil	Fiendish Derro Barbarian/Rogue 2 nd /3 rd (Abyss)	CR: 10
Str: 13 (+1)	HP: 6d8+2d12+8 (48)	Speed: 9	Check pen.: -1	
Dex: 17 (+3)	AC: 19 (+2 nat, +3 dex, +1 size, +3 arm)	Armor: light		
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 15%		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +9 (+6 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +7/+2	Grapple: +4	
Wis: 5 (-3)	For: +8 (+7 base, +1 con)	Melee: +9/+4 (+7 base, +1 str, +1 size)		
Cha: 16 (+3)	Will: +5 (+2 base, +3 cha)	Ranged: +11/+6 (+7 base, +3 dex, +1 size)		
Attacks			Skills	
Greataxe, +9/+4 melee, damage 1d10+1+poison, crit 20/x3			Bluff +8 (+5 ranks, +3 cha)	
Feats and special abilities			Diplomacy +5 (+2 synergy, +3 cha)	
Feats: Aspect of the Tanar'ri*, Blind-fight, Improved Initiative.			Hide +14 (+4 ranks, +3 dex, +4 racial, +4 size, -1 armor)	
* due to the feat's requirements, Abretal can only use it while raging.			Intimidate +9 (+4 ranks, +2 synergy, +3 cha)	
SR 15, insane (uses Charisma instead of Wisdom for Will saves, immune to confusion and insanity), takes 1 point of Con damage per hour spent in sunlight, smite good 1/day (+8 damage vs a good foe), darkvision 12, DR 5/magic, cold and fire resistance 10, poison use, sneak attack +3d6, trapfinding, trap sense +2, evasion, fast movement, rage 1/day, uncanny dodge.			Knowledge (local) +3 ranks	
At will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>ghost sound</i> . 1/day – <i>daze</i> (DC 13), <i>sound burst</i> (DC 15). Caster level 3 rd .			Listen +8 (+11 ranks, -3 wis)	
Equipment			Move silently +22 (+11 ranks, +3 dex, +4 racial, +5 competence, -1 check penalty)	
Studded leather armor (AB +3, max dex +5, check penalty -1, arcane failure 15%)			Speak Abyssal	
Greataxe (damage 1d10, crit 20/x3) poisoned with Abyssal Greenblood Oil.				
Dagger (damage 1d4, crit 19-20/x2)				
4 doses of Abyssal Greenblood Oil (Injury DC 15, initial 1 Con, secondary 1d3 Con)				
<i>Potion of Nondetection</i> (faint abjuration, CL 5)				
<i>Boots of Elvenkind</i> (faint transmutation, CL 5)				

Abretal picks a random victim from the Ratholes, knocks him or her out, and then drags the poor sod back to his secluded, hidden cave. There, he inflicts constant torture, torment and mutilation to his prisoner until the victim is too damaged to suffer any more, and then he leaves him or her to die. Then, he goes on to the next one. He's become *very* good at it. It takes several days between a victim and the next one. Sometimes, faint, distant screams can be heard in all the passages of the Ratholes. Abretal is currently convinced that he is very, very close to his goal.

Abretal looks like a beardless, pale dwarf, with long uncombed hair and bulging eyes. He wears an old worker suit, and his face, clothes and hair are all covered in dried blood and other fluids. The awful smell is enough to tip some victims off to his arrival, and as a result there are plenty of scared recounts of the killer's appearance. No two tales are exactly the same, but most agree that he's got to be some kind of horrible undead dwarf.

The fiendish derro's lair is one of the natural caves. It contains one of the poisonous pools; this one causes the skin of humanoids who drink from it to become hypersensitive, so that the slightest contact causes dire pain. Abretal uses it to great effect. The floor and walls of the cave are splattered with blood, and gory remains lie everywhere on the floor. Inch-thick worms can be seen here and there. Not far from the pool, several iron chains are nailed to the ground, and to the chain is bounded the mad dwarf's last victim. He probably was a human, the corpse is too mangled to be sure. Still, an accurate examination can reveal that none of the wounds was lethal by itself, and that the man probably died of infection.

If the PCs look for the murderer, they have to ask around the scared Ratholes' folks, find out the areas where the attacks have been more frequent and carefully follow tracks. Eventually, they'll discover Abretal's cave. The derro is there, busy carving out someone's eyeballs. The cave is shrouded in magical darkness and the victim is covered in cuts and he is choking on blood. As the PCs enter, the dwarf startles, suddenly shaking his dagger. There is a brief gurgle from the man, and then he dies. Abretal snarls and casts *sound burst* at the PCs, then he rages, calling to his inner demon, and charges. When it is clear that he has no hope, he screams in madness and shouts (in Abyssal) "It doesn't matter! It is complete! It must be!", followed by some incoherent roaring. Then, he drives the dagger deep into his heart and dies.

If the heroes have the guts to search the cave, they can find some items, which belonged to the victims. A rusted earring. A chipped mug. A stained bottle cap. An unrecognizable painting. The derro doesn't care about them; he picked up whatever seemed useful for him to capture victims more easily. That isn't much; all the prisoners have been outcasts and homeless, though a couple of them had a minor magical trinket, either as a very prized possession or without knowing its nature. There is a single *bead of force* (moderate evocation, CL 10) which neither the dwarf nor the previous owner had recognized as magical.

But it is not over yet. In the Abyss, good deeds have the worst consequences. Even though most of Abretal's soul is probably bound to become a larva or something, a fraction of it has become trapped in its own evil. When the derro's *darkness* spells expire, the shadows of his cave coalesce in a tall, living shadow, a mass of dark tentacles and incarnate madness.

What if...?

It takes a *wish* or *miracle* to cure a derro. Abretal makes no exception; in fact, he is even more insane than the average derro, because of the demonic blood running through his veins. At the DM's discretion, a Bleaker's faction ability could allow Abretal to be restored to sanity.

He stays Chaotic Evil, though. He won't feel particularly remorseful. Free from the Abyss' influence, he will seek to return to the Prime.

Allip		Al. Neutral Evil	Medium Undead (Incorporeal) (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: -	HP: 12d12 (78)	Speed: fly 9 (perfect)		
Dex: 20 (+5)	AC: 19 (+4 deflection, +5 dex)	Armor: none		
Con: -	Initiative: +9 (+5 dex, +4 improved init)	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: -		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +11 (+4 base, +5 dex, +2 light ref)	BAB: +6 Grapple: -		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +4 base	Melee: +6 base		
Cha: 24 (+7)	Will: +9 (+8 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +11 (+6 base, +5 dex)		
Attacks				Skills
Touch, +12 melee incorporeal touch, damage 1d4 wisdom drain				Hide +20 (+15 ranks, +5 dex)
Feats and special abilities				Intimidate +17 (+10 ranks, +7 cha)
Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (touch).				Listen +16 (+15 ranks, +1 wis)
Darkvision 12, incorporeal, undead, +2 turn resistance.				Search +5 ranks
Babble (su): all sane creatures within 12 meters must save on Will, DC 23, or be affected as if by <i>hypnotism</i> for 2d4 rounds; this is a sonic, mind-affecting compulsion.				Spot +16 (+15 ranks, +1 wis)
Madness (su): anyone using detect thoughts, mind control or telepathy on an allip takes 1d4 wisdom damage.				
Wisdom drain (su): the allip deals 1d4 wisdom drain on a successful attack, and gains 5 temporary hit points for one hour.				

Abrital's own considerable power, his demonic ancestry, the horrible deeds he committed, and his deep insanity have resulted in a powerful undead whose mere presence can project madness on everyone nearby. This allip will hunt down the PCs and attack them, possibly when they are alone, draining a PC's Wisdom and then retreating. Between an attack and another, it might decide to vent his frustration by driving some Broken Reach sod insane. Only by destroying this monster can the PCs become safe again.

7. This huge cavern (no, it's not in scale on the map, but it's still several hundred meters across) is called Battlefield Courtyard, and is used to gather and train the mercenary troops hired by fiend lords to war against the Baatezu and among themselves. At any moment, there will be between one and three mercenary forces in the hall, either just arrived from some campaign, or gathering to leave, or training. Some of them will be disciplined mercenary companies, but most are just rag-tag ensembles of individual professionals, the only thing in common being the lord that hired them.

Besides these freelancers or small groups, there are currently two mercenary companies in Broken Reach. The first one is the Red Swords; they are a group of psychopaths led by a charismatic minotaur barbarian (Hruthorg/male minotaur barbarian 15th/Abyss/chaotic evil Fated) who was born in Baphomet's realm. They have several units with different equipments, but they all wear metal armor, boots, and red leather gloves, belt, scabbards, quivers and shoulder pads. They are noisy, chaotic, troublesome, homicidal, and currently bored, so it's better to keep away from them.

The other company is the Lower Planar Mercenary League. It is led by a yugoloth (Oshakan/male yagnoloth fighter 8th/Abyss/neutral evil) and it's far better organized than the Red Swords. It has a few elite units composed of yugoloth, but the bulk of it is made of well-trained mortals. Oshakan pays well but he likes discipline, and these cutters are much saner than Hruthorg's horde. They are currently waiting for an assignment – only Oshakan knows the details – and they can often be found in Battlefield Courtyard practicing maneuvers or training.

If the PCs ask the residents of the surrounding houses, they can learn some information about the mercenaries that were hired by Rothakon. The bulk of their forces entered the Abyss from Pandemonium via the Styx, in order to reach the 76th layer quickly, but many of them were recruited in Broken Reach by the tiefling girl, Lianne. Also, they bought a good number of cold iron weapons in the city-fortress.

8. This area of Broken Reach is home to the city-fortress' high-ups. There are no formal political structures in the town, the only official leader being Red, but some of the smartest folks in town have nevertheless managed to carve up a nice comfy niche for themselves. All of them are as igno-

rant of lawful authority as any Abyssal inhabitant, but none of them dare challenge the succubus' power right now.

Ledi (**Ledi Opalheart/female tiefling rogue 11th/Abyss/chaotic evil**) lives in a house which makes full display of her wealth. She is an ex-Sensate and she's behind all the prostitution business of Broken Reach, taking the lion's share of all earnings and punishing "freelancers" in ways better left unmentioned. Recently, she spends a lot of time alone in her rooms, mostly directing her business through her faithful servant Suleensh (**Suleensh/male incubus/Abyss/chaotic evil**). When she does show herself, she is languid and absent-minded. Her appearance is very comely, and her tiefling traits are manifest in her brightly colored hair, ranging from blue to pink, and her tough and sharp fingernails. She usually wears very loose silken cloths. Noone knows the truth – the servant is actually an incubus, which is basically a succubus whose natural form appears male (this doesn't really make a difference, since both succubi and incubi can *polymorph* at will into whatever race and sex they need). Suleensh keeps Ledi constantly *charmed* and feeds her dozens of *suggestions* in her sleep, effectively directing her thoughts and actions. He plans to use Ledi's resources, position and network to corrupt mortals passing through Broken Reach through lust and decadence, damning their souls to the Abyss forever. Since he (correctly) suspects that Red would object to the presence of another succubus in her town, he hasn't yet killed Ledi, instead using her as a front for his schemes.

Hanatel (**Hanatel/male human cleric of Hiddukel 11th/Prime/neutral evil**) is a worshipper of the Krynnish god of trickery, flung into the Abyss during a freak accident involving a gnomish quasit-powered clock and his attempt to sabotage it. He managed to survive and has slowly established himself in Broken Reach. He's now over 70 years old and still as cunning as ever if not more so. He has a long white beard and a wrinkled face, but the signs of age end there. His step is sure and fast, and noone has ever seen him ill or sick. He is the man to visit in the Reach if you're looking to buy or sell a rare and costly magical item. It is rumored that he is less than accurate in his tax payments to Red, but noone knows how he can get away with it. Other rumors say that he wields incredible powers granted by his god, and that this is the reason for which Red doesn't bug him too much. The truth is, one, that the old blood is an exceptional con artist and his large collection of exotic magical items allow him to fake being a lot more powerful than he actually is, and two, that he has a loose agreement with Red thanks to which he pays reduced levies in exchange for information on persons who would not pay those levies at all. He is now the second richest person in town, after Red Shroud herself. Hanatel has no shop; he does all his dealings in the privacy of his house. Noone has ever been able to steal from him. Chant is that he casts *divination* on a regular basis to know when and how someone will try a heist and the best way to counter it.

Mobley the maurezhi, whom the PCs met in front of the fortress' entrance, also lives in a small house in this area. He deals in knowledge, buying and selling the secrets of Broken Reach as if they were sacks of grain. With his ability to learn everything that was known to the victims he devours, he has a major advantage in this field. Mobley knows about Hanatel's agreement with Red; he knows that Suleensh is an incubus; he knows of Smiling Sam's job for Red Shroud; he knows who's killing the homeless in the Ratholes. He hates the succubus, and he knows enough secrets to cause her little reign to crumble, but he can't act, and she knows it. The succubus protects him from the molydei, the Blood War recruiters, who would want Mobley in the front lines against the baatezu. The fiend, however, is working towards overturning this situation. He knows that Red is almost sure that an attack against Broken Reach by the forces of Mithrengo is imminent. Mobley has secretly hired the Lower Planar Mercenary League and is waiting for the assault to commence. When that happens, he will reveal his force, and first use it to help Red repeal the attack, and then turn on the weakened mercenaries hired by the succubus.

In the mean time, the maurezhi can be very useful for the PCs. He knows that Rothakon the half-fiend has passed through Broken Reach just a few hours before the PCs arrived. He stormed into the town as angry as a whole nest of wasps, hired a bunch of escorts, and got out as soon as possible. One of Mobley's agents also discovered that he has hired some of the Reach's worst scum to re-

trieve a sort of wooden orb from a bunch of guys that sound suspiciously similar to the PCs. Mobley also knows of a secret passage leading from Battlefield Courtyard to the caves where the portal to the Outlands lies. And he knows where the PCs are most likely to find Red Shroud's escaped daughter. And lots more... but all this chant is not free, and the characters aren't likely to have anything that the fiend desires, especially if they angered him when they got into town. Mobley would place great value in the date of Mithrengo's assault on Broken Reach, but what he will try to get from the PCs is another thing entirely. He wants them to capture victims for him to devour. Expecting these mortals to have some kind of moral issue with the proposal, he will indicate targets of proven evil, starting from the Ratholes killer. He isn't much interested in the man and won't value his soul very much, but if the PCs do this task for him he will point them to a not-so-wicked individual... slowly leading the heroes to damnation and increasing his power considerably in the meantime. Make no mistake, knowingly feeding someone to a maurezhi means destroying the victim's soul and is an incredibly evil act no matter what; even doing this to the psychopathic murderer Abretal is more than enough for a paladin to lose his powers, or for a cleric to lose access to some or all of his spells, or for a character who was "on the edge" to make the final transition to evil.

9. This area is fairly deep, and it is where the Reach gets its water supply from. A slow, cold underground river flows through a low cave, touching the excavated tunnels in several points. There are always some people gathering the water here; they are either residents, or they work for a mercenary company, an inn, or for some rich folk.

There are several other places around the tunnels where substantial amounts of water drip from the ceiling, or trickles from some hole; however, it is all tainted. Unless purified by magic, it will not satiate thirst, and it will deal 1 Constitution damage unless the character makes a Fortitude save, DC 13. All locals know this.

10. Rothakon has left Broken Reach, but before going he has hired a bunch of fiends and sellswords to keep an eye on the town for him. He has given them the PCs' descriptions and instructions to kill them and retrieve a small wooden orb.

Unusual parties

If the PCs are so evil that they would have no qualms about capturing people and having their souls devoured by a fiend, Mobley is going to take advantage of their wickedness.

He will soon start giving them less and less useful information in return for their services, only upping the rewards when it seems that they no longer want to serve him.

He will also make sure to never tell them anything that may help them escaping Broken Reach. He doesn't want his new puppets to go away before they have done everything they can for him.

Larkis Methulon		Al. Chaotic Evil	Tiefling Fighter 9 th (Abyss)	CR: 9
Str: 18 (+4)	HP: 9d10+9 (58)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 15 (+2)	AC: 23 (+9 armor, +1 dex, +3 shield)	Armor: heavy		
Con: 13 (+1)	Initiative: +4 improved initiative	% fail.: 50% Check pen.: -7		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +5 (+3 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +9/+4 Grapple: +13		
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +7 (+6 base, +1 con)	Melee: +13/+8 (+9 base, +4 str)		
Cha: 9 (-1)	Will: +5 (+3 base, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +11/+6 (+9 base, +2 dex)		
Attacks		Skills		
<i>Silvered vicious longsword</i> +1, +16/+11 melee, dam 1d8+2d6+6 and 1d6 to Larkis, crit 19-20/x2, or		Bluff +1 (+2 racial, -1 cha)		
<i>Composite longbow w/arrows</i> +2, +13/+8 range 33m, damage 1d8+5, crit 20/x3		Climb +4 (+7 ranks, +4 str, -7 armor)		
Feats and special abilities		Hide -3 (+2 racial, +2 dex, -7 armor)		
Feats: Combat reflexes, Dodge, Greater weapon focus: longsword, Improved initiative, Iron Will, Power attack, Precise shot, Weapon focus: longbow, Weapon focus: longsword.		Intimidate +8 (+11 ranks, -1 cha)		
Darkvision 18m; cold, fire and electricity resistance 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.		Jump +3 (+6 ranks, +4 str, -7 armor)		
Fast movement, improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +2, rage 2/day.				
Equipment				
<i>Full plate</i> +1 (AB +9, max dex +1, check penalty -5, arcane failure 35%) (faint abjuration, CL 3)				
<i>Silvered vicious longsword</i> +1 (damage 1d8+2d6+1 and 1d6 to wielder, crit 19-20/x2) (moderate necromancy, CL 9)				
<i>Composite longbow</i> (+4 Strength bonus) (damage 1d8, crit 20/x3)				
<i>Quiver, 30 arrows</i> +2 (moderate evocation, CL 6)				
<i>2 exploding arrows</i> +1 (<i>fireball</i> on impact) (faint evocation, CL 5)				
<i>Heavy Steel Shield</i> +1 (AB +3, arcane failure 15%, check penalty -2) (faint abjuration, CL 3)				
<i>Boots of Striding</i> (+3 base land speed) (faint transmutation, CL 3)				
7 fury leaves (see page 15)				
400 jinx, 12 stingers				

Larkis, an average-looking cutter except for his odd-looking hands, is a freelance mercenary. He works for Rothakon because he was paid one half of a very large sum up front, and he'd like to get the other one. He needs money because he is addicted to fury leaves – he will eat one right before the ambush begins, in fact. However, he values his life a lot more, and will not hesitate to flee or beg for mercy if the tide of the battle does not swing in his favor. Despite having only four fingers per hand, he's good with a longsword and with a bow, and is trained to use either as need be.

UH... LET'S TALK ABOUT
THIS...
- LARKIS METHULON,
WHEN THE BATTLE GOES
WRONG

Groskel Hathanx	Al. Neutral Evil (Fated)	Human Wizard 9 th (Outlands)	CR: 9
Str: 7 (-2) Dex: 9 (-1) Con: 14 (+2) Int: 18 (+4) Wis: 12 (+1) Cha: 11 (+0)	HP: 8d4+16 (36) AC: 9 (-1 dex) Initiative: -1 dex Ref: +2 (+3 base, -1 dex) For: +7 (+3 base, +2 con, +2 lit reflexes) Will: +7 (+6 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 9 Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +4 Melee: +2 (+4 base, -2 str) Ranged: +3 (+4 base, -1 dex)	Check pen.: - Grapple: +2
<u>Attacks</u> Dagger, +2 melee, damage 1d4-2, crit 19-20/x2			<u>Skills</u> Bluff +4 ranks Concentration +14 (+12 ranks, +2 con) Diplomacy +3 (+5 ranks, -2 cape of shadows) Intimidate +2 (+2 cape of shadows) Knowledge (Abyss) +17 (+5 ranks, +8 synergy, +4 int) Knowledge (Arcana) +10 (+6 ranks, +4 int) Knowledge (Gehenna) +17 (+5 ranks, +8 synergy, +4 int) Knowledge (Carceri) +17 (+5 ranks, +8 synergy, +4 int) Knowledge (Gray waste) +17 (+5 ranks, +8 synergy, +4 int) Knowledge (Baator) +17 (+5 ranks, +8 synergy, +4 int) Sense motive +6 (+5 ranks, +1 wis) Spellcraft +16 (+12 ranks, +4 int) Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*) Speak abyssal, infernal, yugoloth
<u>Feats and special abilities</u> Feats: Energy substitution: acid, Great fortitude, Quicken spell, Scribe scroll, Self-reliance, Spell focus: evocation, Spell focus: necromancy. Wizard spells/day: 4/5/5/4/3/1			
<u>Equipment</u> Spellbook (0 th level: all core; 1 st level: Protection from evil, Protection from good, Shield, Cause fear, Mage armor, Identify, Magic missile, Expeditious retreat, Obscuring mist; 2 nd level: See invisibility, Summon swarm, Invisibility, Touch of idiocy, Scorching ray; 3 rd level: Fireball, Tiny hut, Hold person, Dispel magic, Vampiric touch, Rage; 4 th level: Animate dead, Dimensional anchor, Black tentacles, Summon monster IV, Bestow curse, Greater invisibility, Scourge of brimstone*, Dimension door; 5 th level: Permanency, Dominate person, Nightmare; 6 th level: Circle of death) <i>Scroll of vampiric touch</i> (medium necromancy, CL 8) <i>Scroll of animate dead</i> (medium necromancy, CL 7) <i>Scroll of summon monster IV</i> (medium conjuration, CL 7) <i>Scroll of tiny hut</i> (medium conjuration, CL 8) <i>Scroll of identify</i> (faint divination, CL 1) <i>Scroll of dimension door</i> (medium conjuration, CL 8) <i>Brooch of shielding</i> (can still absorb 54 damage) (faint abjuration, CL 1) <i>Cape of shadows</i> (dimension door 1/day at night or underground, +2 circumstance bonus to intimidate, -2 to diplomacy) (moderate conjuration, CL 9) Silver dagger, cold iron dagger. 130 jink, 34 stingers.			* on one of the planes he knows

Prepared spells:

0th level: Detect magic, Dancing lights, Detect magic, Touch of fatigue

1st level: Protection from good, Magic missile, Magic missile, Expeditious retreat, Cause fear

2nd level: See invisibility, Invisibility, **Acid** Scorching ray, Scorching ray, Arcane lock

3rd level: Fireball, Rage, Dispel magic, **Acid** Fireball

4th level: Bestow curse, Black tentacles, Greater invisibility

5th level: **Quickened** cause fear

Scourge of brimstone

Conjuration [Evil, Fire]

Level: Sor/Wiz 4, Clr 3

Components: V, S, M

Range: close (7,5 mt + 1,5 mt/level)

Effect: flaming evil skull

This spell is similar to Spiritual Weapon, with the following differences. Instead of creating a weapon of force, it creates a flaming flying skull, which moves and attacks in the way described by the Spiritual Weapon spell. It uses the caster's spellcasting stat (Intelligence, Charisma or Wisdom) as a bonus to hit, instead of Wisdom. Once created the skull isn't limited by the spell range; it can keep following the target for as long as the caster can see him or her. Each hit deals 1d8 fire damage, plus 1 point of vile damage every three levels. Vile damage cannot be resisted, and it can only be healed by magic, and only in a consecrated or hallowed place. Finally, the skull is vulnerable to physical attack in addition to the vulnerabilities of a spiritual weapon. It has an AC of 17 (10, +2 for being Tiny, +5 deflection), hardness 5 and 10 hit points. Other attacks do not affect it.

Groskel Hathanx is a planar human in his thirties, born in Sigil, and out on the planes to grab power by the horns. He wears a shortened scholar robe, a leather belt with several pouches, and a black cloak that seems to cover his entire figure in shadow – the effect is pretty unsettling. He has traveled the lower planes looking for secrets and magic, and has struck a deal with Rothakon for several scrolls of tanar'ri battle spells in return for the Selthian Orb. He is more motivated than Larkis, but still he will place his survival above all.

In combat, Groskel likes it when he can take his enemies by surprise. He starts the combat under the effect of *greater invisibility* and *expeditious retreat* and keeps casting offensive spells while moving, staying in open spaces to prevent his foes from finding out where he is. If someone gets too close, he *dimension doors* away. In case any of his comrades falls under a mind control spell, he keeps a *protection from good* ready. If he has time, he'll also make Nukauth invisible.

Nukauth		Al. Chaotic Evil	Babau Fighter 3 rd (Abyss)	CR: 9
Str: 22 (+6) Dex: 14 (+2) Con: 20 (+5) Int: 14 (+2) Wis: 13 (+1) Cha: 16 (+3)	HP: 7d8+3d10+50 (98) AC: 26 (+2 dex, +8 natural, +6 armor) Initiative: +6 (+2 dex, +4 impr. init)	Speed: 6 Armor: medium % fail.: 25% Check pen.: -3	BAB: +10/+5 Grapple: +16 Melee: +17/+12 (+11 base, +6 strength) Ranged: +12/+7 (+10 base, +2 dexterity)	
Attacks Cold iron greatsword +19/+14 melee, damage 2d6+9, crit 17-20/x2, or 2 claws, +12 melee, damage 1d6+5, and Bite +10 melee, damage 1d6+2		Skills Climb +12 (+10 ranks, +5 str, -3 armor) Disable Device +12 (+10 ranks, +2 int) Disguise +13 (+10 ranks, +3 cha) Escape Artist +12 (+10 ranks, +2 dex) Hide +17 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +2 dex, -3 armor) Intimidate +15 (+12 ranks, +3 cha) Listen +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis) Move Silently +17 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +2 dex, -3 armor) Open Lock +12 (+10 ranks, +2 dex) Search +20 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +2 int) Sleight of Hand +12 (+10 ranks, +2 dex) Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*) Use Rope +4 (+2 dex, +2 synergy**)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Cleave, Improved critical: greatsword, Improved initiative, Multiattack, Power attack, Weapon focus: greatsword. All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Sneak attack +2d6, damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 14, telepathy within 30 mt. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>greater teleport</i> ; caster level 7 th . Protective slime (su): any weapon or character touching the babau takes 1d8 damage, ignoring hardness; magic weapon and characters may roll a Reflex save, DC 18, to avoid. Summon 1 babau 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.		* when following tracks ** when binding someone		
Equipment Scale mail +2 (AB +6, max dex +3, check penalty -3, arcane failure 25%) (moderate abjuration, CL 3) Masterwork cold iron greatsword (damage 2d6, crit 19-20/x2) 1083 jinx, 12 green.				

Nukauth convinced Ruxekoz to desert a battle, and now he and the bulezau are waiting in the relative safety of Broken Reach until they can be sure that their former master is no longer looking for them. Nukauth is the brains of the two, but like all tanar'ri he doesn't have much of a planning skill. He doesn't know or care about what they should do a week from today. However, the money that Rothakon handed them to put some berks into the dead-book is a very good point to start.

Unlike many other tanar'ri, Nukauth doesn't have many compunctions about using his summoning ability as early and as often as needed. While using this ability normally leaves the demon in debt towards the summoned one, Nukauth is already on the death list of his former master, so he's not planning on upholding his part of the deal.

During the fight, if Groskel can make him invisible, he'll find some safe place and ready actions to counterspell (though the armor he's wearing may prove a problem there).

Ruxekoz		Al. Chaotic Evil	Bulezau Barbarian 3 rd (Abyss)		CR: 9
Str: 22 (+6)	HP: 7d8+3d12+33 (88)	Speed: 12	Check pen.: 0		
Dex: 18 (+4)	AC: 24 (-1 size, +4 dex, +11 natural)	Armor: none			
Con: 16 (+3)	Initiative: +4 dex	% fail.: 0%	BAB: +10/+5 Grapple: +20		
Int: 7 (-2)	Ref: +10 (+6 base, +4 dex)	Melee: +15 (+10 base, +6 strength, -1 size)			
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +11 (+8 base, +3 con)	Ranged: +13 (+10 base, +4 dexterity, -1 size)			
Cha: 11 (+0)	Will: +6 base				
<u>Attacks</u>			<u>Skills</u>		
+1 keen large greataxe +17/+12 melee reach 3m, damage 3d6+10, crit 19-20/x3, or 2 claws, +15 melee reach 3m, damage 1d4+6, and Head butt +13 melee reach 3m, damage 2d8+3, and Tail slap +13 melee reach 3m, damage 1d3+3			Climb +16 (+10 ranks, +6 str) Intimidate +12 ranks Jump +17 (+10 ranks, +6 str) Listen +11 ranks Search +8 (+10 ranks, -2 int) Spot +11 ranks Survival +12 (+10 ranks, +2 synergy*) Swim +17 (+10 ranks, +6 str)		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>			* when following tracks		
Feats: Improved bull rush, Multiattack, Power attack, Weapon focus: greataxe. All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 14. Awesome blow with the head butt, as the feat. Rage 1/day, fast movement, uncanny dodge, trap sense +1. Bulezau rage (ex): 25% chance per round of combat, 75% in rounds during which it was damaged but didn't hit a foe. Rage lasts until all opponents are dead or until 5 rounds pass without combat. This doesn't stack with barbarian rage! Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>cause fear</i> , <i>command</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>wall of fog</i> ; 1/day – <i>shout</i> . Caster level 7 th . Summon 1-3 rutterkin (40%) or 3-12 dretches (60%) babau 1/day with 25% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.					
<u>Equipment</u>					
+1 keen huge greataxe (damage 3d6+1, crit 19-20/x3) (moderate transmutation, CL 10)					

Ruxekoz works as a freelance mercenary, together with Nukauth. The two of them have deserted some tanar'ri lord in the middle of a battle, and are taking shelter in Broken Reach until they can be sure that noone is looking for them. Ruxekoz is a large, tall but sickly thin fiendish minotaur, his gaunt appearance hiding an impressive strength. When he's calm, he does what Nukauth tells him to do, but in combat he instantly becomes a frothing, raging engine of destruction and there's nothing that can stop him.

One day, after the PCs have been around for a while, and these agents have had time to take a look at them and decide that they have found their targets, the heroes are going to get attacked. The hired thugs are going to be well prepared, and will attack the PCs in the point marked as **10** on the map. They will pop up from an alley and strike quickly; their hope is to finish off the PCs before Red's "security forces" can intervene. They know that if they don't succeed immediately, they are going to have a hard time hiding from the succubus' revenge; Red Shroud doesn't take kindly to strangers messing up the semblance of peace she has built in Broken Reach.

If the PCs realize this, they could escape relatively easy by stalling the fight somehow. After some minutes, a bunch of the bashers Red employs for peacekeeping will show up and try to stop the fight (in the case of the bulezau, this might mean killing him). If the PCs stop attacking, the thugs will be forced to comply. The town mercenaries will tell everyone that if they want to settle something, they will have to do it out of the fortress. The PCs are free to refuse this of course, in which case the agents will have no choice but to wait until the heroes get out of the city. If they are lucky, they may be able to catch the PCs in a city section where there is no danger of being seen by anyone of importance,

More of the dark

In case the PCs manage to capture, *charm* or *dominate* one of the assailants, and wish to question him, they all know about the same about their employer.

They know that Rothakon is a half-fiend; he looked pretty furious as he stormed into town, toured some inns and other "recruitment centers", hired them and left.

They were given detailed descriptions of several people – the PCs, plus any other person that was recently imprisoned in castle Maldithar. Their instructions are to capture them, and to search for a small wooden orb; once the item is found, the prisoner's lives have no more value.

Rothakon said that he would send someone in one or two months, to pick up the item and complete their payment.

such as the Ratholes. A modicum of care on the heroes' side should prevent this.

If the PCs so desire, they can actually accept to fight outside Broken Reach. This gives them time to prepare and probably makes the combat's outcome fairly obvious. The bunch of mercenaries know that they'll lose their edge; if they've been impressed enough by the heroes' combat skills they may decide to pass this "opportunity" themselves! If a fight does occur, though, the locals will treat it as some kind of entertainment, flock around the combat site, and start taking bets.

11. This end of the city has been taken over by a bunch of Red's best bashers. Not long ago, while digging for a new housing area, someone struck a vein of valuable abyssal red iron. The owner was "gently" persuaded by Red Shroud to hand over control of the mine to her. The wide tunnel coming from the main street ends on a wide portcullis, guarded by several human and tiefling mercenaries. Inside, a small mine has been set up, and a dozen of slaves extract the mineral under the merciless supervision of a vrock. The slaves are eight dwarves and four gnomes; they are part of a bunch that was captured during a raid on the Prime Material many years ago. They are the only survivors; the other fifty or so prisoners have died under an endless series of cruel masters.

The mine consists of three excavated tunnels, one of which has been enlarged and is being used as a dormitory for the slaves and temporary storage for the ore. The slightly poisonous mineral isn't exactly beneficial to the health of the slaves, but none of their owners seem to be concerned with this.

The red iron produced here is very impure, but it can still fetch between 2 and 3 gold coins per kilogram. Someone capable of refining and forging it – not an easy task – could create weapons which have a +1 enhancement bonus to damage, and can overcome damage reduction as if it was cold iron. A weapon made from abyssal red iron costs 500 gold more than its normal counterpart. Further, any magical enhancement costs 2000 additional jinx. Red iron is otherwise the same as normal iron.

12. The chamber containing the portal to the Outlands lies under Red's palace. It is a wide cave, about ten meters across, with a low ceiling. Two pillars, chiseled to resemble pillars of skulls, enclose the shimmering surface of the portal. Braziers near the walls provide a modicum of illumination.

The access to this cave is within Red's palace, and it is well guarded. However, within the chamber itself there is only a single chasme tanar'ri. This somewhat uncommon fiend looks like a 2 meters long fly, with a roughly human head. Its eyes are wide and round, and its nose is long and thin.

The chasme is hiding on the ceiling (it can climb as well as any fly), and the entire area is shrouded in *darkness*. Further, the entire cave is always under the effect of *desecrate*; entering it really gives the shivers. The fiend is almost always (90% of the time) keeping a *see invisibility* spell active. Its job is to check on anyone who enters the portal, and telepathically inform the fiends up in the palace. Like many chasmes, it doesn't like being with other fiends, and this solitary job suits him well.

Besides the stairs coming down from the palace, there is another access to this room. It is a secret passage, leading to a tunnel that snakes all the way to Battlefield Square. The passage is very well concealed – it takes a 35 Search check to notice it. Few people know of it; one is Red, another is the chasme guarding the place. If anyone enters from the secret passage, its instructions are to kill the intruder before it can escape through the portal. It is worth noting, though, that the passage is barely large enough for a Medium creature to pass through; if the intruders retreat through it, the fiend won't be able to follow (it will, however, try to summon a bunch of dretches to send after the unwanted visitors).

What if...?

Only very good, or very stupid, parties would decide to try and free the slaves here. It means risking their lives, and ruining any chance they have of getting help from Red. In fact, they'll likely have to flee from the city if they want to avoid the killers she'll certainly send after them.

Also, the ex-slaves would have nowhere to go; unless the PCs can find a way out for them, they will be killed or recaptured quite soon.

If the leatherheads try this trick, do not be afraid to throw the consequences at them.

Chasme		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Outsider (Chaotic, Evil) (Abyss)	CR: 11
Str: 18 (+4)	HP: 7d8+21 (52)	Speed: 6, climb 6, fly 12 (good)		
Dex: 15 (+2)	AC: 22 (-1 size, +2 dex, +11 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 17 (+3)	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0%	Check pen.: 0	
Int: 12 (+1)	Ref: +7 (+5 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +7	Grapple: +15	
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +8 (+5 base, +3 con)	Melee: +10 (+7 base, +4 strength, -1 size)		
Cha: 12 (+1)	Will: +6 (+5 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +8 (+7 base, +2 dexterity, -1 size)		
Attacks			Skills	
2 claws, +10 melee, damage 2d4+4+wound, and bite +8 melee, damage 1d8+2			Climb +14 (+10 ranks, +4 str)	
Feats and special abilities			Concentration +13 (+10 ranks, +3 con)	
Feats: Multiattack, Power attack			Hide +8 (+10 ranks, +2 dex, -4 size)	
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.			Listen +19 (+10 ranks, +1 wis, +8 racial)	
Damage reduction 10/cold iron and good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 19, telepathy (can communicate with any creature within 30 meters that has a language).			Move silently +12 (+10 ranks, +2 dex)	
Wounding (ex): a successful claw attack opens a wound that bleeds for 1 point of damage per round, in addition to normal damage, until stopped by application of the Heal skill (DC 15) or any magical healing. Multiple wounds are cumulative.			Search +11 (+10 ranks, +1 int)	
Sleep drone (su): a chasme can buzz and drone as a free action. All creatures within 9 meters that hear it must succeed at a Will save (DC 14) or fall asleep for 2d4 hours. A sleeping creature can be awakened by vigorous stimuli. A creature that makes its save is immune to the drone of that chasme for one day. The DC is based on Charisma.			Sense motive +11 (+10 ranks, +1 wis)	
Fear aura (su): anyone within 9 meters that is viewing the chasme must succeed at a Will save (DC 14) or be affected as by a <i>fear</i> spell, caster level 8 th . A creature that makes its save is immune to the aura of that chasme for one day. The DC is based on Charisma. Tanar'ri are immune.			Spot +19 (+10 ranks, +1 wis, +8 racial)	
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>desecrate</i> , <i>detect good</i> , <i>detect magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>telekinesis</i> and <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22,5 kg of objects only). Caster level 7 th . DCs are Charisma-based.			Spellcraft +11 (+10 ranks, +1 int)	
Summon 2-16 dretches or another chasme 1/day with 35% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.				

13. Two wide bronze doors allow access to Red Shroud's palace. The entrance is guarded at all times by between three and five mercenaries, each between the 5th and 8th level of experience. Beyond the doors, a corridor lined with doors leads to the succubus' "throne room".

This is a large room, about 10x10 meters. The tall ceiling is sustained by four thick marble columns; the walls are covered in marble as well. There's a thin reddish haze in the area, and a faint smell of wilting roses. The floor is covered in wall-to-wall carpet, several cushions are strewn about, and more guards stand discreetly on the sides. Red sits on a comfortable throne made of wood, gold and luxurious cushions. The throne was evidently made for a Large creature, and the beautiful succubus makes use of the extra room by staying sprawled in a most languid manner on the cushioned couch. Her smooth red hair flows along her body all the way to her legs. She wears expensive, sexy and beautiful clothing, favoring green silk or red velvet, but unlike most of her kind, her clothes aren't excessively revealing. Red Shroud has no need or desire to have every male in Broken Reach lusting after her. Plus, it's easier to conceal a dagger in decent clothing – you never know.

SHUT UP BERK. IF I
WANTED YOU TO HAVE AN
OPINION, I WOULD HAVE
GIVEN YOU ONE.
- RED SHROUD

Sometimes, especially when she is seeing potentially dangerous cutters, her current consort (Ygrax the Skullbiter/male nalfeshnee/Abyss/chaotic evil) stands at her side, but he does little more than gaze at any newcomer and occasionally snarl. Chant is that, after being wounded in the head by a goristro, Ygrax is not exactly the sharpest pencil in the box. A powerful and stupid servant is exactly what Red enjoys the most. It is worth noting that nalfeshnees have continuous *true seeing*, so using illusions when Ygrax is present is useless.

Red Shroud		Al. Chaotic Evil	Succubus Rogue 7 th (Abyss)	CR: 17
Str: 13 (+1)	HP: 12d8+7d6+76 (154)	Speed: 9, fly 15		
Dex: 13 (+1)	AC: 24 (+1 dex, +9 natural, +4 deflection)	Armor: none		
Con: 18 (+4)	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0%	Check pen.: 0	
Int: 18 (+4)	Ref: +14 (+13 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +17	Grapple: +18	
Wis: 16 (+3)	For: +12 (+10 base, +2 con)	Melee: +18 (+17 base, +1 strength)		
Cha: 32 (+11)	Will: +15 (+10 base, +3 wis, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +18 (+17 base, +1 dexterity)		
Attacks			Skills	
2 claws, +18 melee, damage 1d6+1, or			Appraise +9 (+5 ranks, +4 int)	
<i>Fiendstinger</i> , +20/+20/+15/+10 melee, damage 1d4+2, crit 17-20/x2			Bluff +35 (+22 ranks, +11 cha, +2 persuasive)	
Feats and special abilities			Concentration +19 (+15 ranks, +4 con)	
Feats: Ability focus (energy drain kiss), Dodge, Improved critical (dagger), Iron will, Mobility, Persuasive, Quicken spell-like ability (greater teleport).			Diplomacy +35 (+22 ranks, +11 cha, +2 synergy)	
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.			Disguise +23 (+10 ranks, +11 cha, +2 synergy*)	
DR 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 18, telepathy within 30 mt, constant <i>tongues</i> , sneak attack +4d6, trapfinding, evasion, uncanny dodge, trap sense +2.			Escape Artist +10 (+9 ranks, +1 dex)	
Energy drain kiss (su): Red can bestow a negative level on a mortal she lures in some act of passion, or with a successful grapple check. Additionally, the victim must save on Will, DC 26, or be under the effect of a <i>suggestion</i> to kiss her again. The DC to remove the negative level is 26.			Gather information +32 (+22 ranks, +8 cha, +2 synergy)	
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>charm monster</i> (DC 25), <i>detect good</i> , <i>detect thoughts</i> (DC 23), <i>ethereal jaunt</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only), <i>polymorph</i> (humanoid form only, unlimited duration), <i>suggestion</i> (DC 24), <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); caster level 12 th . The DCs are based on Charisma.			Hide +13 (+12 ranks, +1 dex)	
Summon 1 vrock 1/day with 30% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.			Intimidate +32 (+17 ranks, +11 cha, +2 synergy, +2 persuasive)	
Equipment			Knowledge (local) +26 (+22 ranks, +4 int)	
<i>Fiendstinger</i> (+2 evil outsiders bane dagger of speed) (damage 1d4+2, +2d6 vs evil outsiders, crit 19-20/x2) (moderate conjuration/transmutation)			Listen +29 (+18 ranks, +8 racial, +3 wis)	
<i>Ring of protection</i> +4			Move Silently +15 (+12 ranks, +1 dex)	
<i>Ring of mind shielding</i>			Search +15 (+11 ranks, +4 int)	
<i>Amulet of health</i> +4			Sense motive +25 (+22 ranks, +3 wis)	
Expensive clothing and some tasteful jewelry			Spot +29 (+18 ranks, +8 racial, +3 wis)	
			Survival +5 (+3 wis, +2 synergy**)	
			Use Magic Device +31 (+20 ranks, +11 cha)	
			Use Rope +8 (+5 ranks, +1 dex, +2 synergy***)	
			* when acting in character	
			** when following tracks	
			*** when binding someone	

Red Shroud is fairly reasonable for a tanar'ri. She appreciates it when powerful cutters coming to her town pay her a visit; this way she can make sure that they aren't going to cause trouble. She smiles and talks with courtesy, presenting her demands as reasonable and natural. However, she is also temperamental and prone to flying into a rage over petty things. In those moments, it's better to be as far as possible; she doesn't like getting dirty but she does like ordering executions.

When the PCs meet her, she is in a good mood.

"Guards. Leave us". The assorted mercenaries around the room hesitate for only a moment before leaving through one of the side doors. After they are gone, the succubus shifts position in her throne as she leans towards you. "I could grant you access to the Outlands portal. However, I am currently keeping it sealed and guarded, because of the city's... situation". Red's eyes go dark for a moment. "This chant isn't going to leave this room, understood?"

"From my many informants, I am certain that the lord of the fortress of Mithrengo is planning an attack on Broken Reach. His spies are in town even as we speak, and for each of them that I discover and uproot, two more take the berk's place. I cannot afford to let people come and go through a portal right in the middle of the Reach. Anyone could be working for the enemy! I have heard that you have fled here after giving the laugh to a blood named Rothakon".

Red Shroud smiles, showing her perfect teeth. "I know about him. He apparently believes that you have something of his. Some kind of mystical artefact". She rests her back against the large throne, and continues: "We will have more opportunities to talk about this. What matter is that I don't

think you are spies. I want us to be friends! For now, I'm giving you a nice dark as a present: four tough bashers are in town, with your descriptions, and orders to get that item and your heads. I suspect that Rothakon doesn't care too much about the rest of your bodies".

"Now, as much as I look well placed and comfortable here in my little hole, I also have a bunch of problems. One I have already mentioned. Another is my wayward daughter". The fiend sighs, and her beautiful voice is full of irony. "Aren't kids always a source of problems? She has escaped her loving mother, and her unusual magical skills allow her to stay undetected". Red Shroud's voice takes on a sharper note. "Normally, I deliver these children to the molydei for ... military service, in return for some favors. But Seranna has been naughty and must be punished".

"I want her head".

"Naturally, I don't care too much about the rest of her body".

While paladins and the like have fun thinking about whether killing the fiendish daughter of a fiend for the fiend herself is a good action or not, quick-thinking PCs may wonder whether offering to find Mithrengo's spies wouldn't be a better idea instead. This way, they'll do Red a favor and she'll be able to let them access the portal with no worries. The problem here is that the story about spies and paranoia and not wanting anyone to use the portal is just an excuse; Red sees a bunch of tough and relatively trustworthy cutters and wants them to do as many dirty jobs for her as possible. The heroes *can* convince her but it will take some skill. In this case, the DM can have Red propose the job again later, when the PCs will be again in Broken Reach. Or just drop it.

Red Shroud has an enticing reward for the PCs if they accept: she has the names and descriptions of the four killers who are on their heels (they are the bashers described at location **10**). Further, she is willing to help the PCs get rid of them by setting up an appropriate ambush. The succubus assures the heroes that they really don't want to meet these bashers in a fair fight, though this is not entirely true. Red doesn't have a good assessment of the party's strength, but she thinks that the killers would have a hard time taking them out.

The succubus' grand prize for the PCs, which she will keep secret for now, hoping to be able to get them to do both of the tasks she needs done, is the tiefling Lianne. Even when she decides to reveal her prisoner, Red Shroud isn't going to tell the PCs how she captured Rothakon's daughter or why, but she can guarantee them that the tiefling has vital information about their... problem.

Assuming that the PCs accept, she can give some help. She suggests that Seranna will still be in town, because it's the only place she knows and she is afraid of being pressed into the Blood War if she gets out. The danger isn't *that* big, but Red Shroud makes sure to cultivate a healthy fear of the outside in her spawn. The young succubus will probably be going with a different name, and a different shape (if the PCs mention that they have encountered her and she still called herself Seranna, Red is surprised and comments that mistakes like this one will make the mission easier).

What if...?

There's a moral quandry here. Even though they are both fiends, some good parties might decide that helping a mother killing her own daughter is a too much, and the reward isn't essential.

If Red can't convince the PCs, she'll fly into a rage, stand in front of the throne, and shout at them to leave her presence immediately. Her guards quickly enter the room and throw the PCs out. She won't take any more action, though. She hopes that the PCs will become "more reasonable" after they have taken the attack of the four mercenaries.

In addition to that, the DM may wish to have Seranna do something horrible to one of the NPCs that got to Broken Reach with the heroes, if any. Their refusal to kill the fiend has only brought more suffering.

Unusual parties

If noone in the party is capable of casting *dimensional anchor*, it will be very difficult for them to catch the succubus. Seranna doesn't want to fight if she can help it, and she will teleport away at the first chance whenever she spots a threat.

By searching Broken Reach's market, the PCs could find a pair of *shifter's manacles* for sale at the fair price of 6000 gold. Whoever wears these handcuffs is unable to teleport or plane shift, and will take 1d10 damage if he tries to do so. They still need to find a way to get them on her, of course.

If they have an arcane caster but not the spell, they can find a scroll of *dimensional anchor* instead.

Red Shroud usually finds escaped children by sending out people with *detect magic* spells to find who has the aura of a *polymorphed* body. However, this hasn't worked with Seranna. She seems to have the innate ability of masking magical auras on people. This means that they'll have to find some other way; the succubus gives them a pointer by mentioning the name of Mobley. The maurezhi owes her a favor, and if the PCs go to his house and mention this he will help them. Red Shroud's final advice is to keep a *dimensional anchor* spell or two at the ready, unless they want their prey to slip through their clutches.

Hunt The Young

Mobley (see page XXX), the maurezhi that the PCs met in front of the entrance to Broken Reach, lives in a small house in the “noble district” of the city-fortress. Unless the heroes have already managed to piss him off, he will behave very friendly towards them. Always on the lookout for people who can increase his power one way or another, the maurezhi is an amiable guest as long as he still has to figure out whether to eat you or to hire you. The PCs have an ace in their sleeves though: when they remind the fiend of his debit towards Red Shroud, the ghoulish monster is going to snarl for a bit but he'll eventually accept to help them “but remember to tell miss pretty hair that after this one, we are even. Despite everything, I'm not here to serve her”.

WELCOME. WOULD
YOU LIKE TO HAVE
DINNER? I HOPE YOU
LIKE MEAT...
- MOBLEY

The fiend claims that he is sure that Seranna is still in town; he still gets reports of encounters with her on a regular basis. She never sleeps in the same place twice in a row, but he is fairly confident that the heroes have their best chances at finding her if they search the Ratholes (location number 6 on the map). Apparently, she often goes there in the shape of a beggar or bubbler, where she is relatively safe from the fortress' guards. She doesn't usually “hunt” there, though, finding the Ratholes' inhabitants generally filthy and disgusting (which isn't too far from the truth). Mobley isn't going to mention Abrital for now, since he doesn't think it's relevant to the PCs' task.

Since the sods in the Ratholes are mortally afraid of anyone who doesn't look as desperate as they are, the PCs are going to have some problems in getting useful information from them. Many people have heard about a beautiful lady wandering the narrow tunnels and caves, but lots of them think it is just some kind of new urban legend. She only appears very rarely (Seranna spends most of her time *polymorphed*), and few people have actually seen her. A Gather Information check, DC 18, can provide them with one of those persons. He's a human (Jomas/male human expert 6rd/Outlands/neutral) and he claims that the mysterious lady has taken away his son Lakeos not more than fourteen days ago. Jomas, a 35-years old man who looks twice his age, is a first-class bubbler and for most of the time he's drunk on a sort of disgusting mushroom beer he produces in his cavern, so he's not exactly considered a reliable source of information. In this particular case, though, he looks sincere. He's taken to drinking even more, hoping to drown out the sorrow for the loss of Lakeos and the hatred towards the person who he believes has killed him.

Here's the bubbler's tale: one day, this old beggar lady he had never seen before came to his place and asked for some beer. While he was filling up a jug, his 20-years old son Lakeos entered the cavern; after seeing him, the crone muttered an excuse and shuffled out of the cave through a side passage. Just moments later, a beautiful woman entered from that same passage, and asked Lakeos for help in looking for her mother. Though Jomas was very dubious (and, indeed, believed that it was an alcohol-induced hallucination), the young man followed her with a dreamy gaze. That was the last time Jomas saw the woman, the crone, or his son.

Lakeos was last seen in a cave some ten kilometers away from where Jomas is now, where a couple of sods said that he and the woman were having sex; the father searched for him to no avail. While some of the other people in the Ratholes think he may be still alive, and many more believe that he and the woman fell victim to the mysterious murderer which prowls the area, Jomas is convinced that the lady has killed his son – or maybe the woman *is* the mysterious murderer. This conflicts

with all other recounts of the killer's appearance, but the old bubbler also thinks that the old crone and the beautiful woman were the same person, so maybe she can change shape.

Few would pay attention to the words of a drunkard from the Ratholes, but the PCs have no other clue for now. Jomas can point them towards the cave where his son was last seen.

Lakeos was indeed killed by Seranna. The succubus *charmed* him in Jomas' cave and then brought him to a distant tunnel. There, after a couple of *suggestions*, some good kissing and a few minutes of lust, Lakeos was dead from energy drain. Seranna hid the corpse and went away without a second thought. And, as it often happens in these cases, the victim rose as a wight after 24 hours. The undead Lakeos now prowls the area within a hundred meters or so from the cave where he died. As the PCs get close, they will meet with two hobos – a blind gnome (Nigsh/male gnome rogue 4th/Prime/chaotic neutral) and a deaf gnome (Shnig/male gnome rogue 2nd/expert 3rd/Prime/chaotic neutral). The two weirdos will flee screaming upon seeing the PCs, like most Ratholes bubblers do, but after watching the heroes head towards the cave, they will whisper to them from the shadows.

Hiding behind a rock, one of the two gnomes peeks out and whispers towards your direction: "Shirs! Shirs! Don't g'ther! Ther's monstah!" He doesn't sound like he can speak very well, and he seems to be ignoring whatever you say. From behind another rock, you can hear the voice of another gnome, saying with a trembling voice: "That stupid idiotic Shnig is dumb like a bell, sirs! Please don't smite him! There's a monster that way!"

If the PCs stop and reassure the gnomes, and tell them who they are looking for, they can get valuable information. These are the same two hobos who told Jomas about his son and the woman.

After reassuring them that you are not going to kill them, the two gnomes (Shnig, who is dumb, and Nigsh, who is blind), try to tell you about this monster. Shnig says: "Oi whas leadeen' mah fren here" – he stops for a moment to make a rude gesture towards the unseeing Nigsh – trough tha cavesh, and..."

The blind one starts speaking, and after some overlap he says: "I distinctly heard voices from a cave not a hundred yards from here in that direction. Sounded like someone having some real fun, if you catch my drift. And..."

The deaf gnome resumes talking. "So oi go alohng the passhage and hear I shtumble on youn' Lakeosh an' thish pretty wensh who where..." Nigsh talks over his friend (cousin? Brother?) again, explaining that they went away quietly. "Despite all you hear about gnomes, we respect privacy! Got that, tall guys?"

After that, they've never seen Lakeos or the woman again, but what they did meet between one and two days later, after they told Jomas what they'd seen and heard in the cave, was a horrible creature stalking the passages. The deaf gnome manages to say that this monster was about the same height and build as Lakeos, and its features were reminiscing of him too, but they were distorted in a wicked grin. Its flesh was pale and grayish, and its clothes were in tatters. The blind one says that he heard the creature howl the name of Jomas, and that he heard it a half dozen times afterwards, proving that it is still around these caves. Neither of the gnomes has had the heart to tell Jomas about this. They think that the creature, who may or may not be Lakeos, has already killed five people who happened to get near the cave. The gnomes urge you to go somewhere else.

The corridor which the PCs were following proceed for a hundred meters or so, before opening in a 15-meters wide natural cave. Darkish water drips from stalactites on the ceiling, and the ground is mostly made of soft, wet sand. Several other passages, both excavated and natural, lead out from the cavern. There are no light, save for what the PCs brought with them, making the shadows flicker and dance behind every boulder and stalagmite.

A minute or so after the heroes have arrived (if they don't spot the wights before), a low, echoing voice is heard through the air. "Have you come to destroy me?" says Lakeos. At the same time, from all the corners of the cavern, more hissing voices are heard, muttering nonsense.

Lakeos		Al. Lawful Evil	Wight (Abyss)	CR: 4
Str: 12 (+1)	HP: 8d12 (52)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 13 (+1)	AC: 15 (+1 dex, +4 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: -	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +3 (+2 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +4 Grapple: +5		
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +2 base	Melee: +5 (+4 base, +1 strength)		
Cha: 16 (+3)	Will: +8 (+6 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +5 (+4 base, +1 dexterity)		
Attacks		Skills		
Slam, +5 melee, damage 1d4+1+energy drain		Hide +12 (+11 ranks, +1 dex)		
Feats and special abilities		Listen +12 (+11 ranks, +1 wis)		
Feats: Alertness, Blind-fight, Turn resistance (TR 4).		Move Silently +12 (+11 ranks, +1 dex)		
Darkvision 18 mt, undead.		Spot +12 (+11 ranks, +1 wis)		
Create spawn (su): creatures slain rise as wights under his control within 1d4 rounds.				
Energy drain (su): slam attack causes one negative level (DC to remove is 17); Lakeos gains 5 temporary hit points.				

Wight (5)		Al. Lawful Evil	Wight (Abyss)	CR: 3
Str: 12 (+1)	HP: 4d12 (26)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 12 (+1)	AC: 15 (+1 dex, +4 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: -	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 10 (+0)	Ref: +2 (+1 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +2 Grapple: +3		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +1 base	Melee: +3 (+2 base, +1 strength)		
Cha: 15 (+2)	Will: +5 (+4 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +3 (+2 base, +1 dexterity)		
Attacks		Skills		
Slam, +3 melee, damage 1d4+1+energy drain		Hide +8 (+7 ranks, +1 dex)		
Feats and special abilities		Listen +8 (+7 ranks, +1 wis)		
Feats: Alertness, Blind-fight.		Move Silently +8 (+7 ranks, +1 dex)		
Darkvision 18 mt, undead.		Spot +8 (+7 ranks, +1 wis)		
Create spawn (su): creatures slain rise as wights under his control within 1d4 rounds.				
Energy drain (su): slam attack causes one negative level (DC to remove is 14); the wight gains 5 temporary hit points.				

The wights and Lakeos are hiding in the shadows; it takes a Spot check, DC 22, to notice Lakeos (DC 18 to notice the other wights). They aren't doing anything not to be heard, though. Lakeos has noticed that these people who have just arrived are not ordinary tramps. He has decided not to attack; though for some unknown reason he has risen as an unusually powerful wight, his mortal habits of being careful around people who look like trouble has not faded yet.

The heroes may talk with Lakeos. The rest of the wights will not talk or attack unless Lakeos orders them to. The wight has a lot to tell to the PCs, if they won't attack him. One of the five creatures that are now his minions used to be an agent of Red Shroud, sent to investigate the whereabouts of her daughter. He was directed to Lakeos, who killed him after a brief fight. Now, the wight knows almost everything about the situation, he knows who killed him, and he has his plans. Lakeos wants to raise an army of wights to attack Seranna, his murderer, and get his revenge. And he knows he can do it, because after being energy drained to death by Seranna, he has some sort of mystical connection to her, that will enable him to recognize her in any form and through any disguise. Right now, though, he wants the PCs to go away; he won't reveal this plan unless forced to.

If the heroes manage to extort this precious information from the undead monster, they have the opportunity to offer their help. After all, this is going to make the search much easier. And, though they'll probably not say this aloud, they can kill off the undead afterwards. While this *is* indeed the

best plan from a tactical point of view, Good PCs may object to associating with dark monsters that have already murdered and turned to undead five people, and Lawful PCs may object to backstabbing them immediately after. Point is, in the Abyss the Chaotic Evil way *is* the easiest one, and

LIFE IS
OVERRATED,
REALLY
- LAKEOS

there are no gods or karma that are going to punish you for it, either. Except for maybe your conscience.

Alternatives are harder. There is no convincing Lakeos that he'd be better off dead; in fact, after destroying Seranna, he plans on getting public in Broken Reach, turning his servant army into a mercenary force, and eventually moving out. After death, he found that he can think in a much more *clear* fashion, his body and instincts no longer derailing his thoughts, and he's starting to find the cluttered nature of his home town rather irritating. First, though, he must have his revenge. The lust for revenge is the only raging passion he still has.

There *is* another way, though; now that the PCs know that the succubus' victims may come back as wights, they may spend some days searching the city for undead appearances. There are various undead inhabitants of Broken Reach, which have nothing to do with the succubus or the heroes, but after a Gather Information check (DC 24), the PCs can finally stumble on some good chant. It looks like the bashers who compose the unofficial city guard of Broken Reach have recently had to deal with more insane wights than usual, and what the PCs find out is that many of these unliving sods were seen in the companionship of some new hooker just before their demise. It looks like Seranna is taking the appearance of a prostitute to lure victims to her. Reasonably enough, she isn't using the same form twice, but if the PCs meet Ledi Opalheart (see page XXX) they may be able to get a (admittedly inaccurate) list of the "official" prostitutes of Broken Reach. Given enough detective job, they can figure a way to spring a trap on Seranna this way.

Assuming that they strike some kind of deal with Lakeos, the wight is all too willing to help the PCs localize and kill the succubus. He'd rather bring his five servants with him, but the heroes can convince him otherwise relatively easy (after all, disguising six undead horrors is harder than disguising one undead horror). The group only has to tour the tunnels of the Ratholes, or the streets of Broken Reach, for no more than one day before Lakeos freezes and discreetly points at a woman in a crowd, suppressing a snarl.

What happens afterwards depends on how smart the heroes are. Seranna is going to teleport away as soon as she knows she's under attack. Make no mistake, she is a coward, she doesn't like fighting at all, and she is smart enough to know that even if she wants these berks dead, she will have better chances when she isn't being ambushed. If the PCs are going to use *dimensional anchor*, they should cast it first thing and then attack. If they are going the *shifter's manacles* route... well, it's going to be harder. They can always pretend being interested in some extreme sex, though. The use of manacles wouldn't seem too much out of place, and it'd have the added bonus of restricting her physical movement as well. Don't laugh, it's the most perverse way and therefore the easiest one (at least on this plane). Seranna has lived a relatively sheltered life until recently, and while succubi have a natural gift for weaving lies and deceit, they aren't too good at resisting them. The succubus is, naturally, going to use *charme* and *suggestion* even if she doesn't know she's being set up – but hopefully the party can arrange the surprise smartly enough to prevent these problems.

Once Seranna is found and prevented from teleporting, she is bsai-cally defeated. When she understands that she's in the PCs' power, she is going to break. She will fall to her knees, cry, beg, offer her servitude, whatever it takes to survive. Apart from the Blood War and the dead-book, there is no place she would not go to right now. If the PCs still decide to kill her or give her to Red Shroud (the two actions are largely equivalent), they should be able to overpower her without too much trouble.

What if...?

If the PCs are moved by the young succubus, well, they are stupid.

More to the point, though, they will have to decide what to do with her (since she obviously will resume killing people if they leave her alone), and what to tell Red Shroud.

The ruler of Broken Reach is not easily fooled, whatever stunt the heroes, try to pull. She also holds what could very well be the key to their liberation. If the PCs try to cross her and fail, their lives may suddenly become very interesting (albeit short).

Even if they *do* give Red the laugh, they are now without a clue as to how to get out of the Abyss. The DM should let them somehow find that Red is holding Lianne prisoner, and then the PCs may mount a daring raid to rescue the tiefling. Which is going to be exceedingly difficult (Red's nalfeshnee consort could destroy them by himself if they get spotted). But since they wanted to be heroes, they'll have to be heroes.

Red Shroud is true to her word with the reward (not that she places any weight on her word, but the PCs are useful for now). Whatever the PCs managed to bargain for, they got it.

If they asked for access to the portal, they are led by Red herself to the underground chamber. They are greeted by darkness and the buzzing of its chasme guardian (see page XXX). The portal stands, dark, in the middle of the room. The succubus steps aside to let the heroes pass, and watches them. Unfortunately, the tanar'ri lord's curse is as strong as ever; characters that try to step through the portal take 3d10 damage as unnatural energy crackles through their bodies. Red shows signs of surprise, and makes a mental note to investigate these berks further.

If they asked for details about the killers that are after them, they receive everything Red knows – the mercenaries' identities, descriptions and main abilities (see page XXX) as well as their current location, a house not far from Battlefield Courtyard. The succubus graciously gives the PCs permission to deal with these hirelings as they see fit. If the heroes remind her that she promised help in setting up an ambush, her flawless face darkens briefly. She says she doesn't remember promising that, and that the PCs have received enough information to deal with the mercenaries themselves. That is precious help indeed, and they should be grateful.

Red Shroud invites the PCs to come back to her after they've dealt with the four bashers. She has more work for them, and they still need her help.

Covert Operation

The... other task: Red Shroud wants the PCs to discover the list of spies within Broken Reach.

"I want you to recover a list of all of Mithrengo's agents in this fair town. Before you tell me to pike it, let me show you another of my guests, a common friend of ours". The succubus snaps her fingers, and a guard comes out from behind a corner, pulling a chain behind him. A second later, you see that the chain is tied to a familiar figure. Lianne is there before you, gagged and chained, prisoner to the succubus. Red keeps talking: "She didn't elect to make herself useful to me. How convenient that you have been more reasonable. If you perform this task for me, she is yours to do as you wish. We've had occasion to chat, and I know that she has been through a lot since your last encounter. You will find her chant valuable, I think".

"I have a plan, but it's dangerous and there isn't too much time. You have to join up the lord of Mithrengo as mercenaries, so as to gain access to the fortress, and then find the information and get back to Broken Reach". Before you can open mouth to protest, she waves with her hand and says: "This is not as barmy as it sounds. You have been in town for a relatively short time, and I have my own spies and guardians, thanks to which I have managed to considerably slow down the passing of information to the dark fortress. I am certain that, even if they have picked up some chant about you, they have not yet been able to deliver it to Mithrengo". The succubus picks up a bunch of grapes from a plate resting near her throne. "Well, fairly certain".

"I also have an additional plan to give you more time. May I introduce you to my ... other daughters?"

After Red Shroud has said this, two doors in the back of the room open silently, and you come in. No, wait – people just like you come in. Before you can recover from the surprise, an identical copy of your party stands in front of you, just behind Red Shroud's throne. You can easily spot many subtle differences in posture and equipment, but someone who isn't familiar with you could be fooled rather easily. And these impostors look more... evil. Well, at least that certainly won't look out of place.

Unusual Parties

If any PC is not humanoid and Red Shroud can't find an easy way to duplicate him or her, she will simply ignore the problem.

The creatures are immature succubi tanar'ri. They have used their *polymorph* ability to assume the heroes' shapes, and skilled artisans have provided good enough (nonmagical) duplicates of their equipment. Red explains that the party will leave Broken Reach in secret, and these substitutes will

fool any spy into believing that they are still in town. It's not a perfect idea, but it will give the heroes more time. Red reassures the PCs that she will ensure that her daughters behave.

As Red Shroud will make sure to make clear, the PCs will have to play this smooth, or die. Mithrengo is full of soldiers and fiends as seldom it has been before, and if they are discovered, they will have no hope of escaping alive. Luckily, the lord of the fortress still feels in need of more troops, and he will not turn away capable mercenaries that can stand to fiends in combat.

Red Shroud doesn't have anything more to tell the PCs. They will leave Broken Reach through a secret passage which leads from the palace to a deserted watchtower near the town's outskirts on the outside. From there, they are to approach Mithrengo, and claim that they are mercenaries looking for employment with the fortress' army. Hopefully, they will be let in. At that point, they have to find out the identity of all the spies in Broken Reach. When they have this information, they will return to the city, report to Red Shroud, and pick up their tiefling friend.

Red's last piece of advice is that the Lord of Mithrengo is capable of seeing through any illusion, so they must be careful in their choice of magic during this mission. The succubus personally leads them through her palace, to the secret passage. There are no guards in front of the passage – a section of wall, apparently similar to any other wall, which noiselessly slides aside to reveal a dark staircase spiralling downwards. After the heroes have entered, Red Shroud closes the passage, leaving them in the dark. The staircase only goes down a few meters, and then ends in an approximately straight corridor, which bends very slightly upwards. The long tunnel proceeds for maybe two kilometers and ends in another spiral stairway, which ends in a stone trapdoor. Lifting the slab, the heroes find themselves on the lower floor of a stone watchtower, out of Broken Reach.

As they walk on the blasted plain towards Mithrengo, which is a faint outline on the horizon currently, the PCs will sooner or later be intercepted by a patrol similar to the one described on page XXX. Since the heroes' arrival several days ago, Mithrengo's soldier have been getting more nervous, especially with regards to people coming from the direction of Broken Reach. When the heroes mention that they are mercenaries looking for employment, the demon leading the patrol says that they have no room for weaklings. As soon as the PCs start protesting, the fiend makes a gesture towards one of the babaus, who jumps on the PCs in a surprise attack!

Unusual Parties

If the PCs don't have anyone with decent Bluff and Diplomacy skills, you may consider having Red Shroud give them some non-permanent skill boosting magic items. The PCs can't afford being discovered while in Mithrengo.

More of the Dark

Red Shroud – much more scheming than the average tanar'ri – does not want to kill the spies. Rather, she wants to know who they are and what they are doing, so that she is able to feed them false information. Besides, killing the spies would only result in the Lord of Mithrengo sending new ones, ones that she wouldn't know.

What if...?

If the heroes don't want to leave immediately, but they'd rather rest or do something else, that's not a problem for Red. A nice idea would be to go to Mobley's house and see if the maurezhi has more information. However, the price may be too high...

Babau		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 7
Str: 22 (+6)	HP: 9d8+45 (85)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 12 (+1)	AC: 19 (+1 dex, +8 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 20 (+5)	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 14 (+2)	Ref: +7 (+6 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +9 Grapple: +15		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +11 (+6 base, +5 con)	Melee: +15 (+9 base, +6 strength)		
Cha: 16 (+3)	Will: +7 (+6 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +10 (+9 base, +1 dexterity)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, +15 melee, damage 1d6+6, and		Climb +18 (+12 ranks, +6 str)		
Bite +13 melee, damage 1d6+3, or		Disable Device +13 (+11 ranks, +2 int)		
+1 cold iron spear, +17/+12 melee, damage 1d8+10, crit x3, or		Disguise +14 (+11 ranks, +3 cha)		
+1 cold iron spear, +13 range 6 mt, damage 1d8+7, crit x3		Escape Artist +12 (+11 ranks, +1 dex)		
Feats and special abilities		Hide +20 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex)		
Feats: Cleave, Multiattack, Power attack, Weapon focus: spear		Listen +20 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis)		
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.		Move Silently +20 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex)		
Sneak attack +2d6, damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18		Open Lock +12 (+11 ranks, +1 dex)		
mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire		Search +21 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +2 int)		
10, spell resistance 16, telepathy within 30 mt.		Sleight of Hand +12 (+11 ranks, +1 dex)		
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> ,		Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*)		
<i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); caster level 9 th .		Use Rope +3 (+1 dex, +2 synergy**)		
Protective slime (su): any weapon or character touching the babau takes		* when following tracks		
1d8 damage, ignoring hardness; magic weapon and characters may		** when binding someone		
roll a Reflex save, DC 18, to avoid.				
Summon 1 babau 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.				
Equipment				
+1 cold iron spear (damage 1d6+1, crit x3) (faint evocation, CL 3)				

None of the other patrol members interfere in the combat. When the PCs have disposed of the fiend, the leader grins and says that maybe Mithrengo can find a use for them. The heroes are led towards the dark fortress.

Mithrengo

Mithrengo is a chaotic building, made of stone and metal, which stands together thanks to sheer mass and strength more than any sort of architectural cunning. The fortress squats on the reddish plains as an iron toad. Black towers manned by fiends jut out at random angles and directions, metal plates cover dark stone, and gates forged from solid adamantium bar the entrance. Even the inside walls are made from thick slabs of hewn stone, and every single door is made of wrought iron, engraved with scenes of victory in the Blood War. *Everburning torches* give off a diffuse red light, which veers to purple here and there. The ceilings are at least seven meters tall in all rooms, and all passages are wide enough to accommodate a Huge creature.

The fortress' floors aren't terribly well-defined. Rooms have been built at various heights, stairs go up and down, but the overall height is about twenty to thirty meters. Some of the towers are much higher, up to seventy meters tall; there are no stairs going up to these towers, so that only tanar'ri (with *greater teleport*) can go up there.

The whole fortress has been covered in *unhallow* spells (with a caster level of 20). This means that the entire place is a *magic circle against good* (all creatures have a +2 deflection bonus to AC and +2 resistance to saves against good creatures; possession, charme and similar effects are suppressed, and good summoned creatures can't enter unless their SR is higher than 1d20+20), attempts to turn undead suffer a –4 penalty, and attempts to rebuke undead have a +4 profane bonus.

Most rooms in Mithrengo have been converted to dormitories for the mercenaries and storing rooms for weapons, spell components and supplies. The PCs will be assigned beds in one of the sleeping rooms, and will be told that the wage for them is two hundred gold pieces per week, which may increase if they prove their worthiness in battle and don't cause trouble. This isn't too interesting for the heroes (who hopefully aren't going to stay here for weeks); what they want is to find the list as soon as possible. Luckily, they are allowed to wander around as much as they like, and they can ask around if they need to know where a certain place is or how to get somewhere.

There are lots of fiends wandering around in the fortress. Most of them are babau, but there's also a sizeable amount of bar'lgura – apelike demons covered in red-brown fur and armed with fearsome claws and tusks.

Bar'lgura		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 7
Str: 17 (+3)	HP: 6d8+12 (39)	Speed: 9, climb 9		
Dex: 13 (+1)	AC: 20 (+1 dex, +9 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 15 (+2)	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 10 (+0)	Ref: +6 (+5 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +6 Grapple: +9		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +7 (+5 base, +2 con)	Melee: +9 (+6 base, +3 strength)		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: +6 (+5 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +7 (+6 base, +1 dexterity)		
Attacks 2 claws, +9 melee, damage 1d4+3, and Bite +4 melee, damage 1d6+1				Skills Climb +12 (+9 ranks, +3 str) Concentration +11 (+9 ranks, +2 con) Hide +22 (+9 ranks, +12 racial, +1 dex) Move Silently +10 (+9 ranks, +1 dex) Listen +20 (+9 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis, +2 alertness) Search +9 ranks Sense motive +10 (+9 ranks, +1 wis) Spot +20 (+9 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis, +2 alertness) Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*)
Feats and special abilities Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Mobility, Spring attack. All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 17, telepathy within 30 mt. Spring attack is a bonus feat. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>desecrate</i> , <i>detect good</i> , <i>detect thoughts</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>entangle</i> , <i>fear</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>telekinesis</i> , <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); 2/day – <i>change self</i> , <i>invisibility</i> , <i>spectral hand</i> . Caster level 8 th . Chameleon (ex): a bar'lgura can change its color to match its surroundings as a free action. This gives it a +12 racial bonus to Hide checks. Summon 1d6 babau 1/day with 35% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.				* when following tracks

Occasionally, the PCs can spot a froglike hezrou or a tauric bulezau coming back from a patrol; these demons don't look very content of having to do patrol duty, and the PCs should leave them alone. Every now and then, the gates open wide and one of the patrols pushes in a horde of manes. These creatures are barely considered tanar'ri at all; they are petitioner spirits of the chaotic evil dead, and they look like revolting humanoids about one meter tall, with white eyes that ooze a thick yellowish fluid, clawed hands, and sparse dirty hair. They are mindless and have no free will. The fiends routinely use them as cannon fodder in their wars; manes can't easily be killed since even if they are destroyed, they will reform in 24 hours.

Manes		Al. Chaotic Evil	Small Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 1
Str: 10 (+0)	HP: 1d8 (4)	Speed: 6		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 12 (+1 size, +1 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 10 (+0)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 2 (-4)	Ref: +2 base	BAB: +1 Grapple: -3		
Wis: 4 (-3)	For: +2 base	Melee: +2 (+1 base, +1 size)		
Cha: 6 (-2)	Will: +0 (+2 base, -2 wis)	Ranged: +2 (+1 base, +1 size)		
Attacks 2 claws, +2 melee, damage 1d4, and Bite +0 melee, damage 1d4				Skills Hide +8 (+4 ranks, +4 size) Listen +2 (+4 ranks, -2 wis) Move silently +4 ranks Spot +3 (+4 ranks, -2 wis)
Feats and special abilities Feats: Multiattack All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Damage reduction 5/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 5. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); caster level 9 th . Acid cloud (ex): when killed, a manes dissipates in an acid cloud. Those within 3 meters must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 10) or take 1d6 acid damage. Mindless (ex): immune to mind-influencing effects. Reformation (su): when slain, a manes will reform in one day. Demon lords and creatures of similar power can devour a manes to permanently destroy it.				

Besides dormitories and warehouses, here are other interesting places within Mithrengo:

1. The courtyard is relatively small compared to the fortress' size, and rather cramped too. At all moments, there are several dozens of mercenaries here, training. Ten or so babaus stand guard around – they are supposed to make sure that noone kills each other, but they are more inclined to point and laugh. Clumps of reddish sand mark the points where “accidents” have occurred. If the PCs stay here for any length of time, they may be challenged by some mercenaries to a sparring match.

2. This area comprises a small unholy chapel and the living quarters of Father Smirk, a gnoll priest of Yeenoghu who provides some magical healing and much, mostly unrequested, religious advice for the Lord of Mithrengo. The two don't really like each other; however, Father Smirk doesn't leave or act against the Lord because he hopes that he can extend his influence to Broken Reach should the attack be successful. In turn, the Lord doesn't kill the gnoll because he finds his priestly magic useful.

The chapel is dominated by a large statue of Yeenoghu the gnoll demon god: a gaunt, almost skeletal humanoid, with a hyena's face and wielding a three-headed flail. Father Smirk has two personal bodyguards; the two massive gnolls stand guard in the chapel almost constantly. They don't speak the common tongue, only Gnoll, and if someone comes in they'll just growl at him until Father Smirk comes to the chapel. Yeenoghu is “only” an archfiend, and it can't grant high level spells; but here in this chapel Father Smirk can cast up to fourth level spells.

The gnoll priest is an elderly gnoll, his hair going white on his head and along his back, wearing a leather armor made from demon hide. Whenever he's in public, he is holding a flail in his hand, a perfect replica of the one the statue is wielding. Father Smirk (is that a name or a nickname?) wears a hyena-like grin on his face at all times, and has a condescending, patronizing attitude that grates on the nerves of anyone he's talking to. Unsurprisingly, he hasn't had too much success in his quest to gain converts. If the heroes don't mind receiving the blessings of a dark god, Smirk can heal them for standard PHB fares (70 gold per spell level, CL 7). Not many people come to the chapel, and the area is generally deserted except for the gnolls.

YEEEEEEES?
- FATHER
SMIRK,
GRINNING

Father Smirk		Al. Chaotic Evil	Gnoll Cleric 7 th (Abyss)		CR: 5
Str: 13 (+1)	HP: 2d8+7d8+9 (49)	Speed: 6	Armor: medium % fail.: 25% Check pen.: -5		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 16 (+3 armor, +1 natural, +2 shield)				
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +4 improved initiative	BAB: +5	Grapple: +6		
Int: 8 (-1)	Ref: +4 (+2 base, +2 lightning reflexes)	Melee: +6 (+5 base, +1 strength)			
Wis: 16 (+3)	For: +9 (+7 base, +2 con)	Ranged: +5 base			
Cha: 9 (-1)	Will: +8 (+5 base, +3 wis)				
Attacks +1 cold iron flail, +7 melee, damage 1d8+2, crit x2			Skills Concentration +4 (+3 ranks, +1 con) Listen +5 (+2 ranks, +3 wis) Spellcraft +3 (+4 ranks, -1 int) Spot +6 (+3 ranks, +3 wis)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Combat casting, Craft magic arms and armor, Lightning reflexes, Power attack, Weapon focus: flail Darkvision 18 mt. Evil Domain (evil spells cast at +1 CL); War Domain (proficiency and Weapon Focus: flail), rebuke undead. Cleric spells/day: 6/5+1/4+1/3+1/1+1 Cleric spells prepared: 0 th – create water, cure minor wounds, cure minor wounds, detect magic, read magic, guidance; 1 st – cause fear, cure light wounds, cure light wounds, magic weapon, protection from good, sanctuary; 2 nd – bear's endurance, cure moderate wounds, cure moderate wounds, hold person, spiritual weapon; 3 rd – animate dead, cure serious wounds, invisibility purge, magic circle against good; 4 th – divine power, poison.					
Equipment +2 demon hide armor (equivalent to a masterwork scale mail armor, AB +6, max dex +3, check penalty -3, spell failure 25%) (moderate abjuration, CL 6) +1 cold iron flail (damage 1d8+1, crit x2) (faint evocation, CL 3) Bag of spell components including 2 onyxes worth 300 GP.					

Gnoll bodyguards		Al. Chaotic Evil	Gnoll Warrior 4 th (Abyss)	CR: 5
Str: 16 (+3)	HP: 2d8+4d10+12 (43)	Speed: 6		
Dex: 11 (+0)	AC: 16 (+3 armor, +1 natural, +2 shield)	Armor: medium		
Con: 14 (+2)	Initiative: +4 improved initiative	% fail.: 35%	Check pen.: -5	
Int: 8 (-1)	Ref: +1 base	BAB: +5	Grapple: +8	
Wis: 11 (+0)	For: +9 (+7 base, +2 con)	Melee: +8 (+5 base, +3 strength)		
Cha: 8 (-1)	Will: +1 base	Ranged: +5 base		
<u>Attacks</u>			<u>Skills</u>	
+1 battleaxe, +10 melee, damage 1d8+4, crit x3			Intimidate +3 (+4 ranks, -1 cha)	
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>			Listen +2 ranks	
Feats: Improved initiative, Power attack, Weapon focus: battleaxe			Spot +3 ranks	
Darkvision 18 mt.				
<u>Equipment</u>				
+1 battleaxe (damage 1d8+1, crit x3) (faint evocation, CL 3)				
Heavy wooden shield (AB +2, check penalty -2, spell failure 15%)				
Hide armor (AB +3, max dex +4, check penalty -3, spell failure 20%)				

If, for any reason, a fight occurs and the priest gets killed, the heroes can get away with it surprisingly easy. The gnoll wasn't liked at all, and no serious investigation will be done.

The priest's quarters consist of a bedroom and a filthy privy that probably hasn't been cleaned since it was built. The bedroom contains a large bed and several furniture items, mostly empty. Searching carefully, the PCs may find 230 gold coins and 100 stingers in a drawer and a *scroll of break enchantment* (CL 9) in another.

3. The fortress' treasury is a heavily guarded room, with walls made of steel and granite. The only entrance is a small adamantine door, guarded at all times by two hezrous and four bulezaus. Additionally, a spellcasting guard (**male tiefling wizard 7th/Abyss/chaotic evil**) with a *ring of invisibility* is watching nearby, silently. The inside of the vault is covered by a *dimensional lock* spell (CL 15). The Lord of Mithrengo has spent considerable resources in securing this place, and it is pretty much impregnable. The money, gems and precious items it contains are worth more than two million gold pieces.

4. The throne room of Mithrengo is not seeing much use in these days. The Lord spends most of his time secluded in his rooms, studying plans and assembling intelligence. The throne is carved within the wall opposing the entrance, so that noone can be behind the ruler, and the rest of the room is covered in expensive, if a bit damaged, red and black carpets. Randomly scattered columns of marble sustain the high ceiling.

Unbeknown to anyone within the fortress – with the possible exception of the Lord himself – a seldom-used secret passage leads from here to the Lord's tower. A secret switch on the throne can cause it to quickly rotate and leave its occupant to a dark tunnel between the walls, which leads up to the tower's second floor. The mechanism only works if at least 500 kg of weight are resting on the throne, making it suitable for use by a nalfeshnee or similar creature. The tunnel is in fact just barely wide enough for a Huge creature to cross it. However, lack of use and maintenance have damaged the device, and if it is used there is a 25% chance that it will break down for good.

5. Mithrengo's dungeons are a single level extending underneath the entire fortress. They mostly contain spacious torture rooms and prisons, but the prisons are now being used to herd many hundreds, maybe thousands, of dretches and manes. The horde amassed here is nothing when compared to the armies of millions that fight in the Blood War, but it is a striking sight – made even more impressive by the cramped space. The lowly fiends are thrown together in the cells, packed together so tight that they are actually one on the other most of the time.

AS FUN AS A
BARREL OF MITANES
– ABYSSAL SAYING

Fairly often, a fiend here dies from the horrible conditions it has to endure. This most often happens to the smaller and less powerful manes, it will evaporate in a cloud of acid vapor, and reform some time later. The acrid smell is everpresent in the dungeons, overpowering the stench of the fiends themselves. A side-effect of these events

is that dead manes sometimes reform outside of the cell – an unorthodox way of escaping, but fairly effective.

If the PCs wander in the dungeons, they may encounter a group of hostile manes (the creatures instinctively band together). The little fiends attack without fear or intelligence until they are all destroyed. Shortly after, they will notice that the smell of acid comes particularly strong from a corridor nearby. If they investigate, they find the half-corroded corpse of another mercenary, who probably wandered here and was attacked by the manes just minutes before. The corpse is surrounded by a thick acid cloud as a result of the many dead manes and the narrow environment; unless the PCs wait at least ten minutes for it to dissipate, they take 1 acid damage per round while searching the corpse. The dead mercenary had 300 jinx, a gem worth 50 gold coins, and a curious ring made in some elastic gum-like material (it's a *ring of jumping*, faint transmutation, CL 2).

6. The guard towers have no stairs between their floors. The PCs enter in a circular room, manned by a couple babaus, with no other exits. The tanar'ri use their *greater teleport* power to move between the levels of each tower.

7. The area around this tower, which stands in the middle of a small internal courtyard, is deserted; if the PCs ask around, they are told that it is said to be infested, and that bad stuff happens to those that tried to go inside. The iron door leading into this tower is barred shut – from the inside, as if to keep people out. If the PCs make a Gather Information check, DC 15, they learn that eventually, a fiend closed the door from the inside and teleported out. If they beat DC 20, they can actually locate the fiend; he is a hezrou who will at first snarl an order the party to leave the tower alone, and then offer chant about its content in return for 500 jinx in gems or jewelry.

If the PCs are willing to offer that kind of bribe, the hezrou tells them that the tower contains a bodak. The undead monster doesn't go out of the tower, maybe because it is afraid of the light, but it is all too willing to kill anyone going in. The hezrou tells the PCs (not without some malevolent glee) that before he locked the door, a whole bunch of people went in, and when he entered there were at least ten bodaks hiding there. He killed most of them, sealed the rest in the upper levels, barred the door and teleported out. He doesn't know how many are left, certainly at least two but no more than six, and he doesn't care. The hezrou tells the PCs that they should not enter, "even though, and this should be very clear, the possessions of most of the berks who went up there are still somewhere in the tower". The grinning tanar'ri has nothing else to tell the PCs.

Should the PCs decide to challenge the bodaks, they first need to find a way to pass the barred door. If they manage that, they find that each level of the tower is a single circular room, with stairs leading to the next one. The torches have long since burned out, and there are no windows, so each room is shrouded in darkness. The first level is empty except for the skeletons of five unlucky berks. The door to the second room is locked with an adamantium padlock (DC 30 to pick, hardness 20, 40 hit points).

The second room looks empty. The next door is open. However, PCs that can beat DC 20 on a Listen check can hear shuffling from above. After one minute, two bodaks enter from the third room.

Unusual Parties

Without a spellcaster capable of casting *death ward*, this encounter is much, much more dangerous. The PCs can still come up with some clever plan, but the solution won't be so obvious.

What if...?

If the PCs barge in unprepared, they deserve to die. A door barred from the inside, another one locked with adamantium, no one coming anywhere close to the tower, and they don't think about gathering information before entering?

But if you're feeling merciful, delay the entrance of the rest of the bodaks, so that the heroes can deal with them one at a time.

Bodak (5)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Undead (Abyss)	CR: 8
Str: 13 (+1)	HP: 9d12 (58)	Speed: 6		
Dex: 15 (+2)	AC: 20 (+2 dex, +8 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: -	Initiative: +6 (+4 improved init, +2 dex)	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 6 (-2)	Ref: +5 (+3 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +4 Grapple: +5		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +3 base	Melee: +5 (+4 base, +1 str)		
Cha: 12 (+1)	Will: +7 (+6 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +6 (+4 base, +2 dex)		
Attacks				Skills
Slam, +6 melee, damage 1d8+1				Listen +11 (+8 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)
Feats and special abilities				Move silently +10 (+8 ranks, +2 dex)
Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Improved initiative, Weapon focus (slam).				Spot +11 (+8 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)
Damage reduction 5/cold iron, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity, resistance to acid and fire 10, undead.				
Vulnerability to sunlight (1 damage/round).				
Death gaze (su): range 9 meters, Fortitude DC 15 negates. Humanoids slain by this attack become bodaks in 24 hours.				

After one round, a third bodak enters. After another round, a fourth bodak enters. After yet another round, the fifth and last bodak joins the fight. This is a potentially lethal combat, but if the PCs have prepared themselves carefully, they can manage to get out of this alive. If they talked to the hezrou and knew what to expect, the party cleric should have prepared lots of *death wards*. This spell cast on each member of the party makes bodaks practically harmless for tough heroes like the PCs. On the other hand, don't forget that the area is *unhallowed* and all attempts to turn undead have a –4 penalty (evil clerics can rebuke with a +4 profane bonus, though). Basically, the fight is very nasty but it becomes very easy with the right preparation; another example of how information is the most powerful of weapons.

If the PCs can defeat all the bodaks, they are free to search the tower. There are a total of five rooms; the second one (where the fight takes place) looks empty but it actually contains 123 gold coins scattered around. If the party searches it, multiply the result of their Search roll by 4 to find out how many coins they find (obviously, no more than 123). The third room contains old dried blood stains everywhere and some smashed furniture, all covered in a thin layer of dust. Searching the room, the PCs can find a *scroll of detect thoughts* (CL 3, faint divination) and (if they beat Search DC 30 or scan the room with *detect magic*) a single *bead of force* (CL 10, moderate evocation). There are also some heavily damaged leather armor, and a couple of rusted swords. The fourth room is similar to the previous one; a discarded and torn wizardly robe contains a *wand of color spray* (CL 1, faint illusion, 47 charges) and a *chain of holding* (CL 3, faint enchantment). This last item is a short length of iron chain, just three links long, which can cast *hold person*. Every time it is used, a link is removed, so it has three “charges” left.

A Cutter with Potential

If a PC gets killed by a bodak, you might consider the idea of letting him be raised as a bodak himself.

Apart from the obvious advantage of allowing the player to keep his character, such an event has ample opportunities for good roleplaying and it is an awesome evolution for the character.

If you have *Savage Species* by Wizards of the Coast, you can easily create a bodak monstrous class which keeps the game balanced. You may “spread” the death gaze ability over several levels by having it start as a “fatigue gaze”, then an “exhaustion gaze” and finally gain its full power at the last bodak level.

The fourth room of the tower is empty; a corner, however, is covered in a large cobweb. If the PCs search it, they don't find anything special, but they risk being bitten by an Abyssal poisonous spider. The spider – just an inch long – attacks at +5 and draws an attack of opportunity when doing so, but will probably get the surprise. Its poison has DC 13 and deals 1d6 Strength damage as initial and secondary damage. Any damage will squish it.

The final room is empty, and there are large observation windows looking out (the bodaks probably never went here). A corpse is resting on a wall, wearing half plate armor and a beautiful steel shield, engraved with multiple geometrical patterns in gold and copper. The shield is a *heavy steel shield* +2 (moderate abjuration, CL 6). A leather bag near the poor sod's side contains 580 jinx. The tower

gives a good look to all sides of the fortress; the only higher tower is the tower of the Lord. Inside the tallest room, the PCs can see the light of a lantern, and a massive shape moving around.

If the PCs clear the tower, the new will get known very quickly. After one day or so (less if they tell someone about their exploit), they will hear rumors that the Lord has heard about their deed and is becoming interested in them. Though the Lord will not contact them directly, he will be willing to talk if the PCs seek him. He'll mention that he liked to use the tower as a lure to eliminate loud-mouths and braggards out of his army, but he's nevertheless satisfied that it has been taken care of. He'll double the PCs' wages as a plus. Smart PCs may use this as their occasion to search his tower, if they can find a way to keep him out of it long enough.

8. The tower of the Lord is the tallest one in the building. It is composed of eight levels, connected by massive stone stairs running along the walls. In front of the main door to the tower, which is closed and made of adamantium but is not locked, two hezrous stand guard. Each floor is lavishly furnished with expensive couches and chairs, gold-plated tables, jewelled mirrors, statues and paintings depicting victorious tanar'ri lords, and other valuable objects of art. The second-to-last floor contains a massive bed, built in steel, gold and platinum, and sporting a deva-skin mattress.

WE MUST GATHER
MORE INTELLIGENCE,
DEVISE A STRATEGY
- THE LORD OF
MITHRENGO

The current Lord of Mithrengo is a powerful nalfeshnee tanar'ri. He looks like a six meters tall bloated humanoid, with a goat's head, apelike arms and two small feathery wings on his back. His greenish skin is tensed and covered in warts. The Lord of Mithrengo wears lots of jewelry, but it doesn't do much to improve his appearance. He holds creatures below his station in great disdain, and practically never talks to his troops or servants. When

he does talk with someone, he often mentions that he has so much work to do sorting out intelligence that he has no time to cheer up the soldiers, and that the attack is imminent. The Lord of Mithrengo always speaks in a slow, measured tone, designed to impress the listener and express self-confidence.

He has claimed Mithrengo for himself after a party of Prime heroes stormed the fortress and killed its previous occupant. It is said that Red Shroud had something to do with that... and the nalfeshnee knows that the succubus is his primary threat – not to count that the city of Broken Reach would be a great prize in itself. It has taken him many decades to gather the resources needed for an attack, and now he has a formidable army, much more powerful than Red's little militia. He's planning to use his mortal troops to storm the barricades and towers, and then send his hordes of manes down the tunnels, where they'll be killed in droves and hopefully fill the caves with acidic gas; when the gas dissipates, he'll send in his most powerful troops and hopefully avoid a long guerrilla warfare. However, the Reach is an extremely defensible position. The only known entrance is protected by dozens of watch towers and fortifications. And that's only the beginning – the town itself is a huge maze of tunnels which his troops don't know well, and where his army would be bled to destruction.

...THEN, WE WILL
STAGE A DIRECT
ASSAULT!
- THE LORD OF
MITHRENGO

The Lord of Mithrengo		Al. Chaotic Evil	Huge Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 15
Str: 25 (+7)	HP: 16d8+160 (232)	Speed: 9, fly 12 (poor)		
Dex: 12 (+1)	AC: 29 (+1 dex, +18 nat, -2 size, +2 def)	Armor: none		
Con: 29 (+9)	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0%	Check pen.: 0	
Int: 23 (+6)	Ref: +11 (+10 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +16	Grapple: +31	
Wis: 23 (+6)	For: +18 (+10 base, +8 con)	Melee: +21 (+16 base, +7 strength, -2 size)		
Cha: 20 (+5)	Will: +16 (+10 base, +6 wis)	Ranged: +17 (+16 base, +1 dexterity, -2 size)		
Attacks			Skills	
Bite, +22 melee, damage 2d8+7, and 2 claws, +19 melee, damage 1d8+3			Bluff +24 (+19 ranks, +5 cha)	
Feats and special abilities			Concentration +27 (+19 ranks, +8 con)	
Feats: Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Multiattack, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite).			Diplomacy +26 (+19 ranks, +5 cha, +2 synergy)	
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.			Disguise +7 (+5 cha, +2 synergy****)	
Damage reduction 10/good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 22, telepathy within 30 mt, constant <i>true seeing</i> .			Hide +12 (+19 ranks, +1 dex, -8 size)	
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>call lightning</i> (DC 18), <i>feeblemind</i> (DC 20), <i>greater dispel magic</i> , <i>slow</i> (DC 18), <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only), <i>unholy aura</i> (DC 23); caster level 12 th .			Intimidate +26 (+19 ranks, +5 cha, +2 synergy)	
Smite (su): 3/day can create a nimbus of light; on the following round, it bursts and any creature within 18 meters must save on Will (DC 23) or be dazed for 1d10 rounds from visions of its worst fears. Tanar'ri are immune.			Knowledge (arcana) +25 (+19 ranks, +6 int)	
2/day summon 1d4 vrocks, 1d4 hezrous, or 1 glabrezu with 50% success, or a nalfeshnee with 20% success. Equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.			Knowledge (Abyss) +25 (+19 ranks, +6 int)	
Equipment			Listen +33 (+19 ranks, +8 racial, +6 wis)	
Lots of nonmagical jewels, for a combined value of 5000 jinx.			Move Silently +20 (+19 ranks, +1 dex)	
<i>Ring of major elemental resistance (fire)</i> (fire resistance 20) (moderate abjuration, CL 7)			Search +25 (+19 ranks, +6 int)	
<i>Ring of protection</i> +2 (moderate abjuration, CL 6)			Sense motive +25 (+19 ranks, +6 wis)	
<i>Golembane scarab</i> (moderate divination, CL 8)			Spellcraft +28 (+19 ranks, +7 int, +2 synergy***)	
<i>Amulet of health</i> +2 (moderate transmutation, CL 8)			Spot +33 (+19 ranks, +8 racial, +6 wis)	
			Survival +10 (+6 wis, +2 synergy*, +2 synergy**)	
			Use magic device +26 (+19 ranks, +5 cha, +2 synergy****)	
			* when following tracks	
			** on the Abyss	
			*** with scrolls	
			**** when acting in character	

For this reason, he has sent a large number of spies and agents into the town, with instructions to report on every strange occurrence and to keep close track of Red Shroud's military capabilities. He knows that the succubus is a master of deception, and he's personally conducting a very patient job of piecing together the chant he gathers, confronting reports and cross-referencing information, in the hope of reaching reliable data on the Reach. The highest room of the tower is devoted to this task. It is full of huge iron tables and bookshelves, and hundreds of reports and documents are strewn everywhere. Lots of them come from Broken Reach, but not all; the Lord of Mithrengo is keeping a close eye on every neighbouring power. The demon spends most of his time here. If the PCs can get him out somehow, they can search the room and eventually find a list of the spies in Mithrengo, complete with names, race, false identity and wage. The problem is, it will take them no less than one hour of searching before they can locate the list, and even if they can get past the hezrou guards (hint: they don't see invisible things), they still have to find a way to distract the Lord of Mithrengo, possibly without raising suspicion. And, as a nalfeshnee, he does see invisible things very well.

Chant Gathering At Its Finest

When the heroes finally return to Red Shroud with the list of spies, she is certainly glad to see them. The succubus will order Lianne's release, and a servant will drag her from the dungeons, bound with chains, and hand her to the heroes.

The prompt payment doesn't mean that the succubus has somehow turned honorable overnight. Rather, she has other intentions. Red Shroud has no further use for the PCs, and she has reasons to want them out of town for good. At the very least, they are powerful and have powerful enemies, and may be used by someone else against her, in a moment which is already hard for her city. It'd

be much better if they got killed, but the succubus must not appear to be connected to this – if they survive, they must not consider her another enemy.

Depending on the agreements they got with Red Shroud, the four killers may still be alive. If this is the case, Red will discreetly and through several intermediaries warn the bashers that the PCs know them and are going to get them. Otherwise, she will put someone on their tails and wait for an occasion to lend their enemies a bit of covert help. Who knows, this may even earn her another ally.

Lianne is in a very bad position and it will not be hard to get her to reveal everything she knows. After the mess in Sigil, she tried to stay out of the Abyss for good. However, for a woman born and raised by demons, adapting to a more orderly social life proved too hard. While stealing from a Lady's Ward house, she put a rich merchant who spotted her and insulted her into the dead-book. This placed her on the Harmonium's wanted list, so she killed a couple of patrol guards – soon

enough, she couldn't walk down the street for fear of being recognized. Instead of making her feared and respected, as it should be, killing people only led to being targeted for scragging at all costs.

After some weeks of this, she just couldn't take it any more. She stepped through the portal in the slags to Castle Maldithar and found it in chaos. Apparently, a baatezu army was invading from underground, the orb she stole was nowhere to be found, and half of the mercenary force was in rout. Her father

Rothakon was furious and getting ready to leave. Lianne went to him and explained what happened – and was furiously attacked by the angered half-fiend. She escaped with the certainty that only by recovering the Selthian Orb she could reenter her family's graces.

Disguising herself carefully among the mercenaries, Lianne left without meeting her father again. She camped not far from the fortress, staying well hidden from the creatures of darkness, and watched the castle fall and the baatezu retreat before the Worm. Then, she left. She was very careful on the dark plains surrounding Maldithar, and reached the portal several days after the PCs. There, she successfully bluffed the demons still guarding it to believe that she had orders from her father and that they must let them pass or suffer the wrath of Rothakon.

Once in Broken Reach, though, her luck was over. Somehow, Red Shroud got wind of her and decided to scrag her. Though the tiefling cannot know this, one of the weapon merchants recognized her and when the chant reached the succubus, she decided that the tiefling would be a good bargain item with the PCs.

Lianne has learned something more during her brief stay in Maldithar. Her grandfather, the demon lord Ithla-Sathlo, has placed a powerful curse on the portal leading from Sigil to Maldithar, which traps everyone passing through in the Abyss. The aim of the curse was to capture the Selthian Orb. Lianne doesn't know what Ithla-Sathlo wanted to do with the Orb; the only thing she knows is that the artefact seems to be lost. When the retriever arrived, Rothakon was busy elsewhere and there was a bit of confusion. Then, the PCs arrived, were captured, and escaped; then all hell broke loose. With the knowledge that the heroes were after the Orb in Sigil, Rothakon convinced himself that they had somehow stolen it when they escaped from their cells; however, by that time it was way too late to look for them in the blazing castle (besides, they could very well have escaped from the fortress entirely).

Now for the future. Lianne wants the Orb, and the PCs want to get out of the Abyss. She is trapped here too, having used the portal, but she doesn't care much about it. After the experience in

WHAT DID THESE
HARMONIUM WANT
FROM ME? THE BERS
KILLED WASN'T EVEN
THEIR FRIEND!
- LIANNE

More of the Dark

How could Rothakon miss the fact that the Orb never arrived to Maldithar in the first place? The answer lies in the innate treachery of Abyssal creatures.

The fiend who was responsible for securing the artefact after the retriever's arrival decided to lie to his master and tell him that the Orb was safe and locked away. This lie was undiscovered and it eventually led to Rothakon blaming the PCs.

Since that particular fiend died in the subsequent battle, only the powers know this bit of chant right now.

Sigil, she doesn't wish to leave the plane any time soon. She too suspects that the PCs have the Orb, but (like her father) she doesn't have the foggiest idea of how they could have taken it. In fact, while they interrogate her, she will often try to make this question. In any case, unless the PCs are overtly hostile, she will try to stay with them since they look like her best chance to get the Orb. If they want to break the curse, she can help.

Lianne knows that the tools Ithla-Sathlo used to craft the spell were still in Maldithar when she left. In the confusion, noone brought them away, and they are very likely still there. Examining them might provide vital clues as to how to break it. Further, Lianne has watched the Baatezu fighting the Worm outside Maldithar, and the strategy they used, and she thinks she has figured a way to get in without being killed by the beast. A big number of sacrificeable troops will draw the monster away for some time. All they need is a hundred or so manes, which can be gathered on the Plain of Infinite Portals or bought from one of the other warlords. They will be left loose near Castle Maldithar, while the party enters from the opposite point.

The manes won't last forever, but if they are scattered enough they will keep the beast busy for long enough to enter, find information on what's going on, and get the hell out of there. 100 manes, adequately scattered, can keep the Worm running around for hours. Wealthy PCs might decide to get more – remember, manes can regenerate in one day; being devoured by the Worm will prevent this, but the Worm doesn't always eat its victims.

However, the PCs will be unable to find any manes in Broken Reach or the surrounding plains. They have all been bought or gathered by Red Shroud or the Lord of Mithrengo, in preparation for their war. So, the heroes have to leave Broken Reach (Red will be happy with this and let them go).

Leaving the Abyssal city on the verge of a war, a new part of their travel begins.

Challenge Summary

<i>Challenge</i>	<i>EL</i>
Defeating a crocodile of darkness	3
Defeating a giant crocodile of darkness	5
Surviving a storm on the 76 th layer	6
Defeating the dire bats of darkness	8
Defeating the fiendish will'o'wisp	8
Defeating the dire boars of darkness	8
Defeating a dretch	2
Defeating a babau	6
Defeating a vrock	9
Defeating the team of 1 vrock, 3 babaus and 6 dretches	11
Defeating Mithrengo's patrol team of 1 hezrou and 6 babaus	13
Preventing Mobley from devouring the barbarian	9
Defeating the would-be rapists	8
Avoiding Seranna	4
Defeating Seranna	8
Defeating the enraged patrons at the inn	8
Defeating the cranium rats	6

<i>Challenge</i>	<i>EL</i>
Catching Smiling Sam	6
Defeating Balaemoz	12
Defeating Abretal	10
Defeating Abretal's allip form	6
Defeating the four mercenaries hired by Rothakon	13
Defeating the chasme guarding the portal	11
Destroying Lakeos and his wights	8
Getting the information about the four killers from Red Shroud	8
Getting access to the Outlands portal from Red Shroud	8
Defeating the babau, proving the party's strength to Mithrengo's patrol	7
Defeating Father Smirk and his bodyguards	8
Killing a hezrou	11
Defeating the bodaks in the abandoned tower	13
Stealing partial information from the Lord of Mithrengo	11
Stealing the spy list from the Lord of Mithrengo	13
Getting Lianne from Red Shroud	11

CHAPTER IV

In which the Heroes return where they arrived, hoping to learn the dark of their curse

Manes Ranchers

Once they're out of the Broken Reach underground, the PCs can notice that the town is getting more heavily fortified. Almost all guard towers are now manned, and most of the people chatting and trading outside the underground entrance are fully armed mercenaries. Patrol groups, armed with heterogeneous equipment and weaponry, wander around the outside area of Broken Reach, and warn everyone they meet that it is now forbidden to leave the city. However, if everything has gone smoothly, they have been instructed to make an exception for the PCs, so there should be no problem there.

The party can easily find out that the closest place on the Plains of Infinite Portals where they can hope to buy some manes is the barracks city of Styros. The bad news is that it lies on the banks of the Styx, at 12 good days of travel on the blasted abyssal plains from Broken Reach. The alternative is jumping through a portal to a deeper layer; but all of the layers that can be reached in a reasonable time from the PCs' location are very dangerous.

Luckily, though, a night hag trader is travelling towards Broken Reach with a load of 30 manes in this very moment. Not quite enough, but it's a starter. The PCs can find this information if they ask around the town before leaving and roll a 25 in Gather Information. The hag's name is Amanitis; she's a smart and powerful fiend, and she's been trading in souls, magic and larvae for centuries. If the heroes don't hear about the hag, the general advice will be to get to Styros. The road to the barracks city leaves Broken Reach in the opposite direction from the one leading towards Mithrengo, so the heroes shouldn't have to worry about patrols from the dark fortress.

If the PCs wish to get to Amanitis as soon as possible, they can leave town to meet her. She's coming in from Styros; the PCs will even meet her if they leave for the barracks city. Before that, though, they have to travel for two days in the Plains of Infinite Portals. The environment itself is unpleasant but relatively harmless. The ground is rocky and jagged, composed of small and large rocks shading from red to grey. There are plenty of short hills, rich with caves and fissures where the characters may opt to hide. The sky is red, with yellow sulphuric clouds, and it emanates a constant ambient light. Sickly emanations from the ground cloud patches of the plains in a mildly irritating fog. There are some short bushes here and there, and occasional razorvine patches. The most common risk here is being pressed into Blood War service, or being asked for some kind of "toll", generally made up on the moment by whatever tanar'ri happens to meet the PCs.

Press gangs tend to be composed of a couple vrock, or one vrock and some ground-based troops. The first one the PCs will meet, though, is just a single vrock who is patrolling alone hoping to find some pushovers he can recruit for his personal service. The flying fiend scans the blasted plains from the sky, and then close in to speak, while staying high enough to be outside of melee range. Many recruiters behave very arrogant and haughty when talking to mortals, "proposing" them to join the Blood War when in fact it's more of a demand. If the PCs piss the vrock off and seem to be too tough for a fight, the fiend will laugh, say that he's going to call for Maheros, and teleport away. Maheros is a molydeus, who happens to be supervising the recruiting in a wide area including Broken Reach and Styros. Lianne (assuming she's with the party) doesn't know this specific molydeus, but she knows how things work with tanar'ri recruiting. As soon as the

What if...?

The PCs may decide to take a risky gamble. If they actively seek to be recruited as Blood Warriors, they might be able to get sent to Styros with a heavily-armed caravan instead of going by themselves, though they'll have to do some good talking if they want to retain their equipment.

The fiendish caravan drivers know the ground much better than the PCs, and they have connections and agreements with many local lords. They'll be able to get to the barracks city faster and safer. Once there, the PCs might be able to slip away and search for the manes they need. It's a risky, risky business, though.

JOIN THE ARMY!
TRAVEL THE PLANES,
MEET INTERESTING
PEOPLE! AND SEND 'EM TO
THE DEAD-BOOK.
- TANAR'RI
RECRUITMENT

fiend is gone, she shouts at the party to run away and (unless restrained somehow) bolts for the closest hill. It would be a good idea for the PCs to do the same; after one minute or so, the vrock is back in the same spot together with a hulking monster – Maheros. The large, muscular fiend has a jackal's head and a serpent's head, short dark fur, and an aura of palpable fear surrounds him.

Hopefully, the PCs have hidden somewhere in the hill. When Maheros fails to see them around, he orders the vrock to fly

around and search for the party. Now, the PCs can easily hide in a cave; best of all would be to cover the entrance with some kind of illusion for a while. Let the heroes get away this time; if you feel like showing off, let the molydeus demolish the vrock for having wasted his time. From this experience, the heroes should learn the three big lessons of traveling in the Plains of Infinite Portals without an army. First, the plains are, well, plains – flying demons can spot you very, very easily from great distances. Smart PCs will find a way to travel unseen, or make sure that they have quick means of escape such as *teleport*. Second, tanar'ri can teleport too and know the ground well. This means that they can call for overwhelming reinforcements in a matter of rounds or minutes at best, if they decide to do so, even without using their summoning power. They just have to teleport to their home fortress, find some more warriors, and get to the battleground together in a moment. This isn't too common, since the called fiends will generally ask for some kind of payment later, but some fiends actually have instructions to patrol an area and call for help if they meet resistance. Third, there are plenty of hiding places among the cracks and fissures of the tormented ground and a good cover can generally be found in minutes. Most of these holes are not very deep, though, and if the fiends really want to get you, they will. It's just a matter of time. Using illusions to cover up the hiding place is a good move.

What if...?

If the PCs somehow miss the hag entirely, the nearest place where they can get manes is in fact Styros, at 12 days of hard abyssal travel from Broken Reach.

Amanitis is traveling on a covered carriage built from heavy, dark wood and pulled by a single fiery-hooved nightmare steed. The carriage's content can't be seen; the cover is tied rather tightly at the sides. The hag herself looks like a dark-skinned, very old woman. Her skin is wrinkled and she has warts all over her face. She wears a simple black dress and gown – the many folds offer a nice hiding place for her magical trinkets.

Amanitis talks in an unexpectedly pleasant way. She loves to make mortals uneasy in her presence, and to this end she assumes a “nice old lady” style of speaking with a flirtatious twist. Considering the horrible appearance of the night hag, this is more than enough to give anyone the shivers. Dealing with her is especially hard because she *always* looks as if she's lying, even when saying that two and two is four. Amanitis carries 30 manes in her carriage; the heavy cover includes a *silence* spell to keep them quiet.

The night hag expected to sell them to Mithrengo for 15 jinx each; if the PCs show interest, she'll try to sell them for 20 each, hinting at a discount if the payment is made in magic rather than gold. What's more, she can procure up to two hundred more from her reserves in the Gray Waste in just three days if the PCs wish, for the fair price of 4000 jinx... maybe 3600 if they pay in magic, souls, or slaves. Smart PCs will make sure not to give the entire payment in advance. Depending on how nasty the DM feels, the hag may decide to just keep it and never be seen again.

The agreement includes four sturdy carriages to transport the little demons, and eight fiendish horses to pull them. If the heroes accept, Amanitis can deliver the goods at any point in the Plains close to Broken Reach. The night hag is also a big trader of magical items; she doesn't have much on her right now but the PCs can make deals now and complete them when she gets back with the manes if they want. The price is high, but it can get low if the payment is made in the three goods of the

OOOH, WHAT A CUTE
BOY!
- AMANITIS

hags – magic, souls, or slaves. Finally, there's one further service Amanitis can offer (though she won't mention the possibility unless directly asked). Thanks to her innate magic and vast experience in the field of magical items, she can *identify* items just by examining them for a moment, and she's willing to identify the party's possessions for as little as 100 gold per item; however, the payment must be made in other magic. And, though she won't say this, if she spots a powerful item she'd like to have, she may decide to lie on its abilities to try and get the PCs to give it to her in payment for the manes. Buyers beware!

Once the deal is done, while the PCs are slowly taking the four carriages to the dark hole leading back into the 76th layer, there is one final nasty surprise by Mithrengo. A two-vrocks patrol has spotted the caravan and has decided to steal it. They'll fly down on the PCs and demand that they hand over the carriages and their content immediately, in the name of the Lord of Mithrengo. One of the vrocks will try to move aside the cover and see what's in the carriages. Once they know that they are chock full of manes, they'll attack the PCs unless they give them the small fiends immediately. As soon as the combat looks bad, one or both the vrocks will teleport away to warn Mithrengo.

This is the PCs' cue to start running. They are very close to the portal; just ten minutes will do it. Unfortunately, a big tanar'ri patrol (just like the one on page XXX) is going to teleport in a few minutes later, together with any remaining vrocks. Lianne (who seems to have a phobia of being attacked by fiends appearing from nowhere) urgently suggests to get behind a hill instead of heading directly for the portal. This is going to take a bit longer, but it will hide the party from view from the place where the vrocks disappeared.

If the party follows her advice, they turn around the hill just moments before the fiends appear. The tanar'ri start looking for them immediately, though. If there is a vrock in the group, it will be able to spot the caravan from above as it nears the portal. The PCs will have to fight at least for a couple minutes while the carriages enter the hole. If there are no vrocks among the tanar'ris, the PCs can escape unharmed.

If the party chooses to keep going, ignoring Lianne, the tanar'ri will appear when they are midway to the portal, and then teleport closer to attack. Unless the party can kill them all, the situation is bleak. There is one trick they can try, though – leave one carriage behind, and let the horses carry it away in a random direction. On the jagged ground of the Plains, it is only a matter of moments before it topples, sending manes flying everywhere. When the tanar'ri group sees this, at least part of the chaotic fiends will try to recover the manes instead of fighting the PCs, seeing that it is rather easier and safer. This will cost the party full 50 of the critters, though.

Back To The Palace

The PCs will eventually manage to reach the dark 76th layer again. Remember: no teleport, no passwall. The clearing around the portal is silent. There are no tanar'ri guards, though a careful search may reveal a few demonic skeletons in the clearing as well as in the surrounding forest. The tanar'ri here have been killed, or they have left. The forest now only contains the fiendish will'o'wisps and the creatures of darkness.

The PCs can make the trip to Maldithar without too much danger, if they are decently organized. If they are sloppy, though, they may have problems. First of all, the manes are noisy; they constantly shout, gargle and moan, and there are dozens of them. The carriages' cover prevents the noise from getting out, but they are easily damaged and a small hole is enough to break the cheap, fragile magic that the hag got on them. If the PCs are unable to keep the fiends silent, they will be attacked by creatures of darkness just about constantly.

What if...?

If the PCs asked Amanitis to deliver the manes directly to the portal for the 76th layer, the hag will deal with the vrocks instead of the heroes. She's more than capable of easily taking one out; the other will teleport away.

Assuming that the PCs are near the portal when this happens, they will witness the scene from a distance and likely run towards their precious cargo as fast as they can.

The hag will hand over the reigns, after taking any final payment, and then suggest the heroes to start driving to their destination very, very fast. Mithrengo's reinforcements will come in just a few minutes.

The vast majority of the black monsters are no threat to the heroes, but they may decide to attack the horses. This can be prevented by a good PC formation, but if a horse does get killed, they will be forced to slow down considerably. Traveling on the river is a bad idea. It is full of crocodiles of darkness, including giant ones (except for the area which is controlled by the Worm, see below).

Finally, the storms are as dangerous as ever. The manes are immune to lightning, but the carriages aren't; if the heroes leave them out, they risk finding themselves with damaged vehicles and covers.

Even if they run everything by the book, lots of creatures of darkness are going to attack the party anyway; with those carriages, they are a big target. You don't have to run every single combat, especially because the PCs can kill most of these creatures in one blow. Just tell them that they kill a bunch of creatures every day and use some healing spells. Don't make the trip too easy, though! A few of the creatures – especially the dire animals of darkness – are dangerous enough to be a challenge for the party, and they can attack the PCs at any moment. Such monsters are rare, and they are invariably heralded by a short period of peace as the other creatures flee the area. If the PCs can defeat a big and powerful creature of darkness, the rest will stay clear of the PCs for several hours. Hopefully, they have learnt enough tactics to kill this:

Tyrannosaur of darkness		Al. Chaotic Evil	Huge Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 12
Str: 30 (+10)	HP: 27d8+144 (265)	Speed: 18		
Dex: 16 (+3)	AC: 16 (−2 size, +3 dex, +5 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 21 (+5)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 3 (−4)	Ref: +18 (+15 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +20 Grapple: +38		
Wis: 15 (+2)	For: +20 (+15 base, +5 con)	Melee: +28 (+20 base, +10 str, −2 size)		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: +11 (+9 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +21 (+20 base, +3 dex, −2 size)		
Attacks				Skills
Bite, +29 melee, damage 3d6+15				Hide +12 (+9 ranks, +3 dex, −8 size, +8 racial)
Feats and special abilities				Listen +14 (+10 ranks, +2 wis, +2 alertness)
Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Improved natural attack (bite), Mobility, Power attack, Run, Toughness (x3), Track, Weapon focus (bite)				Move silently +12 (+1 ranks, +3 dex, +8 racial)
Improved grab (bite): up to Large size.				Spot +14 (+10 ranks, +2 wis, +2 alertness)
Swallow Whole (Ex): Can swallow a grabbed opponent with a successful grapple check. The victim takes 2d8+10 points of bludgeoning damage and 8 points of acid damage per round. The victim can cut its way out by dealing 25 points of slashing or piercing damage (AC 12). It can hold 2 Medium, 8 Small, 32 Tiny, or 128 Diminutive or smaller opponents.				
Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, darkvision 18 mt, blindsight 36 mt, scent.				

Dinosaurs of darkness are exceedingly rare, but they do exist; they are the most fearsome creatures that the 76th layer can spawn. This monstrosity is always hungry and always on the hunt, even more so than “normal” creatures of darkness. The PCs will be left alone for at least two days after defeating this, partly because of the fear the feat will inspire in the other creatures, but also because the tyrannosaur has eaten most of the monsters around the place where the encounter takes place.

The PCs will meet the first real problem at about 60 kilometers from the palace. That's about the radius in which the Worm has spread its gooey secretions. The ground is covered in thick, semi-transparent slime. Assuming that the PCs aren't traveling blind, it will take a Spot check, DC 16, to notice it before the horses step on it. While the slime isn't dangerous by itself, the Worm can sense anything that touches its slime, anywhere on the layer. If the PCs mess with the goo, the monster will start going towards them. Luckily, it can be heard from quite a distance, but a moment of carelessness now is enough to force the PCs to drop the carriages and start running.

The players now have to devise a plan to distract the Worm while they travel the remaining 60 kilometers to the palace. A hundred manes risk not being enough to keep the monster amused for two days or so. Lianne will worriedly admit that she didn't think the Worm could cover that much area in goo. The heroes can still make it if they position the fiends and themselves carefully, or they may choose another way. The river is a smart idea now. There are almost no creatures of darkness in the area where the Worm roams; they either get eaten or don't like the sticky soil. There are also no crocodiles in the river, and as long as they don't touch the shores, the PCs can sail on a make-

shift raft or something without alerting the Worm. This way, they can reach the fortress with relative ease.

The trip on the river will be faster if they start from the south end; the current flows towards the forest. Coupled with the manes, this strategy will make sure that they reach the fortress Maldithar without encountering the Worm. That doesn't mean that the trip will be uneventful, though.

Dire eagles of darkness (6)			
Al. Chaotic Evil		Medium Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	
CR: 3			
Str: 16 (+3)	HP: 4d8+12 (30)	Speed: 9, fly 30 (average)	
Dex: 29 (+9)	AC: 24 (+9 dex, +5 natural)	Armor: none	
Con: 16 (+3)	Initiative: +9 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0	
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +13 (+4 base, +9 dex)	BAB: +3	Grapple: +6
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +7 (+4 base, +3 con)	Melee: +6 (+3 base, +3 strength)	
Cha: 6 (-2)	Will: +3 (+1 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +12 (+3 base, +9 dexterity)	
<u>Attacks</u>		<u>Skills</u>	
2 talons, +12 melee, damage 2d4+3, and		Hide +19 (+2 ranks, +8 racial, +9 dex)	
Bite, +7 melee, damage 1d6+1		Listen +6 (+2 ranks, +2 wis, +2 alertness)	
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>		Move silently +19 (+2 ranks, +8 racial, +9 dex)	
Feats: Alertness, Weapon Finesse, Mobility		Spot +13 (+1 ranks, +2 wis, +2 alertness, +8 racial)	
Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, darkvision 18 mt, blindsight 36 mt, scent.			

Flying creatures can avoid the muck and the Worm with relative ease (that is, they don't get killed very fast because the Worm can only spit at them). A half dozen dire eagles of darkness are going to attack the PCs. Alternatively, you may choose any other flying animal.

Eventually, the heroes will reach Maldithar. The fortress isn't a dark and silent place as the PCs might expect. Since they fled, there was some evolution in the situation here. First of all, a bunch of tanar'ri have remained here when Rothakon fled, and they have claimed the fortress for themselves. Not the smartest move, granted; they have no easy way to get out of the fortress without being eaten by the Worm and the fortress in its current state is no longer a useful strategic point. But they remained nonetheless; during the following days, almost half of the group died to infighting over who got to rule what.

The fighting ceased after a couple of weeks or so, when the portal from Sigil flared open. Right in the middle of the remaining tanar'ri, several tough warriors appeared and started attacking the fiends. These warriors are an elite team of the Mercykiller faction, led by a Justiciar named Coriolis. The Mercykiller high-up has taken on himself the grand task of capturing the individual responsible for sending a Retriever through the Hive Ward of Sigil, causing widespread destruction therein. Coriolis, a powerful blood in his own right, has requisitioned some expert bashers of his faction for a trip to the Abyss and started making preparations; this caught everyone by surprise since it was assumed that noone would be barmy enough to try and arrest a tanar'ri lord. Factol Sarin of the Harmonium, worried that the cagers would start wondering why the Red Death was doing the Hardheads' work, decided to send a Harmonium representative (a paladin named Joseph) together with the expedition, mainly to save appearances but also to try and take the team out when the plan would start coming apart. Here are the stats for the members of the expedition:

A Cutter with Potential

There are several members in the Mercykiller expedition, and each of them can be turned into a PC. All of them have good reasons to adventure with the party – in fact, for the entirety of this chapter, the Mercykillers will be around the PCs at all time.

The warriors are too low-level to be used as PCs, but Tarinee and Harden could be used without too many changes. Just let them gain somewhat more experience for the first sessions, and make them catch up quickly in levels with the other PCs, or directly start them with a few additional levels.

Joseph is about the same level as the PCs or a bit higher, and he's not technically under Coriolis' orders. This makes it easier to make him leave the Mercykillers.

Coriolis isn't a good choice; he's too high level, and wherever he goes the other Mercykillers will follow. Too much power for the party to keep.

Finally, if you need to introduce a new PC, you can let him just be in the Mercykiller group for some reason, provided that his alignment isn't chaotic.

Mercykiller fighters (16)		Al. Lawful (misc)	Human Fighter 6 th (Outlands)	CR: 6
Str: 16 (+3) Dex: 13 (+1) Con: 14 (+2) Int: 9 (-1) Wis: 13 (+1) Cha: 10 (+0)	HP: 6d10+15 (48) AC: 20 (+6 armor, +3 shield, +1 dex) Initiative: +5 (+4 improved init, +1 dex) Ref: +3 (+2 base, +1 dex) For: +7 (+5 base, +2 con) Will: +5 (+2 base, +2 iron will, +1 wis)	Speed: 6 Armor: heavy % fail.: 50% BAB: +6 Melee: +9 (+6 base, +3 str) Ranged: +7 (+6 base, +1 dex) Check pen.: -6 Grapple: +8		
Attacks <i>Cold iron long sword</i> +1, +11/+6 melee, damage 1d8+6, crit 19-20/x2			Skills Climb +6 (+9 ranks, +3 strength, -6 armor) Jump +6 (+9 ranks, +3 strength, -6 armor)	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Weapon focus: long sword, Weapon specialization: long sword, Power attack, Dodge, Improved initiative, Joint Operation (+1 to hit and damage for every two characters with this feat flanking an opponent), Cleave, Iron will				
Equipment Masterwork banded mail (AB +6, max dex +1, check penalty -5, arcane failure 35%) <i>Heavy steel shield</i> +1 (AB +3, check penalty -1, arcane failure 15%) (faint abjuration, CL 3) <i>Cold iron long sword</i> +1 (damage 1d8+1, crit 19-20/x2) (faint evocation, CL 3) <i>2 potions of cure light wounds</i> (cures 1d8+1) (faint conjuration, CL 1) Masterwork composite long bow (mighty, +2) (damage 1d8, range 33m, damage 1d8, crit x3) 60 arrows, 40 gold coins.				

Tarinee		Al. Lawful Neutral	Human Cleric 8 th (Outlands)	CR: 8
Str: 12 (+1) Dex: 10 (+0) Con: 13 (+1) Int: 13 (+1) Wis: 21 (+5) Cha: 12 (+1)	HP: 8d8+8 (48) AC: 24 (+9 armor, +2 def, +3 shield) Initiative: +1 dex Ref: +3 (+2 base, +1 res) For: +8 (+6 base, +1 con, +1 res) Will: +12 (+6 base, +5 wis, +1 res)	Speed: 6 Armor: heavy % fail.: 50% BAB: +6 Melee: +7 (+6 base, +1 str) Ranged: +6 base Check pen.: -6 Grapple: +7		
Attacks <i>Morningstar</i> +2, +9 melee, damage 1d8+3			Skills Concentration +12 (+11 ranks, +1 con) Diplomacy +7 (+6 ranks, +1 cha) Heal +10 (+5 ranks, +5 wis) Knowledge (the Planes) +12 (+11 ranks, +1 int) Spellcraft (+11 ranks, +1 int)	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Commanding Spellcasting (+2 to DCs for compulsion spells), Spell focus (enchantment), Greater spell focus (enchantment), Spell penetration Law domain: +1 to caster level on law spells. Knowledge domain: +1 to caster level on divination spells. Turn undead (8 th level). Spontaneous cast (cure wounds spells). Cleric spells/day: 6/5+1/4+1/4+1/3+1				
Equipment +1 <i>full plate</i> (AB +9, max dex +1, check penalty -5, arc fail 35%) (faint abjuration, CL 3) <i>Morningstar</i> +2 (damage 1d8+2, crit 20/x2) (moderate evocation, CL 6) <i>Heavy steel shield</i> +2 (AB +3, check penalty -1, arc fail 15%) (moderate abjuration, CL 6) <i>Wand of cure light wounds</i> (faint conjuration, CL 1) (29 charges) <i>Ring of Protection</i> +2 (moderate abjuration, CL 6) <i>Periapt of Wisdom</i> +2 (moderate transmutation, CL 8) <i>Cloak of resistance</i> +1 (faint abjuration, CL 3)				

Prepared spells:

0th level: Create Water, Detect Magic, Detect Magic, Guidance, Light, Mending

1st level: Protection from Evil, Protection from Chaos, Bane, Detect Chaos, Doom, Remove Fear

2nd level: Detect Thoughts, Bear's Endurance, Hold Person, Align Weapon, Silence

3rd level: Magic Circle Against Chaos, Invisibility Purge, Remove Curse, Dispel Magic, Bestow Curse

4th level: Order's Wrath, Restoration, Restoration, Freedom of Movement

Tarinee is a middle-aged woman, with an average height and complexion, dark hair, and a stern voice. She wears a robe with the symbol of the Mercykillers above her armor. Tarinee worships all the major gods of Justice from all pantheons and is a loyal member of the Mercykillers.

I WILL UPHOLD JUSTICE
BEFORE ALL ELSE,
PURGING THE
MULTIVERSE OF THOSE
WHO BREAK LAW
- CORIOLIS

Harken		Al. Lawful Evil	Half-elf Wizard 9 th (Outlands)	CR: 9
Str: 9 (-1)	HP: 9d4+9 (31)	Speed: 9		Check pen.: 0
Dex: 12 (+1)	AC: 14 (+1 dex, +3 armor)	Armor: none		
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0%		
Int: 20 (+5)	Ref: +4 (+3 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +4 Grapple: +3		
Wis: 9 (-1)	For: +4 (+3 base, +1 con)	Melee: +3 (+4 base, -1 str)		
Cha: 13 (+1)	Will: +5 (+6 base, -1 wis)	Ranged: +5 (+4 base, +1 dex)		
<u>Attacks</u>			<u>Skills</u>	
Unarmed attack, +3 melee, damage 1d3-1 non-lethal			Concentration +17 (+12 ranks, +1 con, +4 combat casting*)	
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>			Craft (blacksmith) +7 (+4 ranks, +3 int)	
Feats: Spell penetration, Greater spell penetration, Scribe scroll, Empower spell, Lightning justice (+1 DC on lightning spells, sudden empower a lightning spell 1/day)			Diplomacy +2 racial	
Low-light vision, immune to sleep, +2 versus enchantment spells and effects.			Gather information +2 racial	
Wizard spells/day: 4/5/5/4/3/2			Knowledge (Gray Waste) +14 (+5 ranks, +6 synergy, +3 int)	
<u>Equipment</u>			Knowledge (Pandemonium) +14 (+5 ranks, +6 synergy, +3 int)	
<i>Bracers of armor</i> +3 (moderate conjuration, CL 6)			Knowledge (Abyss) +14 (+5 ranks, +6 synergy, +3 int)	
<i>Headband of intellect</i> +2 (moderate transmutation, CL 5)			Knowledge (Limbo) +14 (+5 ranks, +6 synergy, +3 int)	
<i>Wand of magic missile</i> (moderate evocation, CL 9) (15 charges)			Knowledge (Arcana) +15 (+12 ranks, +3 int)	
<i>Scroll of teleport</i> (moderate conjuration, CL 9)			Listen +1 racial	
Bag of spell components, including 2 black pearls worth 100 gold each.			Search +1 racial	
Spellbook (0 th level: all core; 1 st level: Protection from Chaos, Shield, Obscuring Mist, Identify, Charm Person, Magic Missile, Shocking Grasp, Silent Image, Ray of Enfeeblement, Enlarge Person, Expeditious Retreat; 2 nd level: Acid Arrow, Glitterdust, See Invisibility, Hideous Laughter, Invisibility, False Life, Fox's Cunning; 3 rd level: Protection from Energy, Fireball, Lightning bolt, Hold person, Slow, Tongues, Fly, Dispel Magic; 4 th level: Dimensional anchor, Dimension door, Polymorph, Resilient Sphere, Enervation; 5 th level: Break Enchantment, Dominate Person, Wall of Force, Telekinesis)			Spellcraft +17 (+12 ranks, +3 int, +2 synergy)	
Dark spellbook (strong enchantment, CL 15) (0 th level: Slash Tongue; 1 st level: Aberrate, Tongue Tendrils; 2 nd level: Darkbolt, Entice Gift, Shriveling; 3 rd level: Curse of the Putrid Husk, Tongue Serpents; 4 th level: Damning Darkness, Liquid Pain; 6 th level: Fiendish Quickening; 7 th level: Wall of Eyes)			Spot +1 racial	
			* when casting on the defensive	

Prepared spells:

0th level: Detect Magic, Detect Magic, Prestidigitation, Read Magic

1st level: Protection from Chaos, Magic Missile, Magic Missile, Enlarge Person, Expeditious Retreat

2nd level: Glitterdust, Invisibility, False Life, Acid Arrow, Fox's Cunning

3rd level: Lightning Bolt, Fireball, Dispel Magic, Dispel Magic

4th level: Polymorph, Enervation, Enervation

5th level: **Empowered** Lightning Bolt, Wall of Force

Harken is about 50 years old, but still as fierce as ever. His white hair is well-combed, and his wizardly robe, bearing the symbol of the Mercykillers, is kept clean at all times. Since arriving in Maldithar, Harken is looking a bit under the weather, though. He tends to be more unkempt than usual and generally unresponsive. In truth, Harken has found a book of dark, corrupt spells somewhere in the fortress, and he is studying them. Knowing that both Coriolis and Joseph would disapprove if they found out, he has kept the tome secret from everyone else. The old man isn't a good bluffer, and it is only a matter of time before he's discovered.

The truth is that there is something more to the tome than simple written words. Anyone who reads even just one word from it is the target of a *suggestion* spell (DC 20). The *suggestion* is to study the book in secret, without telling anyone about it, and Harken has fallen for it. The spell lasts for 15 hours, but anyone subject to it would want to read the book more often than that. Since the *suggestion* is very reasonable after the first time (after all, you don't want your superiors to find out that you've studied dark magic without their permission), subsequent saves take a -2 penalty. The book contains several spells from the *Book of Vile Darkness*. If you

IN ALL SITUATIONS, I
SHALL JUDGE THE RIGHTS
AND WRONGS WITH A
CLEAR AND IMPARTIAL
MIND
- CORIOLIS

don't have the manual, feel free to invent some wicked spell to put here, or just fill it with standard necromantic and [evil] spells.

Justiciar Coriolis		Al. Lawful Neutral	Human Fighter 15 th (Outlands)	CR: 15
Str: 22 (+6) Dex: 13 (+1) Con: 18 (+4) Int: 11 (+0) Wis: 15 (+2) Cha: 16 (+3)	HP: 15d10+60 (152) AC: 23 (+10 armor, +2 shield, +1 dex) Initiative: +5 (+1 dex, +4 improved init) Ref: +8 (+5 base, +1 dex, +2 res) For: +15 (+9 base, +4 con, +2 res) Will: +11 (+5 base, +2 wis, +2 iron will, +2 res)	Speed: 6 Armor: heavy % fail.: 40% Check pen.: -5 BAB: +15 Grapple: +24 Melee: +21 (+15 base, +6 str) Ranged: +16 (+15 base, +1 dex)		
Attacks <i>Blade of Order</i> , +23/+19/+12 melee, damage 2d6+14, crit 17-20/x2, or <i>Blade of Order</i> (vs chaotic), +23/+19/+13 melee, damage 4d6+14, crit 17-20/x2, or <i>Blade of Order</i> (vs chaotic outsiders), +25/+21/+15 melee, damage 6d6+16, crit 17-20/x2				Skills Climb +10 (+9 ranks, +6 strength, -5 armor) Handle animal +12 (+9 ranks, +3 cha) Jump +10 (+9 ranks, +6 strength, -5 armor) Ride +10 (+9 ranks, +1 dex) Sense Motive +23 (+18 ranks, +2 wis, +3 skill focus)
Feats and special abilities Feats: Weapon focus: greatsword, Greater weapon focus: greatsword, Weapon specialization: greatsword, Greater weapon specialization: greatsword, Improved critical: greatsword, Know deception (<i>discern lies</i> (DC 15) 1/day, Sense motive is a class skill), Iron will, Pulled blow (can deal nonlethal damage with no penalty), Cleave, Power attack, Pierce damage reduction (ignores 5 points of DR), Killing blow (whenever a strike would put the enemy below 0 hit points, deal 1d6+5 additional damage), Dodge, Improved initiative, Skill focus (sense motive).				
Equipment <i>Full plate</i> +2 (AB +10, max dex +1, check penalty -5, arcane failure 35%) (moderate abjuration, CL 6) <i>Buckler</i> +1 (AB +2, arcane failure 5%, -1 to hit with secondary arm) (faint abjuration, CL 3) <i>The Blade of Order</i> (+1 axiomatic chaotic outsider bane two handed sword) (damage 1d8+1, crit 19-20/x2) (moderate evocation (lawful) and conjuration, CL 8) <i>2 potions of cure critical wounds</i> (cures 4d8+7) (moderate conjuration, CL 7) <i>Gauntlets of ogre strength</i> (moderate transmutation, CL 5) <i>Cloak of resistance</i> +2 (moderate abjuration, CL 6) Masterwork composite long bow (mighty, +2) (damage 1d8, range 33m, crit x3) 60 cold iron arrows +1 (faint evocation, CL 3), 90 platinum coins, 100 gold coins. <i>Warrant</i> (strong enchantment, CL 20)				

Coriolis is the leader of the expedition. He is one of the youngest Mercykillers to reach the rank of Justiciar, a feat he accomplished thanks to his extreme dedication to the ideals of Justice and his relentless pursue of powerful criminals. Coriolis is thirsty for more and more glory, a trait which has placed him in trouble before and has done so again. After hearing that a retriever had rampaged through Sigil, and that noone was willing to go and punish its creator because after all the people who got killed were only Hivers, he surprised everyone again by going to seek out the culprit.

He knows that he can't beat an abyssal lord in a fight, so he's relying on the *Warrant* to help him. Up to now, a *Warrant* has never failed, not for him at least. The *Warrant* is a single-use magical item, which is crafted by the most powerful Mercykiller spellcasters and given to Justiciars when they are on a mission. The *Warrant* is a scroll detailing all the crimes and accusations of the Justiciar's quarry. When read as a full-round action, the target must make a Will saving throw versus DC 33 or be paralyzed for one hour. This is a mind-affecting compulsion effect. The *Warrant* will not work on Ithla-Sathlo, even assuming that Coriolis is so lucky that he gets to him.

I SHALL DECIDE WHERE
JUSTICE MUST FALL
UNDER THE LAW, AND I
WILL SETTE OUT THAT
JUSTICE WITH A FIRM
AND UNYIELDING HAND
- CORIOLIS

Measure Three Joseph		Al. Lawful Good	Human Paladin 13 th (Elysium)	CR: 13
Str: 18 (+4) Dex: 10 (+0) Con: 20 (+5) Int: 15 (+2) Wis: 16 (+3) Cha: 16 (+3)	HP: 13d10+65 (136) AC: 24 (+10 armor, +4 shield) Initiative: +1 dex Ref: +7 (+4 base, +3 cha) For: +16 (+8 base, +5 con, +3 cha) Will: +12 (+4 base, +3 wis, +3 cha, +2 iron will)	Speed: 6 Armor: heavy % fail.: 50% Check pen.: -6 BAB: +13 Grapple: +17 Melee: +17 (+13 base, +4 str) Ranged: +14 (+13 base, +1 dex)		
Attacks <i>Shock long sword</i> +2, +20/+15/+10 melee, damage 1d8+6 plus 1d6 elec, crit 17-20/x2				Skills Diplomacy +21 (+16 ranks, +3 cha, +2 synergy) Handle animal +19 (+16 ranks, +3 cha) Heal +11 (+8 ranks, +3 wis) Knowledge (religion) +10 (+8 ranks, +2 int) Ride +16 ranks Sense motive +19 (+16 ranks, +3 wis)
Feats and special abilities Feats: Weapon focus: long sword, Improved critical: long sword., Iron will, Hardheaded (immune to charm effects), Pulled blow (can deal nonlethal damage with no penalty), Authority (<i>command</i> 3/day, DC 14). Smite evil 2/day (+3 to hit, +13 to damage against an evil creature), divine grace, lay on hands (39 hp), turn undead (10 th level), aura of courage. <i>Detect evil</i> at will, <i>Remove disease</i> 2/week. Paladin spells/day: 2/1				
Equipment <i>Full plate</i> +2 (AB +10, max dex +1, check penalty -5, arcane failure 35%) (moderate abjuration, CL 6) <i>Heavy steel shield</i> +2 (AB +4, arcane failure 15%) (moderate abjuration, CL 6) <i>Shock long sword</i> +2 (moderate evocation, CL 8) (damage 1d8+2 plus 1d6 elec, crit 19-20/x2) <i>2 potions of cure critical wounds</i> (cures 4d8+7) (moderate conjuration, CL 7) <i>Bracelet of health</i> +2 (moderate transmutation, CL 5) <i>Cloak of charisma</i> +2 (moderate transmutation, CL 5) <i>Composite long bow</i> +1 (mighty, +2) (damage 1d8+1, range 33m, crit x3) <i>60 cold iron arrows</i> +1 (faint evocation, CL 3), 90 platinum coins, 100 gold coins.				

Prepared spells:

1st level: Bless Weapon, Protection from Chaos

2nd level: Bull's Strength

Joseph's Mount		Al. Lawful Good	Heavy Warhorse (Elysium)	CR: 7
Str: 21 (+5) Dex: 13 (+1) Con: 17 (+3) Int: 8 (-1) Wis: 13 (+1) Cha: 6 (-2)	HP: 10d8+30 (75) AC: 22 (+12 natural, +1 dex, -1 size) Initiative: +1 dex Ref: +7 (+4 base, +1 dex, +2 lightning ref) For: +11 (+8 base, +3 con) Will: +5 (+4 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 18 Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: - BAB: +7 Grapple: +16 Melee: +11 (+7 base, +5 str, -1 size) Ranged: +7 (+7 base, +1 dex, -1 size)		
Attacks 2 hooves, +11 melee, damage 1d6+5, and Bite, +6 melee, damage 1d4+2				Skills Listen +8 (+7 ranks, +1 wis) Spot +7 (+6 ranks, +1 wis)
Feats and special abilities Feats: Dodge, Endurance, Lightning Reflexes, Run Empathic link, improved evasion, share spells, share saving throws, improved speed, command horses (DC 19)				

Joseph was raised a paladin since the day he was born on Elysium. He joined the Harmonium after visiting Sigil and hearing a speech by Factol Sarin; today he's 38 years old and has achieved the status of factor and the rank of Measure Three. Joseph is resisting the corruption of the Abyss better than anyone else; he hates the place, but he recognizes that changing it is way beyond his power. He wasn't happy to be ordered on the expedition. Unlike Coriolis, he believes that attacking a demon lord is suicide, and he wants to persuade the Mercykiller to get back to Sigil.

The Mercykillers are powerful, but they are greatly underestimating their enemy. Of course, their plan went apart in the exact moment when they entered the portal. Like the PCs, they were stunned upon entering and surrounded by tanar'ri. Unlike the PCs, they had enough forces to get out on their

AND THEY CALL US SÖDDIN'
HARDHEADS?
- JOSEPH

feet. The team, reduced to twenty-two members, retreated to a defensible area of the fortress and set up fortifications. After the initial assault, the Mercykiller force – much better organized than the fiends – started taking the upper hand and securing more and more rooms of Maldithar.

About one week before the PCs return to the castle, another person entered the cursed portal (this place ain't ever seen this much traffic!). While the PCs were away, the Gardener could do nothing but stare at his plants as they died. The tuladhara, not a person to succumb to desperation, started slowly rebuilding his greenhouse. Some friends and clients helped him, and after some weeks he got over the loss, psychologically if not financially, and looked like he could resume his life. Then, ten days before the PCs reach the fortress, he abruptly disappeared without leaving a trace.

Unbeknownst to everyone involved, though, the Gardener was not without powerful allies. A plumach, one of his own unknown ancestors, was secretly looking over him. Plumachs are a part of the race known as rilmani, the exemplars of true neutrality and the mysterious overseers of the Outlands. The rilmani are keepers, guardians and upholders of neutrality everywhere on the Planes. Among them, plumachs are the least powerful and those with the greatest tendence towards neutrality as apathy. Plumachs never interfere, never act, and they generally spend their lives as common people, artisans and professionals.

This particular plumach, however, was an exceptional member of his species. While he, too, believed in not interfering with the events of the planes, his chosen profession was that of the wizard. During the centuries, he got quite good at that, and his search for knowledge led him to places and actions not usually seen by other plumachs. Or even other rilmani in general. He married a mortal sorceress, and lived with her for several decades before she died of old age. The single son they had was a half-rilmani, and his (very few) descendants were tuladhara. Saintrii, this the name of the plumach wizard, kept an eye on his offspring, but at the same time felt compelled not to reveal himself to them or act in their favor, due to his neutral essence. His line gradually died out; tuladhara are virtually infertile and the normal dangers of life on the Planes did the rest. After years and centuries, the only remaining one was the Gardener, who didn't know anything more than he had some rilmani blood. Saintrii covertly watched over him but never did anything, even when he spotted fiendish involvement in his life. It looked like his grand-grandson could get over the event, but then the Gardener vanished. The loss of his last remaining descendant was enough to finally prompt him into action.

Maybe in some years' time, his tale will be recounted by the rilmani as an example of why neutrality should not be betrayed.

Saintrii entered the portal in the Slags to look for the Gardener, and suffered the same dire effects as everyone else. He was stunned and he got pummeled by the tanar'ri; as soon as he recovered, he attempted to teleport away and promptly passed out from the damage. The fiends kept him alive, recognizing a chance to reconquer Maldithar. Just for fun, they tortured him for a day. Then, they forced him to use his magic against the Mercykillers, threatening to kill him if he didn't obey. Saintrii offered to summon help; he called several mephits and, speaking in their tongue, instructed them to warn the Mercykillers. The tanar'ri didn't realize this until the mephits were out. Luckily for them, though, the Mercykillers believed the mephits to be an attack from the fiends, and killed them before even hearing what they wanted to say. As a punishment, the fiends tortured Saintrii for another day, and then they forced him to summon help with the scroll of *greater planar binding* he was carrying. During the summoning, the bulezau's axe would be on his neck: attempts to call celestials or other help for him would result in his immediate death. But rather than calling a tanar'ri as his captors wanted, he called an arcanaloth named Tarlikin, assuring the fiends that this was the best thing to do.

This was a particularly foolish move since the wizard lacked access to an adequate circle of protection. Saintrii tried to bargain with the yugoloth; Tarlikin offered to not only free him from the demons, but also stay and help uncover the secrets of the fortress. Knowing that he was going to be screwed, but also desperate enough, the plumach accepted. The arcanaloth got out of the circle and

immediately killed Saintrii, surprising the demons (who nervously expected the yugoloth to either work for them, or attack them). He then proceeded to take control of the astonished tanar'ri troupe. The demons only obey strength, and Tarlikin

DEAL DONE. YOU CAN...
- SAINTRII (EPITAPH)

just displayed more than enough of it.

Even though, between himself and the demons, he has enough power to overwhelm the Mercykillers, it would be a tough battle and he risks taking damage and losing his servants. Besides, keeping the factioneers in check is enough for now: Tarlikin is busy trying to gain access to the laboratory on the third floor.

While all of these events were going on, another prisoner escaped from Maldithar. Sort of. When the Worm escaped, the magical seals holding the Demontree were broken. During the past month or so, it has steadily grown in size and now occupies almost one third of the fortress. Its trunk rises from one of the inner courtyards, and the ground, floors and walls around it are covered in writhing tendrils that lash out at anything approaching. The tentacles can be considered as creatures with the following stats:

Demontree Tendrils		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Plant (Abyss)	CR: 3
Str: 20 (+5)	HP: 4d8+12 (30)	Speed: 0		
Dex: 11 (+0)	AC: 14 (+5 natural, -1 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 16 (+3)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: -	Ref: +1 base	BAB: +3 Grapple: +12		
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +7 (+4 base, +3 con)	Melee: +7 (+3 base, +5 strength, -1 size)		
Cha: 6 (-2)	Will: +3 (+1 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +2 (+3 base, -1 size)		
<u>Attacks</u>				
Touch, +7 melee touch reach 3 mt, damage 1d6 Strength				
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>				
Low-light vision, mindless. Immune to poison, paralysis, polymorph, stunning. Not subject to critical hits.				
Improved grab (touch). A creature does not starve while grappled by demontree tendrils, but it loses one experience level per year unless he's first level already. If the victim dies of old age, it is transformed into a bodak but it does not regain its Strength until freed.				
Since they are not really a single creature, demontree tendrils are immune to any attempt to magically control them.				
Acid, cold and lightning resistance 5.				

Even though they are Large sized, four tendrils can fit in a single 1,5 meters square. Their shape means that they occupy a much smaller volume than their length would suggest, and the demontree is capable of coordinating them so perfectly that they don't get entangled. If they can get to someone, as many tendrils as possible will grapple him or her, until it is drained of Strength.

Luckily, the tendrils cannot move; they sprout from the floor and are physically part of the demontree. Unluckily, the fiendish plant has more surprises in stock. It has somehow been able to create shambling mounds infused with fiendish essence. Unlike normal half-fiends, these have no wings and cannot fly.

Half-Fiend Shambling Mound		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Outsider (Abyss)		CR: 8
Str: 25 (+7)	HP: 8d8+32 (68)	Speed: 6, swim 6		Armor: none	Check pen.: 0
Dex: 14 (+2)	AC: 23 (+12 natural, +2 dex, -1 size)	Initiative: +2 dex			
Con: 19 (+4)	Ref: +4 (+2 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +6		Grapple: +17	
Int: 9 (-1)	For: +10 (+6 base, +4 con)	Melee: +12 (+6 base, +7 str, -1 size)		Ranged: +7 (+6 base, +2 dex, -1 size)	
Wis: 10 (+0)	Will: +4 (+2 base, +2 iron will)				
Cha: 11 (+0)					
Attacks			Skills		
2 slams, +13 melee reach 3 mt, damage 2d6+7, and			Climb +12 (+5.5 ranks, +7 str)		
Bite, +7 melee reach 3 mt, damage 1d8+3			Hide +13 (+11 ranks, +4 racial*, -4 size, +2 dex)		
Feats and special abilities			Jump +12 (+5.5 ranks, +7 str)		
Feats: Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam).Smite good (su): once per day it can make a normal melee attack to deal 8 extra damage to a good foe.			Listen +15 (+11 ranks, +4 racial)		
Spell-like abilities: <i>darkness</i> 3/day, <i>desecrate</i> 1/day, <i>poison</i> 3/day , <i>unholy blight</i> 1/day.			Move Silently +16 (+11 ranks, +4 racial, +2 dex)		
Improved grab (slam): if it hits with both slams, it can grapple and constrict. Constrict 2d6+10.			Search +6 (+5.5 ranks, -1 int)		
Immune to electricity: any electrical damage grants 1d4 points of Constitution instead. These points are lost at the rate of one per hour.			Spot +5 (+5.5 ranks)		
Darkvision 18 mt. Immune to poison. Acid, cold, fire resistance 10. DR 5/magic. Its natural weapons are treated as magic for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction. SR 18.			* +12 in swamps		

These monsters love to use *poison* before or while grappling. There aren't too many of them around, but they are quite dangerous. Fortunately, they are not part of the demontree and their touch doesn't share its powers. They don't wander far from the tree, either. If the demontree is angry at something, it can produce a *lot* of these very quickly – up to twenty, in fact, and one more per day. If the PCs try to stay for long in its area, they will be attacked by a horde of monsters until they are driven away.

Both the Mercykillers and the fiends are ignoring the demontree right now. While the plant poses no immediate threat (it seems that the lack of light is slowing its growth), there is no doubt that it will keep growing indefinitely and eventually engulf the whole castle. The Worm is also slowly expanded the mucus-covered area. Both these threats should make evident to the tanar'ri that *noone* is going to become the lord of Maldithar for a long time. Apparently, they just don't have the foresight to notice that – or maybe they think they can destroy the demontree.

Someone else isn't so foolish, though. Hayazeikanatzeras, the reclusive lord of the 76th layer, has sensed the double threat growing in his domain and has taken steps to put an end to it. A massive army of several millions creatures of darkness is moving towards Maldithar. Hayazeikanatzeras himself is leading it; noone else is capable of controlling the monsters. His plan is to storm the fortress and destroy the plant before it grows so much that the trunk becomes unreachable. If possible, he'll also try to take on the Worm, though he doesn't know how to permanently kill it. The only certain thing is that Maldithar will be razed and that the PCs, the Mercykillers, the yugoloth and the tanar'ri are all going to get killed if they are here when the bulk of the army arrives.

The exact moment of the army's arrival should be determined by the DM. The main purpose of this event is to place some time pressure on the PCs, and to make it clear that they must do all the research they need before the army arrives, because they will be unable to return to the layer afterwards. The PCs can learn this information from the scrying mirror in the Mercykiller-controlled area of the fortress, but even if they don't immediately use the device they will soon enough get the full chant.

Hayazeikanatzeras has been scrying on Maldithar every day for almost two weeks, in preparation for the assault. Upon seeing the PCs, he understands that they have been in the castle before and that they probably have valuable information on the creatures he wishes to destroy. Besides, he'd like to get an estimate of their strength, in case he has to fight them. The archfiend doesn't know everything that happened in Maldithar, and for what he knows they may have been the ones to route the tanar'ri from the fortress. That would mean they are quite powerful and potentially dangerous, even to himself. Therefore, he will try to contact them as soon as they get to sleep.

See, Hayazeikanatzeras, maybe because of his connection to darkness, has a powerful ability to infiltrate people's dreams as they sleep. That night, everyone in the party (except those that don't sleep or are immune to mind effects) "wakes up" in a very realistic dream. They don't automatically realize that it is a dream, though many things will be off somewhat. They cannot be awoken from the outside until the dream is over, unless someone deals them damage. Companions and cohorts aren't present, but familiars and other creatures which are linked to the character's own soul are (if the familiar would be immune, the creature in the dream is a projection of the PCs' knowledge of its friend).

The affected PCs find themselves on a cold stone floor. They are in utter darkness, but they can see up to 18 meters away as if they had darkvision. They can't see walls or a ceiling in any direction, save for some thick, tall stone columns which lose themselves in the darkness above. Those that pass a Spot check, DC 22, can see shadows moving behind the pillars, though they go away when they get close, to reappear behind the next column. The PCs can easily realize that they aren't in any place they've already been to. Odd enough, all spellcasters have their full complement of spells as if they had prepared them.

In this dream-reality, the PCs' choices are limited; many of their actions simply won't work for no apparent reason if the lord of the layer doesn't approve of them. The PCs are in a square room,

about one hundred meters wide and thirty meters tall with vaulted ceilings sustained by hundreds of thick columns. One end of the room features a huge gate in the middle of the wall. The gate is made in reinforced wood, covered in inscriptions. The characters cannot read the inscriptions, though if a PC has a supernatural ability to read or understand languages then he can figure out that it's Abyssal. The heroes cannot damage or open the gate in any way, and if they try to do so, two shadows jump out of the pillars at them.

Shadow (2)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Undead (Incorporeal) (Abyss)	CR: 3
Str: -	HP: 3d12 (19)	Speed: fly 12		
Dex: 14 (+2)	AC: 13 (+2 dex, +1 deflection)	Armor: none		
Con: -	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 6 (-2)	Ref: +3 (+1 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +1 Grapple: -		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +1 base	Melee: +1 base		
Cha: 13 (+1)	Will: +4 (+3 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +3 (+1 base, +2 dex)		
Attacks		Skills		
Incorporeal touch, +3 melee, damage 1d6 Strength		Hide +12 (+6 ranks, +2 dex, +4 racial*)		
Feats and special abilities		Listen +7 (+2 ranks, +2 alertness, +2 racial, +1 wis)		
Feats: Alertness, Dodge.		Search +4 (+2 ranks, +4 racial, -2 int)		
Strength damage (su): 1d6 Strength damage by touch; creatures reduced to 0 die. This is a negative energy effect.		Spot +7 (+2 ranks, +2 alertness, +2 racial, +1 wis)		
Create spawn (su): humanoids killed by a shadow through its touch become shadows under its control within 1d4 rounds.		* in areas of shadowy illumination		

On the other side of the room, the walls open to reveal a stone stairway leading upwards towards a smaller room. If some characters remain in the big room, the small room seems to be empty. It contains a stone throne, four pillars in the corners, and nothing else. If everyone enters the small room, they see the following scene.

You see a stone throne near the bottom of the room. At first, you think that an empty suit of full plate armor is sitting on the throne – then, you realize that it is actually a slim humanoid figure. His face and hands are jet black, while the armor seems to be made from mithral – it takes a second or so to adjust to the contrast. The humanoid is holding a greatsword in his lap; it is made from white mithral as well. At the man's sides, two great figures made from living shadow stand, flexing their claws. You can only see their eyes clearly, and they are focused on you. In front of the throne, a big and feral black wolf lies like a dog before its master. Looking at it carefully, you recognize it is one of the dark creatures of this layer.

The humanoid speaks: "Intruders. I am Hayazeikanatzeras. I am your liege, as long as you are on this realm, for I am the lord of the layer!" His voice seems to rise in anger for a moment here. "I have brought you here because I want you to answer my questions. Know that I am coming to Maldithar!" Again, the sudden vehement increase.

Hayazeikanatzeras keeps on talking, with more occasional displays of barely-suppressed rage. "I am coming to raze that place to the ground! Two great creatures have been let loose in my realm, and they are killing my pets, my precious creatures of darkness! They are killing them by the score. I have tolerated the presence of Maldithar for very, very long, but my patience is now extinguished".

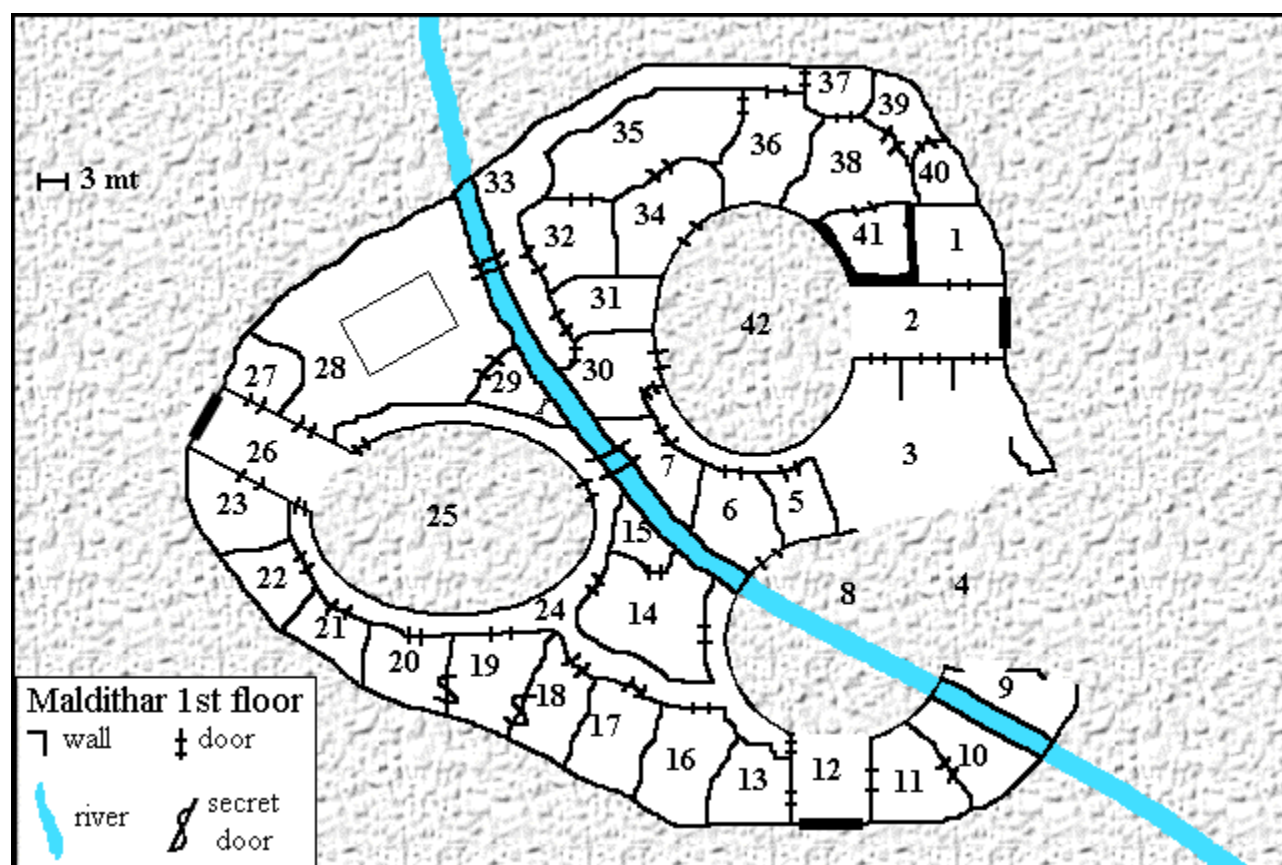
"I am coming with an army of my servants, and the realm of Tenebra will suffer no more Maldithar, nor anyone within!"

The demon lord starts asking questions about the two creatures and about the PCs' travels, though he is only interested in what they did on this layer, which he calls "Tenebra". He looks ready to explode at any moment, frequently raising his voice, tapping on his greatsword, and briefly standing up before the throne when he feels really angry. Hayazeikanatzeras can't hurt the PCs in the dream, but if they prove to be annoying or uninformative, he will cause the vision to end and the PCs to wake up. Since the PCs probably also want to learn as much as possible about this new threat, they'd better not make him angrier than he already is.

Hayazeikanatzeras is ancient, smart, cunning, powerful, and it is unlikely that any of the PCs would be able to lie to him and not be discovered. When he is satisfied, he concludes that the PCs are unable to defeat the two great monsters and certainly unable to oppose him. Satisfied, he ends the dream, and the heroes wake up.

The tanar'ri lord will not contact them or anyone else again, and certainly not in this fashion. The use of this powerful ability is very taxing on him, and he only uses it when he wants to impress an adversary of unknown power. If the PCs warn Coriolis and Joseph about the impending threat, the Mercykiller leader reacts by saying that they need to get the information they are looking for, right now. His plan is to attack the fiends – tomorrow.

Maldithar 1st floor



The first floor has seen the most combat of all. The corpses of mercenaries and tanar'ri, as well as the occasional baatezu, are scattered among the rooms and corridors. Most of them have been thoroughly searched by either of the groups that currently occupy Maldithar, and the Mercykillers have cleared out their area of most of the bodies. Still, even there, the PCs can smell a lingering scent of decay which just won't go away.

A section of Maldithar has collapsed, but even in the standing parts many walls are scorched or otherwise damaged by the combat and the spells that were unleashed upon them. Luckily, the tanar'ri built the fortress with thick stones and metal, and the standing section isn't in danger of collapsing any time soon. Of course, Hayazeikanatzeras will see to that unless the PCs get out quickly.

Most of the internal doors of Maldithar are made from heavy wooden doors (hardness 5, 15 HP, break DC 23), but some are made from iron (hardness 10, 60 HP, break DC 28). Most of the rooms are dimly lit by a single *continual light* spell, sometimes with a reddish or blueish tinge.

The river that crosses the fortress can be accessed at several points. Two bridges used to connect the two halves of Maldithar, but one of them has collapsed during the combats. Another access is behind a secret passage in room 29. The river is also exposed in the internal courtyard 8, but it is in-

fested by demontree tendrils there. Steel grates where the walls intersect the river make sure that it can't be used for an escape.

The river flows from the south to the north, which is just good since it prevents anyone falling in from the bridges from ending up as demontree fodder. However, Hayazeikanatzeras has the ability to reverse the river's direction at will – he hasn't done so in recent times, but since his interest has been focusing on Maldithar again, he may do so in the close future.

Lots of fiends and mercenaries have fallen into the river and died or drowned during the fight. The bottom of the water is covered in corpses, and it will take several hours to search the river carefully. If the PCs do so, though, they can recover 2103 gold coins, 132 silver coins, three *potions of cure light wounds* (faint conjuration; CL 1), a *strand of prayer beads* (moderate transmutation; CL 9; only the bead of karma remains), a *+1 breastplate* (faint abjuration; CL 3; armor bonus +6, max dex +3, check penalty –3, arcane spell failure 25%), a *+1 cold iron glaive* (faint evocation; CL 3; damage 1d10+1, crit x3, reach 3m), and a *+2 dagger* (moderate evocation; CL 6; damage 1d4+2; crit 19-20/x2).

I SEE... ONE CHILD SKULL
AND A VIRGIN'S HEART.
- BABAUS PLAYING
POKER

1. This used to be a guard room. Now, it is occupied by two bored babau tanar'ris. They playing some game using cards made from petitioner skin. A spiral staircase made from iron leads upwards to room 2 of the second floor.

Babau (2)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: 21 (+5)	HP: 7d8+35 (66)	Speed: 9	Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0	
Dex: 12 (+1)	AC: 19 (+1 dex, +8 natural)	Initiative: +1 dex		
Con: 20 (+5)	Ref: +6 (+5 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +7	Grapple: +12	
Int: 14 (+2)	For: +10 (+5 base, +5 con)	Melee: +12 (+7 base, +5 strength)	Ranged: +8 (+7 base, +1 dexterity)	
Wis: 13 (+1)	Will: +6 (+5 base, +1 wis)			
Cha: 16 (+3)				
Attacks			Skills	
2 claws, +12 melee, damage 1d6+5, and			Climb +15 (+10 ranks, +5 str)	
Bite +10 melee, damage 1d6+2			Disable Device +12 (+10 ranks, +2 int)	
Feats and special abilities			Disguise +13 (+10 ranks, +3 cha)	
Feats: Cleave, Multiattack, Power attack			Escape Artist +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex)	
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.			Hide +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex)	
Sneak attack +2d6, damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18			Listen +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis)	
mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire			Move Silently +19 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex)	
10, spell resistance 14, telepathy within 30 mt.			Open Lock +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex)	
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> ,			Search +20 (+10 ranks, +8 racial, +2 int)	
<i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); caster level 7 th .			Sleight of Hand +11 (+10 ranks, +1 dex)	
Protective slime (any weapon or character touching the babau takes 1d8			Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*)	
damage, ignoring hardness; magic weapon and characters may roll a			Use Rope +3 (+1 dex, +2 synergy**)	
Reflex save, DC 18, to avoid)				
Summon 1 babau 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.			* when following tracks	
			** when binding someone	

2. This is one of the three entrances to Maldithar. The door to room 1 is open, allowing the fiends there to look at anyone who may pass through here, though they obviously don't expect an attack from this side. Light can be seen coming from the internal courtyard in room 42.

3. This area is mostly collapsed. Rubble and large slabs of stone are scattered everywhere. In the southern part of the area, there are demontree tendrils jutting out of the rocks almost everywhere, and any given square is threatened by one or two of them. Still, a basher could walk from the western corridor to the northern doors without danger... if it weren't for the two half-fiend shambling mounds. The monsters are hiding among the debris, and they will try to attack by surprise anyone who enters this area.

A small section of corridor near the eastern wall is still standing. It is a dead end, but there is the corpse of a dead mercenary, still wearing his equipment. The poor berk, a dark-haired and dark-skinned tiefling, has a masterwork banded mail (armor bonus +6, max dex +1, check penalty –5, ar-

cane spell failure 35%), a *+1 long sword* (faint evocation, CL 3, damage 1d8, crit 19-20/x2), a heavy steel shield (armor bonus +2, check penalty -2, arcane spell failure 15%), and a pouch with 50 gold pieces.

In the southern part of this area, a babau is standing, grappled by three demontree tendrils. It has been long since reduced to 0 Strength and is immobile. If it sees anyone, it will beg for help with a feeble voice. Helping him, however, is very dangerous; the PCs have to cross about ten meters of tendril-infested ground. If the heroes do free the babau, it will try to get them to restore his Strength, swearing whatever it takes to get help, and then attempt to flee back to the tanar'ri controlled section at the first occasion.

4. This area is entirely collapsed. The ground is fully covered with debris from the destruction of the upper levels, halving the movement of anyone walking on it as they are forced to climb slabs of stone and deal with unstable footing. A gaping hole in the ground, the one from which the PCs escaped, is now almost entirely covered by the demontree's trunk, and tendrils cover the whole area so that any square is threatened by three to five of them.

Walking here is virtually suicide, but even flying characters have something to fear. The demontree can jut out a tendril from its trunk to a range of 18 meters – which means that it covers the entire area, and many characters who rely on darkvision won't even see it until it's too late. The tree itself, on the other hand, has blindsight in any area which can be reached by any of its tendrils, whether they sprout from the ground or are directly attached to the trunk. Luckily, these tendrils work the same as the rest instead of using the tree's BAB. The tree, however, can also use them for slam attacks within 9 meters – these hurt.

The tree itself can be attacked, but if the PCs harm it, it will start spewing out half-fiend shambling mounds from the base of the trunk at a rate of 1 every 1d4 rounds. It can produce up to 20 of them before exhausting its resources for now.

The Demontree		Al. Chaotic Evil	Colossal Plant (Abyss)	CR: 35
Str: 40 (+15)	HP: 90d8+2700 (3105)	Speed: 0	Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0	
Dex: 1 (-5)	AC: 17 (+20 natural, -8 size, -5 dex)	Initiative: -1 (+4 improved init, -5 dex)		
Con: 70 (+30)	Ref: +25 (+30 base, -5 dex)	BAB: +67	Grapple: - Melee: +74 (+67 base, +15 str, -8 size) Ranged: +54 (+67 base, -8 size, -5 dex)	
Int: 10 (+0)	For: +77 (+47 base, +30 con)	Melee: +74 (+67 base, +15 str, -8 size)		
Wis: 19 (+4)	Will: +36 (+30 base, +4 wis, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +54 (+67 base, -8 size, -5 dex)		
Cha: 16 (+3)				
Attacks				Skills
8 slams, +75 melee range 9 mt, damage 2d6+15 and 1d6 Strength, crit 19-20/x2				Listen +97 (+93 ranks, +4 wis)
Feats and special abilities				Spot +97 (+93 ranks, +4 wis)
Feats: Awesome blow, Cleave, Damage Reduction (x6), Energy resistance (acid), Energy resistance (cold), Energy resistance (sonic) (x2), Fast Healing (x12), Great cleave, Improved bull rush, Improved critical (slam), Improved initiative, Iron will, Power attack, Weapon focus (slam).				
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.				
Immune to fire and electricity. Resistance to acid and cold 40. Resistance to sonic 20. DR 20/lawful and good. DR 18/-. Fast healing 40. SR 40. Blindsight 18 meters, low-light vision, darkvision 120 meters.				
Immunity to mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, polymorph, stunning, energy drain and death effects. Not subject to critical hits.				
The Demontree can create one demontree tendril per round, which can attack anyone within 18 meters of the trunk.				
The Demontree can create one half-fiend shambling mound every day and store it within itself. It can release one of them every 1d4 rounds.				

If the PCs somehow manage to search this area (unlikely), they can find lots of dead fiends and mercenaries, most of them with their equipment. This includes three *+1 swords* (faint evocation, CL 3, damage 1d8+1, crit 19-20/x2), a *+1 falchion* (faint evocation, CL 3, damage 2d4+1, crit 18-20/x2), a *+2 greatsword* (moderate evocation, CL 6, damage 2d6+2, crit 19-20/x2), several non-magical weapons, a masterwork full plate (armor bonus +8, max dex +1, check penalty -5, arcane spell failure 35%), two *+1 heavy steel shields* (faint abjuration, CL 3, armor bonus +3, check penalty -1, arcane spell failure 15%), a *+1 breastplate* made from permanent ironwood (moderate transmutation, CL 11, armor bonus +6, max dex +3, check penalty -3), several nonmagical armors,

five *potions of cure light wounds* (faint conjuration, CL 1), a *potion of bull's strength* (faint transmutation, CL 3), a *potion of fly* (faint transmutation, CL 3), an *oil of keen edge* (faint transmutation, CL 5), a *wand of fireball* (faint evocation, CL 5, 29 charges left), an *amulet of natural armor* +2 (faint transmutation, CL 6), and a total of 532 gold pieces and 43 silver pieces.

5. This room was converted to a sleeping area for Rothakon's mercenaries. It contains ten bunk beds and a few crates containing 43 gold coins. However, it is also occupied by four demontree tendrils.

6. This room, too, was used by Rothakon to house his mercenaries. It is guarded by one hezrou and one babau; all the beds have been piled up against the southern door, which is made in iron.

7. This room is guarded by one babau. The door leading to the river is made from iron; the bridge has collapsed entirely some time ago. There have been no strikes around here since then; bashing down the door without the bridge would be too difficult for the Mercykillers, and the fiends have been on the defensive for a while. The room itself is empty. The walls have been painted with pictures of fiendish sea creatures.

8. This used to be one of the three internal courtyards. Now, the ceiling has collapsed, destroying the spells which used to project light on it. It is dark like everything else, and infested by demontree tendrils. Every square is threatened by one or two of them. The river itself is even more infested; a web of tentacles writhes under the water, and there are three corpses entangled in it. Anyone within the river is subject to attacks from four tendrils in any square. At the north and south ends of this room, two steel grates prevent anyone from swimming in or out.

9. This half-collapsed room used to be another sleeping quarter. Right now, though, it contains a monstrous sight. Demontree tendrils come out of the floor, ceiling and standing walls, and they wrap around an immobile carrion crawler. The insectoid creature is suspended about one meter from the floor by the tentacles, and it looks motionless. At a closer inspection, though, it seems to pulsate irregularly, as if something was moving inside it.

The tendrils' poison is interacting with the carrion crawler in a weird way, transforming it into something else. This particular crawler is currently alive but innocuous, but it is not the first which the demontree has captured.

10. *This* is the first carrion crawler which the demontree has captured. It is lurking on the ceiling of the room. There are also four demontree tendrils in the room, attached to the floor and northern walls.

Mutated Carrion Crawler		Al. Neutral	Large Aberration (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: 18 (+4)	HP: 8d8+24 (60)	Speed: 12, climb 6		
Dex: 14 (+2)	AC: 20 (-1 size, +2 dex, +9 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 16 (+3)	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 1 (-5)	Ref: +5 (+2 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +6 Grapple: +14		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +5 (+2 base, +3 con)	Melee: +9 (+6 base, +4 str, -1 size)		
Cha: 4 (-3)	Will: +7 (+6 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +7 (+6 base, +2 dex, -1 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
8 tentacles, +10 melee, damage paralysis and 1d4 Strength, and Bite, +5 melee, damage 1d4+2		Climb +14 (+2 ranks, +4 str, +8 racial*)		
Feats and special abilities		Hide +13 (+5 ranks, +10 racial, +2 dex, -4 size)		
Feats: Alertness, Combat reflexes, Track, Weapon focus (tentacle)		Listen +5 (+2 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)		
Paralysis (su): on a tentacle hit, DC 17, paralyzes for 2d4 rounds.		Spot +5 (+2 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)		
Darkvision 18m, scent.		* can always take 10 when climbing		

The rest of the room is occupied by an iron staircase leading upwards to room 1 of the second floor.

11. This room is another sleeping quarter; it contains two demontree tendrils, but not much else.

12. This is one of the three entrances to Maldithar. It is surprisingly clean, considering that it is so close to the demontree. The middle of the hallway is occupied by an elaborated staircase leading upwards to room 9 on the second floor. Near the tall ceiling, within reach of the stairs' top, a mutated carrion crawler is hiding on the ceiling. It will attack by surprise anyone who tries to climb the

stairs, or to pass through the hallway. The ruckus is probably going to draw the attention of the monsters in room **13**, too.

13. This room used to be a guard room. Right now, it is occupied by three half-fiend shambling mounds, which are gobbling on the corpse of an hezrou. They are going to mindlessly attack anyone who enters. If the PCs search the hezrou, they can pry from its grasp a very heavy keyring. It contains a copy of each key of the fortress, allowing the owner to lock or unlock any door except for those on the third floor. Since there are so many keys, however, it takes 2d8 rounds to find the correct one.

14. This room is heavily guarded by Mercykillers. There are five mercykiller fighters here; four of them are on either side of each of the two doors leading out, while the last is guarding the iron door leading to room **15**. Even though the bashers have tried to clean up somewhat, the room shows the signs of some real carnage, with blood stains everywhere and scratched and scorched walls.

15. This small room contains the stairs leading upwards to room **20** on the second floor.

16. This used to be a resting place for tanar'ri. It contains two wide leather couches, marked with cuts from claws. The leather is made from several layers of human skin – this is easy to tell, because the armrests end with the poor sods' faces. The middle of the room contains a couple of poles, with chains and manacles attached to them. Their use is unclear.

17. This room used to contain an iron spiral staircase leading upwards to room **8** of the second floor. Right now, however, the whole iron structure has collapsed, and it is leaning on a wall leaving just a wide hole on the ceiling.

18. This room has been converted for a sleeping quarters for Rothakon's mercenaries. It contains several bunk beds, and not much else.

19. This room looks like some kind of armory. Dozens of weapons and shields are hanging from the walls, and they are all beautiful items made from precious materials and masterfully carved with delicate lines. The shields are colorfully painted with Blood War scenes in an impressionist style, while the weapons are carved and chiseled with Abyssal runes. While the subjects may be disturbing, tanar'ri make as good artists as anyone else.

At a closer inspection, though, it is clear that all this stuff has only been made for shows. The materials are too fragile to be used, the balance is way off on all the weapons, and the beautiful shapes aren't practical. The stuff here could be sold for about ten thousand gold, but only to a collector or a tanar'ri art enthusiast.

There is one exception. A strange serrated scimitar, which has been made from Abyssal red iron, hangs among the other weapons, as good-looking as them but much deadlier. The weapon is non-magical, but it is masterwork. Combined with the properties of red iron, the red scimitar counts as a scimitar with a +1 enhancement bonus to hit and damage, and ignores DR as if it were cold iron.

The weapon, however, packs a surprise bigger than itself. The name of the surprise is Tamanaguk – the glabrezu who used to command Maldithar before Rothakon and his forces arrived. The powerful and cunning fiend has escaped certain death by possessing the scimitar (as per the rules in the *Book of Vile Darkness*, which will be summarized here in a simplified way for those who don't have that manual).

Tamanaguk is effectively inside the scimitar. The glabrezu can make a Hide check to escape being detected by a *detect evil* or similar spell; this check is opposed by a level check by the caster. Intelligence, rather than Dexterity, is used for this check; size modifiers don't apply. The item doesn't register as magical, either. Tamanaguk can hide in the same way to bypass any spell that would ward him off, provided that someone carries the scimitar through it.

HEY, GUYS! CHECK THIS
OUT!
– ONE HERO, UPON
MEETING TAMANAGUK

The fiend can empower the scimitar while it possesses it. If he wishes, the scimitar can function as if it were *+1 keen flaming*. The big disadvantage of the possession, however, is that he has no senses and no way of getting information from the outside world unless someone picks the scimitar up. Afraid of being discovered and attacked by Rothakon's men, Tamanaguk has been hiding up to now.

If a PC picks the scimitar up, Tamanaguk will stay silent and do nothing until it gets an idea of the situation. The glabrezu is extremely intelligent, and he'll be able to put a picture together fairly quickly. When he learns that the two colossal monsters have escaped, he immediately realizes that this will draw the ire of Hayazeikanatzeras, and he will seek to leave the layer as soon as possible. Tamanaguk knows of two ways out of the layer – the portal in Maldithar, and the portal in the forest. Before choosing either, he wants to learn as much as he can on the situation. If he learns about the curse on Maldithar's portal, he will decide to leave through the portal in the forest, and to be carried there by someone if possible (he can't fly for long, so the trip is going to be rather hard). He won't leave the scimitar at the very least until he's clear of the Worm goo covered zone.

If the PCs prove themselves as powerful heroes, he might decide to stay with them for some more time, hidden in the weapon, while he figures out a way to maneuver him into a new position of power. Tamanaguk can attempt to leave the scimitar and possess a creature instead, and he'll do so when he decides that the right moment has arrived. The DC is 22; if you don't have the *Book of Vile Darkness*, consider this as a *magic jar* spell which doesn't leave the body behind.

Tamanaguk		Al. Neutral	Glabrezu Sorcerer 6 th (Abyss)	CR: 16
Str: 31 (+10)	HP: 12d8+6d4+180 (249)	Speed: 12		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 27 (–2 size, +19 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 31 (+10)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 16 (+3)	Ref: +10 base	BAB: +15 Grapple: +33		
Wis: 16 (+3)	For: +20 (+10 base, +10 con)	Melee: +23 (+15 base, +10 str, –2 size)		
Cha: 22 (+6)	Will: +16 (+13 base, +3 wis)	Ranged: +13 (+15 base, –2 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 pincers, +23 melee reach 4.5 mt, damage 2d8+10, and		Bluff +29 (+21 ranks, +6 cha, +2 persuasive)		
2 claws, +21 melee reach 4.5 mt, damage 1d6+5, and		Concentration +31 (+21 ranks, +10 con)		
Bite, +21 melee reach 4.5 mt, damage 1d8+5		Craft (weapons) +9 (+6 ranks, +3 int)		
Feats and special abilities		Diplomacy +10 (+6 cha, +4 synergy)		
Feats: Cleave, Eschew materials, Great cleave, Multiattack,		Disguise +8 (+6 cha, +2 synergy*)		
Persuasive, Power attack, Quicken spell-like ability (dispel magic)		Intimidate +25 (+15 ranks, +6 cha, +2 persuasive. +2 synergy)		
DR 10/good, darkvision 18 mt, immune to electricity and poison, resist acid, cold and fire 10, SR 21, telepathy 33 mt.		Knowledge (Arcana) +24 (+21 ranks, +3 int)		
Improved grab (ex): pincer attack, Medium or smaller creatures.		Knowledge (the Abyss) +18 (+15 ranks, +3 int)		
Spell-like abilities: <i>chaos hammer</i> (DC 20), <i>confusion</i> (DC 20), <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>mirror image</i> , <i>reverse gravity</i> (DC 23), <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), <i>unholy blight</i> (DC 20); 1/day - <i>power word stun</i> .		Listen +26 (+15 ranks, +8 racial, +3 wis)		
Summon Demon (sp): 1/day, 4d10 dretches or 1d2 vrockes with a 50% chance of success, or another glabrezu with a 20% chance of success, as a 4 th level spell.		Move Silently +15 ranks		
Continuous <i>true seeing</i> , CL 14.		Search +18 (+15 ranks, +3 int)		
Sorcerer spells known (DC 13 + spell level): 0 th level: <i>dancing lights</i> , <i>touch of fatigue</i> , <i>prestidigitation</i> , <i>detect magic</i> , <i>read magic</i> , <i>arcane mark</i> , <i>resistance</i> ; 1 st level: <i>expeditious retreat</i> , <i>aberrate*</i> , <i>ray of enfeeblement</i> , <i>bear's endurance</i> ; 2 nd level: <i>darkbolt*</i> , <i>invisibility</i> ; 3 rd level: <i>fly</i>		Sense Motive +18 (+15 ranks, +3 wis)		
* this spell is from the <i>Book of Vile Darkness</i> .		Spellcraft +24 (+21 ranks, +3 int)		
Sorcerer spells/day: 6/6/5/3, caster level 6		Spot +26 (+15 ranks, +8 racial, +3 wis)		
		Survival +7 (+3 wis, +2 synergy**, +2 synergy***)		
		* when acting in character		
		** when following tracks		
		*** on the Abyss		

20. This room was used by the tanar'ri to eat some snacks and relax. It contains several stone benches, and a crate full of writhing larvae. At least, it used to be – there are only two larvae now, wallowing in a crate full of decomposing, gooey fluids. The whole room is soaked in the fetid smell coming from it.

21. This room contains a steel ladder leading upwards to room **7** on the second floor. A human corpse lies on the floor; it has been stripped of all possessions.

22. This room has been used to house Rothakon's mercenaries. It contains several bedrolls on the floor, a chain mail armor (armor bonus +5, max dex +2, check penalty -5, arcane spell failure 30%) under one of them, and nothing else.

23. This room contains an iron spiral staircase leading upwards to room **6** on the second floor. The staircase is heavily damaged; a dead babau lies impaled on the iron structure. Attempts to climb them may (20%) result in the whole spiral staircase collapsing. If this happens, everyone on the staircase must make a Reflex save, DC 15. Those that succeed fall to the ground and take 1d6 damage. The others get hurt on the spiky iron railings, and take 5d6 damage.

24. These corridors are empty, but there are three Mercykiller fighters patrolling them at all times.

25. This is one of the three internal courtyards of Maldithar. The courtyard is enclosed by an oval ceiling, rising up to twelve meters of height. The ceiling is covered by *continual light* spells, shining down on the inside.

The courtyard contains a wide circular pit, about one meter and a half deep. Here, the tanar'ri used to stage fights between larvae, manes, dretches, captured creatures of darkness, and sometimes a mortal prisoner or two, for their amusement. The bottom of the pit is littered with bones and a few bits of metal from the gladiators' equipment. There's nothing useful, though.

26. This is one of Maldithar's three entrances – and it is a trap. When the huge gate is open, the trap is active: pressure plates everywhere on the floor can trigger showers of cold iron arrows from the walls and ceilings. Every time someone moves, 1d6 arrows are shot at him or her from the mechanisms, striking at +10 attack bonus and dealing 1d8+3 damage. There are about a hundred arrows in the trap.

When the gate is closed, there is no risk. The Mercykillers know about this trap, and they'll warn the PCs if they express their desire to open the gate.

27. This empty room used to be a guard room, and stone steps around the perimeter lead upwards to room **5** on the second floor.

28. This large room was used as a prison and a tool of psychological torture by the fiends. The middle of the room is occupied by a huge steel cage, which is currently locked. From the outside, it looks like a normal cage. From the inside, illusion magic makes the air between the iron bars act like a mirror. As a result, anyone who is in the cage cannot see outside; instead, he sees himself imprisoned in the cage, endlessly in all directions including up and down. The images stare at him behind countless bars, wherever he turns to. Not having the key, the Mercykillers haven't realized this.

The doors on the eastern side are both made from iron. The northern one leads to a bridge over the river, and to the tanar'ri section of Maldithar; the Mercykillers have managed to unlock it. The southern one is locked. Five Mercykillers warriors are here at all times, as well as the Mercykiller cleric Tarinee.

29. This room looks empty except for a dusty, rugged backpack lying near a wall. It contains twelve torches, flint and a tinderbox, two waterbags, a cold iron knife, rope, and some packets which used to contain meat but have long since rotted away. Two levers on the wall allow anyone in this room to raise or lower the steel grates which block access through the river at the points where it enters and exits the fortress.

The short southeastern wall hides a secret passage. The wall can rotate to give access to the river; a small rowboat is here. Apparently, someone planned an escape but didn't get the occasion to attempt it.

30. This room is a sort of atrium. The iron door leading to the internal courtyard is locked, as well as the wooden one leading to the southern corridor. There are shelves on the western wall, holding

up preserved severed heads of various humanoid races. A single hezrou is here, carefully examining the heads.

31. This room is empty of furniture, but it features the mangled corpses of a half dozen mercenaries and a vrock tanar'ri. One of the mercenaries has a pouch of *dust of tracelessness* (faint transmutation, CL 3). The middle of the room is occupied by the stairs leading upwards to room **17** on the second floor.

32. This is an antechamber to the mess hall in room **35**. It contains several shelves of cutlery, dishes and glasses, including some disturbing items such as mugs made out of children's skulls, bone knives, and blood-stained porcelain.

33. This hallway is where most of the fight between tanar'ri and Mercykillers has happened. It is currently guarded by two babaus, placed here by Tarlikin together with a dozen dretches. Unfortunately, the dretches are doing pretty much what they want, and the babaus are spending their time trying to keep them in the same place. So far, the best trick they've found consists in feeding them a corpse or two. Maldithar has no shortage of that.

In the corner of the corridor, there is a spiral iron staircase which leads upwards to room **4** on the second floor. The door leading to the bridge over the river is made out of iron, and locked.

34. This is another antechamber to the mess hall in room **35**. It contains a marble basin, full of normal water, and the walls are painted with sinuous, twisting, snake-like shapes, which seem to writhe and bend near the corners of a berk's eyes. The effect of the fiendish painting is so annoying that anyone staying in this room for more than one round must make a Fortitude save (DC 14) or become nauseated until he leaves. Fiends are immune.

35. This is a fiendish mess hall. It contains two long iron tables and four iron benches. The half-rotten remains of the last meal are still on the tables, and two dretches (escaped from area **33**) are over one of the tables, gobbling the decomposing larva steaks as if they were fine gourmet dishes. They won't attack unless disturbed somehow.

36. This room has been converted for use as sleeping quarters; it contains several bedrolls, scattered over the floor. One dead mercenary is still lying on one of them; it has normal equipment and 32 silver coins. A torture table has been put against a corner; it's a sturdy wooden table, with leather straps firmly nailed to its sides. The fiends would tie a prisoner to it, and leave her here for anyone passing near to abuse her to death.

37. This room contains the stairs leading upwards to room **3** on the second floor. PCs that make a Listen check (DC 16) can hear grunts from upstairs; it sounds like the voice of a hezrou tanar'ri.

38. This is one of the room that has seen the most fight when the PCs escaped. About twenty corpses are scattered everywhere on the floor. They are mostly mercenaries, though a few dead babaus are here as well as a couple barbazus devils. These corpses still have most of their equipment, including a +1 *cold iron lance* (faint evocation, CL 3), a masterwork scale mail, two *potions of cure light wounds* (faint conjuration, CL 1) and 324 gold coins.

39. This room was used as a small armory. Most of the weapon racks are empty, but it still contains a few mundane weapons, mostly two-handed reach weapons such as glaives, guisarmes and ranseurs. All the weapons here are tanar'ri-made.

40. This room used to house Maldithar guards. It is empty now.

41. These are the stairs leading downwards to the Upper Prison. They are literally chock full of corpses. There are dozens upon dozens of dead mercenaries and fiends, who fought for control of this point for hours, climbing over the dead and trampling the dying in their effort to kill their enemies. The bodies are stacked almost to the ceiling, and coupled with the debris from the collapse of part of the ceiling, they completely obstruct the passage leading downwards.

It would take many hours, even days, to free the passage, but it isn't worth it. After more than ten meters of corpses upon corpses, the passage is still blocked by the cave-in, and after that it is in-

fested by demontree tendrils. The Upper Prison has nothing interesting anyway; everything has collapsed and there are no survivors.

Such is the carnage that happened in this area, that the moans of the dying are still echoing against the walls, amplified by the evil of the plane itself. Anyone within the room can clearly hear a chours of faint screams, as if many people were dying somewhere in the distance. The psychic residue also interferes with divination magic – a faint evil aura is permanent here, and *detect magic* fails.

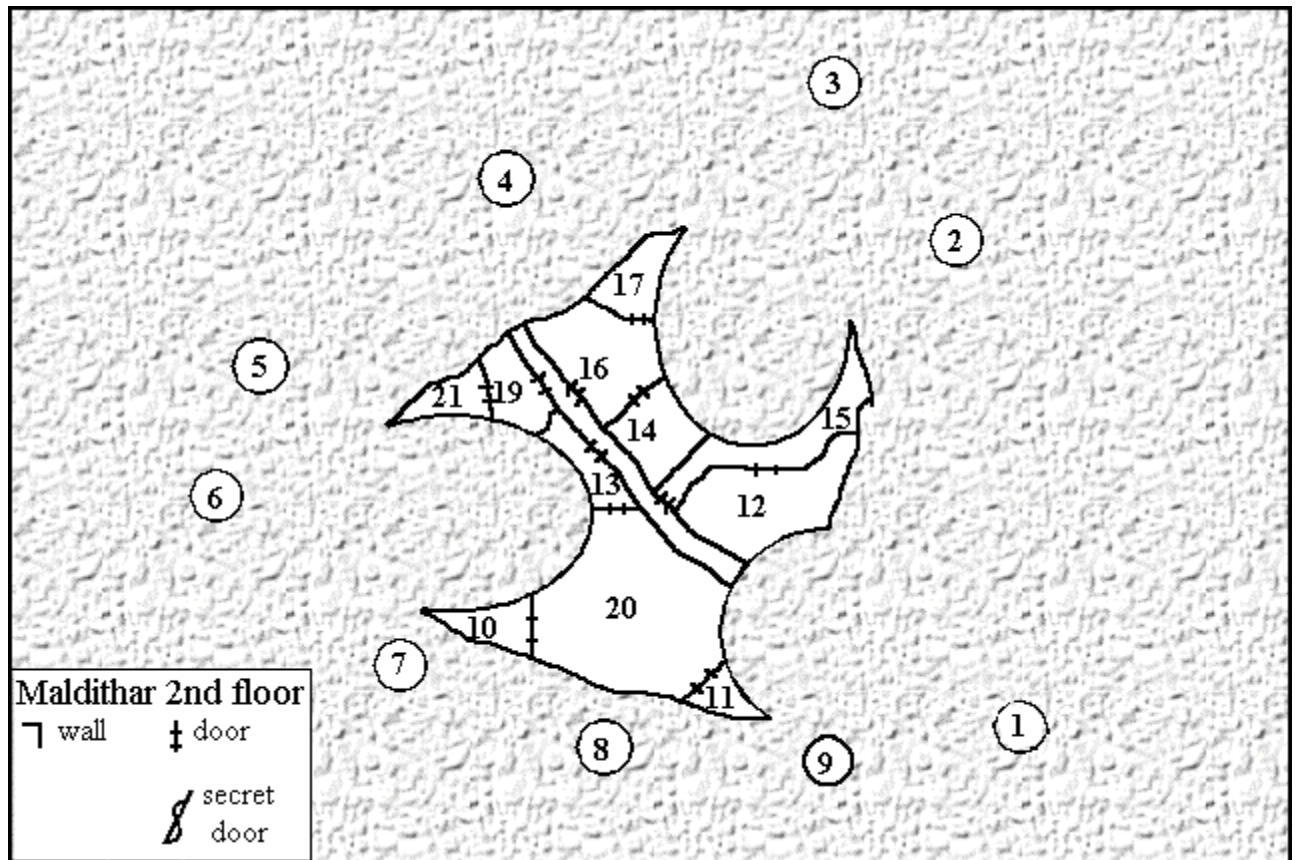
If the PCs have the guts to search the bodies, they can pick up lots of equipment and money. There are three *continual torches* here, several spell component pouches, lots of mundane weapons and armor, a +1 *lance* (faint evocation, CL 3), a +2 *short sword* (moderate evocation, CL 6), a *wand of lightning bolt* (faint evocation, CL 5, 10 charges left), three +1 *long swords* (faint evocation, CL 3), two +1 *breastplates* made from permanent ironwood (moderate transmutation, CL 11), a +1 *full plate* (faint abjuration, CL 3), two +1 *heavy steel shields* (faint abjuration, CL 3), and a total of 1329 gold coins. However, it will take nothing less than 6 hours of work to gather up everything from the obstructed tunnel.

42. This is one of the three internal courtyards of Maldithar. It has an ovoidal ceiling, reaching a height of ten meters, and covered in *continual light* spells which light up the entire area. A dozen or so human skeletons hang from the ceiling on spiked chains. Three babaus – the best warriors among these tanar’ri – are also here; they have taken some weapons and equipment from the corpses of the mercenaries around the fortress, and are trying them out on the skeletons.

Babau (3)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Babau Fighter 1 st (Abyss)	CR: 8
Str: 22 (+6)	HP: 9d8+1d10+50 (96)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 12 (+1)	AC: 19 (+1 dex, +8 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 20 (+5)	Initiative: +5 (+1 dex, +4 improved init)	% fail.: 0%	Check pen.: -3	
Int: 14 (+2)	Ref: +7 (+6 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +10	Grapple: +16	
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +11 (+6 base, +5 con)	Melee: +16 (+10 base, +6 strength)		
Cha: 16 (+3)	Will: +9 (+6 base, +1 wis, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +11 (+10 base, +1 dexterity)		
Attacks			Skills	
2 claws, +16 melee, damage 1d6+6, and			Climb +15 (+12 ranks, +6 str, -3 armor)	
Bite +14 melee, damage 1d6+3, or			Disable Device +13 (+11 ranks, +2 int)	
Two handed weapon, +18/+13 melee, damage weapon+9, crit varies			Disguise +14 (+11 ranks, +3 cha)	
Feats and special abilities			Escape Artist +9 (+11 ranks, +1 dex, -3 armor)	
Feats: Cleave, Improved initiative, Iron will, Multiattack, Power attack.			Hide +17 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex, -3 armor)	
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.			Intimidate +7 (+4 ranks, +3 cha)	
Sneak attack +2d6, damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 16, telepathy within 30 mt.			Listen +20 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis)	
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); caster level 9 th .			Move Silently +17 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +1 dex, -3 armor)	
Protective slime (su): any weapon or character touching the babau takes 1d8 damage, ignoring hardness; magic weapon and characters may roll a Reflex save, DC 18, to avoid.			Open Lock +12 (+11 ranks, +1 dex)	
Summon 1 babau 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.			Search +21 (+11 ranks, +8 racial, +2 int)	
Equipment			Sleight of Hand +9 (+11 ranks, +1 dex, -3 armor)	
+1 <i>breastplate</i> made from permanent ironwood (moderate transmutation, CL 11) (armor bonus +6, max dex +3, check penalty -3, spell failure 25%)			Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*)	
Each of the babau has one of these weapons:			Use Rope +3 (+1 dex, +2 synergy**)	
+1 <i>greatsword</i> (faint evocation, CL 3) (damage 2d6+1, crit 19-20/x2)				
+1 <i>guisarme</i> (faint evocation, CL 3) (damage 2d4+1, crit x3, reach 3m)				
+1 <i>scythe</i> (faint evocation, CL 3) (damage 2d4+1, crit x4)				

These babaus are suppressing their protective slime ability, in order not to damage the equipment. Therefore, the PCs can hit them safely.

Maldithar 2nd floor



The second floor of Maldithar is a nice example of twisted fiendish architecture. It is split in two by a long corridor which runs directly above the river four meters below. Each of the two halves has stairs going down and stairs going up – but in order to get from the first floor to the third or vice-versa, you are forced to pass through the central corridor (look at the map for a better understanding).

Since right now the fortress is split in half between tanar’ri and Mercykillers, the central corridor is a very, very dangerous place. Before the arrival of Tarlikin, it was the main point of combat between fiends and humans. The yugoloth has caused the fight to calm down a little, and now both sides content themselves with keeping the iron doors well locked and barred, and crossing the corridor as little as possible. The Mercykillers in particular have quickly developed a protocol based on tapping the wall between rooms 19 and 13 with their weapons to inform the two sides that someone has to pass through the corridor. The doors are simultaneously unlocked and the person runs the 8 or so meters between them. Then the guards close them again; it takes just a few seconds.

1. This tower is infested by demontree tendrils. There are four on this floor; they’ll attack anything that moves. There are stairs leading upwards to room 1 on the third floor.
2. This floor of the tower is dark and empty, except for the stairs leading upwards to room 2 on the third floor. Even the *continual light* spells are long gone.
3. There is a steel ladder leading upwards to the top of the tower here (room 3 on the third floor). Near the bottom of the ladder, there is a gray leathery bag. It is a *gray bag of tricks* (faint conjuration, CL 3). The hezrou upstairs exhausted its charges for this week, using the conjured animals to amuse itself with torture, and then angrily threw down the bag when it would no longer produce anything.
4. There’s a single dretch here, wandering in circles. A ladder leads upwards to room 4 on the third floor, but access is closed by a wooden hatch. The hatch is stuck; it takes a Strength check, DC 20, to open it.

5. The iron staircase leading upwards has long since collapsed. A gaping hole remains in the ceiling, leading to room **5** on the third floor.
6. A steel ladder leads to room **6** on the third floor. The tower is otherwise empty.
7. The iron spiral staircase keeps climbing to room **7** on the third floor. Another corpse lies in the middle of the steps, stripped of all valuable possessions.
8. This tower contains a couple of crates of meat, preserved under salt. It is unknown for how long it has been here, but it is still edible. Stone steps, jutting out of the walls, lead upwards to room **8** on the third floor.
9. Two half-fiend shambling mounds are here. They will attack on sight. Stone steps lead upwards to room **9** on the third floor.
10. This room contains shelves full of vials and bottles of some thick black fluid. This isn't immediately interesting for the PCs, though, because the floor is literally covered in snakes. Fiendish vipers, to be more precise; there are *hundreds upon hundreds* of them. They are covering every centimeter of the floor, crawling over the walls, and jumping from the shelves. Swarm rules are used.

Fiendish viper swarm		Al. Chaotic Evil	Tiny Magical Beast (Augmented Vermin, Swarm) (Abyss)		CR: 8
Str: 4 (-3)	HP: 12d8 (54)	Speed: 4.5, climb 4.5, swim 4.5			
Dex: 17 (+3)	AC: 17 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +2 natural)	Armor: none			
Con: 11 (+0)	Initiative: +7 (+3 dex, +4 improved init)	% fail.: 0%		Check pen.: 0	
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +4 (+1 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +9		Grapple: -	
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +5 (+4 base, +1 con)	Melee: +8 (+9 base, -3 str, +2 size)			
Cha: 2 (-4)	Will: +1 base	Ranged: +14 (+9 base, +3 dex, +2 size)			
Attacks			Skills		
Swarm 2d6 plus poison			Balance +11 (+3 dex, +8 racial)		
Feats and special abilities			Climb +20 (+9 ranks, +3 dex, +8 racial)*		
Feats: Ability focus (poison), Improved initiative, Weapon finesse.			Hide +15 (+8 size, +4 racial, +3 ranks)		
Darkvision 18 m, half damage from weapons, SR 17, DR 5/magic, resistance to cold and fire 10.			Listen +8 (+3 ranks, +4 racial, +1 wis)		
Smite good (su): since there are so many of them, every strike against a good creature deals +1 damage.			Spot +8 (+3 ranks, +4 racial, +1 wis)		
Distraction (ex): every creature in a square occupied by the swarm must make a Fortitude save (DC 16) every round or become nauseated.			Swim +5 (+3 str, +8 racial**)		
Vermin traits, swarm traits.			* use Dex modifier for Climb checks, and can always take 10		
Poison (ex): DC 18, damage 1d6 Constitution initial and secondary.			** to avoid hazard or perform special moves; can always take 10, can run in a straight line		

The jars and bottles over the shelves are full of viper poison. This poison has a DC of 10, and deals 1d6 Constitution as initial and secondary damage. There are about a hundred doses of it.

11. The viper room was dangerous, but this one is the most evil of the two. It is full of agony – liquid pain, extracted with the device in room **20**. There are many bottles of it, and one can only wonder how many people were horribly tortured to produce it. Liquid pain has many uses for those wicked enough to deal with it. The market price of a dose of liquid pain is 200 gold coins; it can be used to get a +2 caster level on a spell, or to provide 3 XP for the purpose of magic item creation. It is also an extremely addictive drug which provides great pleasure when ingested.

Characters that do so must make a Fortitude save, DC 25, or become addicted. Addicted characters will crave one more dose every 24 hours; if they don't get their fix, they must make a Fortitude save, DC 30, or take 1d6 Dexterity, 1d6 Wisdom and 1d6 Constitution damage. The DC of the save increases by +5 every 24 hours. If a character makes two consecutive saves, he's staved off the ad-

diction. The drug's effect is as follows. The character must make a Fortitude save, DC 18, or become stunned for 1d4+1 rounds and be limited to partial actions for 1d6 minutes. One minute later, the character must make a Fortitude save, DC 18, or take a 1d4+1 enhancement bonus to Charisma for 1d10+50 minutes (people usually willingly fail this one). Regardless of the saves, the character feels intense pleasure for 1d4 hours. If

I WANT THIS STUFF
DESTROYED BEFORE WE
GO.
- JOSEPH

the character takes more than one dose in 24 hours, he falls unconscious for 1d4 hours (Fortitude negates, DC 18). *Greater restoration* or *heal* can end the addiction.

There are about a hundred doses here, but good PCs are probably going to just destroy the vile stuff. Selling it is a questionable action at best, and selling such a large quantity can draw a lot of unwanted attention, both from celestials and fiends.

12. This room has been completely trashed. The furniture used to be beautiful and precious, and now it lies broken in a thousand pieces, everywhere in the room. Even the eastern wall has crumbled, exposing the collapsed area below (area 3 on the first floor). The devastation has been caused by an angry bulezau – probably the strongest tanar’ri around here, and also the most stupid. Tarlikin find it to be quite easy to manipulate, and has managed to intimidate the fiend into guarding the corridor leading to the third floor.

Frightened of the powerful spellcaster, frustrated at his fear, and angry at his frustration, the bulezau has trashed everything up to and including the room’s door. The wall, though, crumbled during the Worm’s escape.

Bulezau	Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 10
Str: 26 (+8) Dex: 19 (+4) Con: 22 (+6) Int: 6 (-2) Wis: 8 (-1) Cha: 10 (+0)	HP: 14d8+84 (147) AC: 23 (-1 size, +3 dex, +11 natural) Initiative: +3 dex Ref: +13 (+9 base, +4 dex) For: +15 (+9 base, +6 con) Will: +4 (+5 base, -1 wis)	Speed: 9 Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +14 Melee: +21 (+14 base, +8 strength, -1 size) Ranged: +17 (+14 base, +4 dexterity, -1 size)	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +26
Attacks +1 <i>greatsword</i> +22/+17/+12 melee, damage 3d6+13, crit 19-20/x2, or 2 claws, +21 melee, damage 1d4+6, and Head butt +19 melee, damage 2d8+4, and Tail slap +19 melee, damage 1d3+4			Skills Climb +23 (+17 ranks, +6 str) Jump +23 (+17 ranks, +6 str) Listen +17 ranks Spot +17 ranks Survival +17 ranks Swim +23 (+17 ranks, +6 str)
Feats and special abilities Feats: Awesome blow, Improved bull rush, Multiattack, Power attack, Weapon focus (greatsword) All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 14. Awesome blow with the head butt, as the feat. Rage: 25% chance per round of combat, 75% in rounds during which it was damaged but didn’t hit a foe. Rage lasts until all opponents are dead or until 5 rounds pass without combat; it otherwise work as a barbarian’s rage. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>cause fear</i> , <i>command</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>wall of fog</i> ; 1/day – <i>shout</i> . Caster level 7 th . Summon 1-3 rutterkin (40%) or 3-12 dretches (60%) babau 1/day with 25% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.			
Equipment <i>Potion of bull’s strength</i> (faint transmutation, CL 3) <i>Potion of bear’s endurance</i> (faint transmutation, CL 3) +1 <i>greatsword</i> , Large size (faint evocation, CL 3) (damage 3d6, crit 19-20/x2)			

The monster is going to drink the potions as soon as it hears a fight coming its way. However, bulezau have some anger management issues; if the PCs hurt it, there is a 75% chance that it will fly into a rage and attack, forgetting about the potions.

The rage grants it a +4 modifier to Strength and Constitution, while the potions grant a +4 modifier to Strength and Constitution respectively. With one of these bonuses, the monster attacks with the greatsword at +24/+19/+14 with damage 3d6+16 and/or has 175 hit points. With all bonuses, the monster attacks with the greatsword at +26/+21/+16 with damage 3d6+19 and has 203 hit points.

13. This room is constantly watched by a Mercykiller fighter, who won’t allow anyone to enter the corridor without an important reason. He has the key to the iron door leading to the corridor. A stuffed barbazu is hanging by the northern wall (not a common sight by any means).

14. This is it – the portal room. This is where the PCs entered the Abyss. It is just like it was back then; a square room, divided by two steel grates in three rectangular section with the portal in the middle one. It looks like a metal arch, somewhat rough at touch.

The portal is guarded by a single babau right now, and the grates are closed. If the PCs wish to examine the portal closely, they notice that the rough feeling of its surface is due to thousands of minuscule runes carved upon it. No human artisan-mage can be so precise. Each PC can make a Spellcraft and Knowledge (Arcana) check to learn more about this, but unless they have some kind of magnifying lens they'll take a –5 penalty. Depending on what they score, they can learn different things. Use the highest result between the Spellcraft and Knowledge (Arcana) check; both the practical and academical approaches are valuable here.

Unusual Parties

If the party doesn't have a character with a high score in either Spellcraft or Knowledge (Arcana), they can ask Harken the Mercykiller wizard to check out the portal for them.

- **0-10.** The PC doesn't understand anything of these runes.
- **11-15.** The PC understands that these runes are the spell which was cast upon them, and that it is still active. It is an epic spell, an abjuration, much more powerful than any common magic.
- **16-20.** The PC understands that the spell becomes active when something tries to move the targets between planes. It greatly strengthens the planar barriers, making the trip impossible. The spell doesn't contain enough power to do this trick for a long time, or to resist powerful dispelling attempt, which leaves the character a bit puzzled. It should have expired long ago. Also, there is nothing here which should deal damage to the victims.
- **21-30.** The PC understands that the spell draws power from an external source. Every time it is activated, it consumes some power from that source. This way, it can keep working as long as that source exists. The bond also prevents the spell from being dispelled; any attempt to do so would simply consume more power from the source. There is some arcane "power leakage" here, which causes damage to the targets when they try to leave the plane, but it doesn't look like it was intentional. Overall, it looks like this spell was put together in haste – there is lots of power here but not much finesse. An *antimagic field* can suppress it normally, but this is useless because it would also prevent planar travel.
- **31-40.** The PC understands that the spell draws power from a living soul. Every time the spell is activated, and every time someone attempts to dispel it, some life force is drawn from that source. Also, the spell is very inefficient; between the painful leakage and the fact that by now it is spread over lots of targets, it uses lots of life force to function. Judging by how tough the spell has proven to be, it must be some extremely powerful creature. The character can't determine the identity of the creature, though.
- **41+.** The PC understands that the spell can be used to damage the source by forcing the magic to suck life force out of it. The enchantment is so shoddy that it wastes lots of power, making it a very inefficient way to prevent planar travel but a very efficient way of hurting the source. Unfortunately, simple *dispel magic* aren't powerful enough to make a dent. The spell consumes real power when it has to deal with powerful magic – *disjunction*, *plane shift*, portals. However, the spell leaks. When it draws power from the source, some of that power is leaked – causing damage to the subjects. And it looks like the source, whatever it is, is much, *much* tougher than the characters. It looks like it's almost a god. Anything capable of hurting that would cause a leakage capable of killing the PCs many times over.

so, ALL WE HAVE TO DO
IS KILLING AN
ARCHFIEND?
- OUR HEROES, WHEN
OPTIMISM HITS THE
WALL

Basically, Ithla-Sathlo consumes some XP whenever someone attempts to plane shift or dispel the curse, but the targets take damage. The amount of energy involved increases exponentially with the

power of the effect, and is much greater for dispelling attempts than for plane shifting attempts. The PCs can't really hurt him this way; they don't have access to *disjunction*-level spells and even if they did, it would be too dangerous to use them.

Still, this is a major flaw in the spell's weave. A powerful spellcaster could seriously threaten Ithla-Sathlo by casting repeated *disjunctions* at the spell, if the targets could survive. Smart planewalkers should recognize the potential usefulness of this information.

15. This corridor ends in a flight of stairs leading upwards to area **18** on the third floor. There are no guards in the corridor itself, but if someone passes in front of the door to room **12**, the bulezau there will notice and attack. Also, the iron door to the central corridor is locked; the key is in the lock.

16. This large was used by tanar'ri officers. It contains a small, empty iron cage, several petitioner-skin couches, a table engraved with Abyssal writings glorifying violence, and a shelf of strong liquors. A single babau is standing guard here, and he has gone through half the liquors already.

17. This room contains the stairs to room **31** on the first floor. A dead mercenary is lying on them.

18. This is the corridor splitting this floor in half. The Mercykillers haven't even recovered the corpses of their fallen from the south end of the hallway, where two of them have been slaughtered by the tanar'ri. These two corpses still have their equipment: masterwork half plates, *+1 guisarmes*, masterwork composite long bows, 20 *+1 arrows*, backpacks with basic supplies (torches, water and rations, rope, a knife, a bedroll), and 43 gold coins.

19. A Mercykiller fighter is standing guard here. All of the soldiers have a strong dislike of the Abyss, where Justice simply doesn't happen, but the forced permanence here is harder on some than others. The basher here is *very* stressed, and the Abyss is slowly driving him insane. His name is Hant and he is very peery of the PCs. He doesn't trust them, and he thinks they are probably criminals, and that maybe they fled to the Abyss to escape the rightful punishment. Hant has the key to the corridor, and he won't let the PCs pass without an explicit authorization from Coriolis. Worse, if the heroes aren't careful with what they say, he may decide to arrest them – every time they speak, he is literally obsessing over every word they say in order to find some kind of admission of guilt, to anything, no matter if he's stretching the meaning of their sentences.

20. This large room is dominated by a huge metal contraption, which lies on a 9-meters wide raised marble platform in the middle of the floor. This device looks like several concentric circles made from steel, with manacles at several points of each circle. Over the steel circles, many jointed metal bars are attached to the device. They are full of spikes, attached to each bar at varying distances. The joints can be moved to place the spiked bars at almost any point over the circles. The whole thing is mounted over what looks like a wide, low oven. Bags of coal lie against the wall.

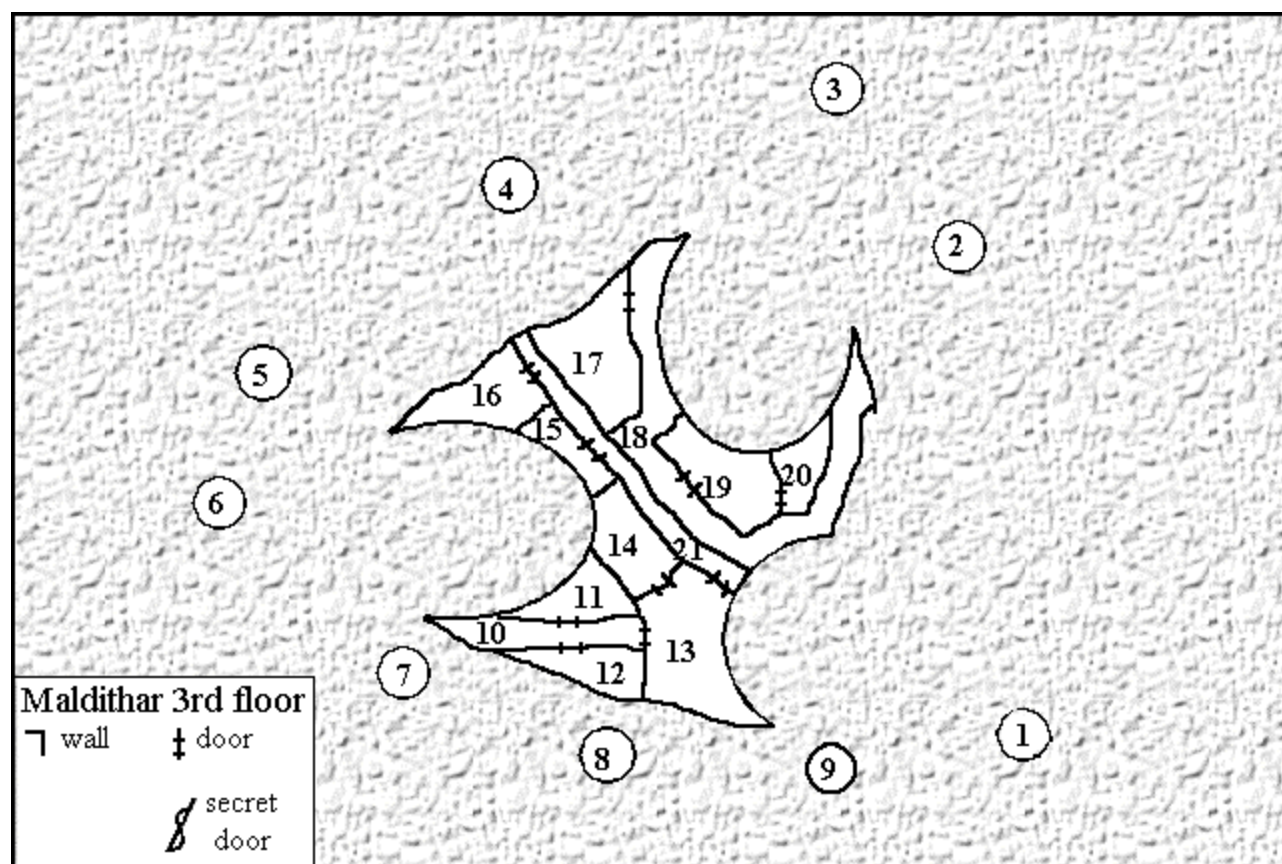
The contraption is an infernal torture device, with which a skilled operator can burn and pierce the flesh of the victims while leaving them alive for as long as possible. If that wasn't enough, the marble platform is a *liquid pain extractor* (moderate necromancy, CL 7). Twelve thin brass tubes leave it in radial directions, climb over the walls and ceilings, and collect in a small marble basin on a wall. The torture of a victim on the machine produces some agony – pain in liquid form – in the basin. One full day of torture yields one dose. A single victim can only produce a small amount of liquid pain before it has taken too much abuse to be useful. The fiends have collected quite a lot of it, presumably by torturing to death a great many people.

Joseph has already expressed his desire to destroy the apparatus, though Coriolis has told him not to waste time on it. The paladin suspects that Coriolis wants to bring it back to the Prison in Sigil, but he has decided not to discuss the matter for now – they have worse problems to think about.

The north side of the room also contains a hatch which opens to reveal the stairs to room **15** on the first floor.

21. This small room contains the stairs leading upwards to room **16** on the third floor.

Maldithar 3rd floor



The third floor of Maldithar is split in two. Unlike the second floor, there is no way to go from one half to the other without climbing back down and going through the central corridor on the second floor. This makes it one of the quieter and most defensible places, and the one Joseph and Coriolis have chosen as their headquarters. Right now, the Mercykillers control the larger section, but the fiends control the one with the laboratory.

The towers rise about as high as the top of the ceilings of the fortress. Each tower has a wide observation window. This is kinda pointless since even tanar'ri can only see up to about 18 meters in the dark of the 76th layer – but they did it anyway. At least, it allows them to rain arrows and spells down on hypothetical attackers.

1. The top of this tower has been reached by the demontree tendrils; there are four of them and several on the outside as well. Leaning on a wall near the observation window, there is the corpse of a mercenary. The corpse has a dagger planted in its throat – and its right hand is still holding the handle. This poor sod of unusual loyalty didn't leave Maldithar in time, and kept on fighting together with the fiends instead. This being the Abyss, no loyalty goes unpunished. When the demontree started popping teendrils through the walls and floors of Maldithar, this mercenary was cornered in the top of this tower with no escape. The tentacles had already begun to sap his strength. Terrified to madness, he attempted suicide by stabbing his throat with his magical dagger. The demontree tried to keep him alive so that it could feed on his life energy, but the only result was a prolonged, excruciating agony; the soldier finally died two days later.

This horrible event brought two consequences. First, the dagger, a family heirloom of no small power, had its magic corrupted by the sheer evil and self-destruction of which it has been the focus. Before, it was a +2 *dagger*. Now, it is a +1 *vicious dagger* and every time it strikes, the wielder's hands get drenched in his own blood.

The second consequence was the creation of an allip, a spirit of madness and suicide.

Allip		Al. Neutral Evil	Medium Undead (Incorporeal) (Abyss)	CR: 3
Str: -	HP: 4d12 (26)	Speed: fly 9 (perfect)		
Dex: 12 (+1)	AC: 15 (+4 deflection, +1 dex)	Armor: none		
Con: -	Initiative: +5 (+1 dex, +4 improved init)	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: -		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +4 (+1 base, +1 dex, +2 lightning ref)	BAB: +2 Grapple: -		
Wis: 11 (+0)	For: +1 base	Melee: +2 base		
Cha: 18 (+4)	Will: +4 base	Ranged: +3 (+2 base, +1 dex)		
Attacks				Skills
Touch, +3 melee incorporeal touch, damage 1d4 wisdom drain				Hide +8 (+7 ranks, +1 dex)
Feats and special abilities				Intimidate +7 (+3 ranks, +4 cha)
Feats: Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes.				Listen +7 ranks
Darkvision 12, incorporeal, undead, +2 turn resistance.				Search +4 ranks
Babble (su): all sane creatures within 12 meters must save on Will, DC 16, or be affected as if by <i>hypnotism</i> for 2d4 rounds; this is a sonic, mind-affecting compulsion.				Spot +7 ranks
Madness (su): anyone using detect thoughts, mind control or telepathy on an allip takes 1d4 wisdom damage.				
Wisdom drain (su): the allip deals 1d4 wisdom drain on a successful attack, and gains 5 temporary hit points for one hour.				

2. There is nothing but a couple of skeletons on the top of this tower.

3. There is a hezrou tanar'ri here, armed with a spear it plundered from a dead gelugon.

Hezrou		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 11
Str: 21 (+5)	HP: 10d8+93 (138)	Speed: 15		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 23 (-1 size, +14 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 29 (+9)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 14 (+2)	Ref: +7 base	BAB: +10 Grapple: +19		
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +16 (+7 base, +9 con)	Melee: +14 (+10 base, +5 strength, -1 size)		
Cha: 18 (+4)	Will: +9 (+7 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +9 (+10 base, +0 dexterity, -1 size)		
Attacks				Skills
+2 <i>spear</i> , +16/+11 melee reach 3mt, damage 2d6+9, or				Climb +18 (+13 ranks, +5 str)
Bite +14 melee reach 3 mt, damage 4d4+5, and				Concentration +22 (+13 ranks, +9 con)
2 claws, +9 melee reach 3 mt, damage 1d8+2				Hide +9 (+13 ranks, -4 size)
Feats and special abilities				Escape Artist +13 (+13 ranks)
Feats: Blind-fight, Cleave, Power attack, Toughness				Intimidate +17 (+13 ranks, +4 cha)
Improved grab (must hit with both claws)				Listen +23 (+13 ranks, +2 wis, +8 racial)
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>chaos hammer</i> (DC 18), <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22,5 kg of objects only), <i>unholy blight</i> (DC 18); 3/day – <i>blasphemy</i> (DC 21), <i>gaseous form</i> . Caster level 13 th .				Move Silently +13 (+13 ranks)
DR 10/good, darkvision 18 mt, immune to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, SR 19, telepathy within 30 mt.				Search +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int)
Stench: non-demons within 3 mt. must roll a Fortitude save versus DC 24 or be nauseated for as long as they remain in the area plus 1d4 rounds. Those that save are sickened for as long as they remain in the area. Creatures that succeed are unaffected by following exposures for 24 hours. <i>Delay poison</i> or <i>neutralize poison</i> removes the condition; creatures that are immune to poison are immune to this effect; poison resistance applies.				Spellcraft +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int)
Summon demon: once per day it can attempt to summon 4d10 dretches or another hezrou with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 4th-level spell.				Spot +23 (+13 ranks, +2 wis, +8 racial)
Equipment				Survival +2 wis*
+2 <i>spear</i> , Large size (moderate evocation, CL 6) (damage 2d6+2, crit x3, range increment 6m)				Use Rope +0**
				* +2 synergy when following tracks
				** +2 synergy when binding

4. The top of this tower hasn't been visited in a fairly long time. Its floor is covered in dust, and it is otherwise empty. However, several dire bats of darkness have nested on the ceiling, and they will attack by surprise anyone who comes here and doesn't spot them. If more than three of them are killed, they'll fly away.

Dire bats of darkness (6)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 3
Str: 17 (+3) Dex: 28 (+9) Con: 17 (+3) Int: 3 (-4) Wis: 14 (+2) Cha: 6 (-2)	HP: 4d8+12 (30) AC: 23 (+9 dex, +5 natural, -1 size) Initiative: +9 dex	Speed: 12, fly 18 (good) Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
	Ref: +13 (+4 base, +9 dex) For: +7 (+4 base, +3 con) Will: +3 (+1 base, +2 wis)	BAB: +3 Grapple: +10 Melee: +5 (+3 base, +3 strength, -1 size) Ranged: +11 (+3 base, +9 dexterity, -1 size)		
<u>Attacks</u> Bite, +5 melee, damage 1d8+4		<u>Skills</u> Hide +21 (+2 ranks, +8 racial, +9 dex, +2 stealthy) Listen +10 (+2 ranks, +2 wis, +2 alertness, +4 racial) Move silently +21 (+2 ranks, +2 stealthy, +8 racial, +9 dex) Spot +9 (+1 ranks, +2 wis, +2 alertness, +4 racial)		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u> Feats: Alertness, Stealthy, Mobility Sneak attack +2d6, low-light vision, darkvision 18 mt, blindsight 36 mt, scent.				

5. The top of this tower has apparently been used to store broken furniture and trash in general. There are bits of wood, stone and metal piled everywhere. A half ton of them is forming a tall scrap heap of broken chairs, tables, torture instruments, decorations and whatnot.

If the PCs start searching the heap, they hear a scream from the inside of it. A moment later, a small crystal-like figure flies out of the pile of scrap, causing half of it to fall down on the second floor, and hugs the leg of one of the PCs, begging for mercy on its knees. The creature is an ice mephitis, one of several mephitis which Saintrii summoned in order to try and get help from the Mercykillers.

Instead, the bashers attacked and this mephitis, who calls himself Axitaminhasosyrillis, The Frost That Dwells In The Scrap Heap, was the only one who escaped. It flew out of the fortress and back into this tower, where it has been hiding since then. If the PCs promise not to hurt him, he will recount Saintrii's story up to the point where he ordered the mephitis to go. The plumach told him everything, including the reason for which he entered the Abyss. Obviously, Axi doesn't know anything about the summoning of Tarlikin and Saintrii's death.

I AM
AXITAMINHASOSYRILLIS!
THE FROST THAT DWELLS
IN THE SCRAP HEAP!
BOW BEFORE ME!
PLEASE?
- AXY BOY

Axitaminhasosyrillis		Al. Neutral	Small Outsider (Air, Cold)	CR: 3
Str: 10 (+0) Dex: 17 (+3) Con: 10 (+0) Int: 6 (-2) Wis: 11 (+0) Cha: 15 (+2)	HP: 3d8 (13) AC: 18 (+3 dex, +4 natural, +1 size) Initiative: +7 (+3 dex, +4 dex)	Speed: 12, fly 18 (good) Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
	Ref: +6 (+3 base, +3 dex) For: +3 base Will: +3 base	BAB: +3 Grapple: -1 Melee: +4 (+3 base, +1 size) Ranged: +7 (+3 base, +3 dexterity, +1 size)		
<u>Attacks</u> Claw, +4 melee, damage 1d3 + 1d4 cold		<u>Skills</u> Bluff +8 (+6 ranks, +2 cha) Escape Artist +9 (+6 ranks, +3 cha) Hide +13 (+6 ranks, +3 dex, +4 size) Listen +6 ranks Diplomacy +4 (+2 synergy, +2 cha) Disguise +4 (+2 cha, +2 synergy*) Move Silently +9 (+6 ranks, +3 dex) Spot +6 ranks Use Rope +5 (+3 dex, +5 synergy**)		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u> Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative DR 5/magic, darkvision 18 m, immune to cold, vulnerable to fire. Breath Weapon (Su): 10-foot cone of ice shards, damage 1d4 cold, Reflex DC 12 half. Living creatures that fail take -4 to AC and -2 to hit for 3 rounds unless immune to cold. Summon one ice mephitis 1/day with a 25% chance for one hour. Spell-like abilities: <i>magic missile</i> 1/hour (CL 3), <i>chill metal</i> 1/day (DC 14, CL 6).		* if acting in character ** when binding someone		

Axitaminhasosyrillis, The Frost That Dwells In The Scrap Heap, has a cold and aloof demeanor. He is prone to greatly overestimating his own importance, unless he's being personally threatened by something, in which case he turns into a grovelling coward. Obviously, Axi likes cold and icy environments and really dislikes heat. He doesn't like people mispronouncing his name, though he may settle for a diminutive.

6. The top of this tower is half crumbled; a chill wind blows in the open air. There is nothing interesting here.

7. The Mercykillers have put a bunch of the bodies they found around Maldithar here, where the sickening smell won't be felt as much. There are close to 20 corpses of humans and tieflings; three babaus are present as well. All the bodies have been stripped of any valuable possessions.

8. The top of this tower looks damaged. There is a barrel of clear water – unfortunately, while it looks good enough, it is tainted. Anyone who drinks from this barrel is exposed to the blinding sickness (DC 16, incubation 1d3 days, damage 1d4 Strength and if the victim takes 2 or more damage, he must make another Fortitude save or become blind).

9. This room is empty; there is a table and a couple chairs, but nothing more.

10. This hallway separated the two small officers' quarters. The western wall is actually a large stained glass window, and though with no light coming from the outside it doesn't look much spectacular, it is actually a pretty good work of art, depicting a screaming balor. PCs with darkvision can easily see the tower marked as 7 through the window.

11. This room used to belong to an officer of Maldithar. The Mercykillers have cleared it of furniture, and are using it as sleeping quarters for themselves. There are between three and five sleeping Mercykillers here at any given time. The bashers aren't getting much rest, and they'd appreciate it if the PCs don't make noise here.

12. This room was used by a Maldithar officer as well. Like room 11, it has been converted for use as Mercykiller sleeping quarters; the furniture has been moved aside and bedrolls have been layed on the floor.

13. This used to be a "war room" of sorts. Its main feature is a huge circular table, made from black obsidian, and painted with a map of the layer in the area surrounding the prison-fortress. Maldithar is in the middle of the map and the PCs can recognize the river and the forest (and the cliff, if they have seen it. It crosses the entire map). Apart from these, there aren't many features. Near one side of the map, a small arrow points outwards. It has a small label in Abyssal, which reads "To the Lord's fortress". No distance or scale is given, but the "Lord's fortress" is clearly twice as far as the forest.

Coriolis and Joseph have placed a map of Maldithar on the table, and they are here discussing more often than anywhere else. Their map is fairly detailed in the Mercykiller-controlled area, but sketchy everywhere else.

This used to be another officer room. It still has all its furniture – a luxurious bed, a desk, a couple armoires and a water basin. The room is occupied by Harken, the Mercykiller wizard on the expedition. He is usually here, saying that he's studying his books and the enchantment which was placed on the party when they crossed the portal. In fact, Harken doesn't know anything more than the PCs about the curse. The reason he's spending so much time alone in his room is that he is reading the dark tome he found.

14. Near the northwestern corner of this otherwise empty room, a big mirror (one meter wide, two meters tall) is covered by a drape. Its frame is an elaborate work of art in yellow and red gold. If asked, the guard or any other Mercykiller can relate that their wizard said that the mirror is some kind of extremely powerful divination device (overwhelming divination, CL 21), but that it would be too risky to use it without knowing more about it.

The item is the *Mirror of Tenebra*. It is a very, very powerful item which was crafted by an unknown mystic theurge who briefly ruled this layer before Hayazeikanatzeras moved in, untold eons ago. Some speculate that the wizard/cleric actually became the fiend lord somehow, though that's dubious since Hayazeikanatzeras has never shown any interest in the *Mirror*.

Whatever the truth about its creator, the *Mirror of Tenebra* is first and foremost a scrying device. It allows anyone who gazes into it to use *greater scrying* on any target, though any target which is in

an area of daylight, sunlight or other bright light cannot be scried upon. The image of the target and its immediate surroundings appear in the mirror (therefore, anyone can see it); similarly, noises and voices are heard as coming from the device. The *Mirror* can only scry any given target once per day.

This power, however, has its share of danger. The *Mirror of Tenebra* is an intelligent artefact (Chaotic Evil, Intelligence 18, Wisdom 18, Charisma 10, ego 26), though it never communicates directly with anyone and it never attempts a direct possession of a user (it may be unable to do so, or simply unwilling). If it desires to do so, the *Mirror* can:

- Deny the target of the scrying any saving throw against the effect (though a check to detect the divination sensor is still possible).
- Cause the target to immediately become aware of the divination sensor.
- Scry into any time of the target's past.
- Alter some details of the scene that it is showing, making it differ from the truth. Though it can't entirely make up a scene, the mirror can substitute a character for another, add or remove something in the background, change a name or a sentence as it is being spoken, and perform other significant but not radical alterations.
- Terminate the effect at any time.

The user of the *Mirror of Tenebra* can make a Will saving throw, DC 26, when he uses the item. If he succeeds, the mirror is unable to alter details of the scene, though it retains all other abilities. The *Mirror* currently knows that Hayazeikanatzeras is coming to raze the fortress, and it knows that the tanar'ri lord doesn't know of its presence there. So, it wants to get out of the layer. To this end, it will provide the PCs with accurate information about what happens on the 76th layer but it may still lie every now and then on external events – whatever it takes to make the PCs more likely to leave and carry it away.

If that wasn't enough, remember that the lord of the layer can intercept divinations. This includes the mirror's effect as well! Hayazeikanatzeras will know everything the PCs learn using the mirror. The lord knows about the *Mirror* and its evil intelligence, and he will not act on the scenes he sees, deeming them unreliable. But he will get an idea of the PCs' intentions and relations outside the 76th layer. Hopefully, the party will get out before this becomes a problem. The lord of Tenebra isn't interested in Abyssal politics; his layer is too hostile and devoid of resources to be a practical

If they scry Hayazeikanatzeras, they see the following scene:

Within the mirror, an image of the layer's dark ground appears. Despite the total darkness, you can clearly see the ground as if you were flying over it at low altitude and great speed. The ground is literally crawling with an army of millions and millions of creatures of darkness. It looks like a veritable carpet of black fangs and claws. In the middle of all of it, Hayazeikanatzeras is riding an enormous reptile creature, and he's staring right at you. Then, the vision ends.

If they scry Tarlikin, Saintrii, or any of the tanar'ri currently in the fortress, they see the following scene from the past (assuming they understand the Abyssal language):

You see a room in Maldithar which you haven't visited yet. The furniture has been cleared away, and a large summoning circle has been drawn on the floor in blood. A humanoid creature is kneeling before it; it looks like a dwarf with a metallic-tinged skin, and it is severely wounded. A bulezau tanar'ri is holding its massive greatsword over its neck, ready to strike. Several other babau and hezrou tanar'ri are around the circle.

One of the hezrous bends its mass towards the creature. "Listen carefully, plumach. You will summon a tanar'ri. Or you will die. No more tricks, understood?" The "plumach" nods weakly and begins casting a spell. The circle starts filling with yellowish mist.

After ten minutes, the mist vanishes, revealing the jackal-headed form of an arcanaloth, wrapped in wizardly robes. The bulezau immediately raises his sword, but the “plumach” turns to look at it and says “No, no! Wait! I know this fiend; we have had dealings in the past... he will help you in defeating the Sigilians if you just let me talk to him!”

PCs who understand Abyssal can make a Sense Motive check, DC 20. If they succeed, they understand that the plumach is bluffing. Each PC can also make a Sense Motive check, DC 34. If they succeed, they understand that the yugoloth has caught the bluff and is going with it to see what happens. All of the tanar’ri are falling for it. PCs can make a Spellcraft check, DC 23, to figure out that the circle is a *magic circle against evil*, focused inwards as fit for a calling.

The conversation between Tarlikin and Saintrii is in the yugoloth language.

The yugoloth looks down on the plumach, saying nothing. The metal-skinned dwarf speaks: “These tanar’ri have captured me. They are fighting some Mercykillers in this fortress, and they forced me to summon help”.

“Why did you call me?”

“I know what your kind desires. The portal which led me here has been the subject of some kind of powerful abyssal magic, and there is a laboratory which... well, I think this fortress hides some interesting arcane knowledge. And you can defeat all these fiends and the Mercykillers have no beef with you...”

The jackal-headed fiend smiles friendly. “Interesting. Very interesting. Say what – I’ll free you from these fiends, deal with the Mercykillers, and help investigating the secrets of this place. Do we have a deal?” A flash of deep suspicion crosses the plumach’s eyes – but it is quickly subdued by sheer desperation. “Deal done. You can...”

Before the sentence is even over, the arcanaloth steps out of the circle, and casts a spell. A beam of frozen air hits the plumach straight in the face; in an instant, his whole head, arms and upper torso are frozen solid. As the tanar’ri stare in astonishment, the yugoloth casually says “Well, you are free now”.

If they scry Tarlikin again, the mirror will show this scene:

You see the yugoloth in a big room, the same that was used to summon him. He is alone. He’s examining a strange set of wooden panels on a large door, which looks like it was made from solid adamantium. You can see Abyssal runes on the panels, but they aren’t in clear sight and what you can read doesn’t seem to have any meaning. The arcanaloth goes to a corner of the room and picks up a chair and a book from the pile of broken furniture there. Then, the fiend begins reading. He murmurs something every now and then, but you can’t hear what he’s saying.

The *Mirror* doesn’t want to end up in the yugoloth’s hands, because it would be carried out of the Abyss, something it doesn’t desire. So, it will try to get the PCs to kill Tarlikin. If the heroes don’t seem inclined to do so, the *Mirror* may try to push them that way by showing them this altered vision (if they fail the Will save):

You see the yugoloth in a big room, the same that was used to summon him. He is alone. He’s examining a strange set of wooden panels on a large door, which looks like it was made from solid adamantium. You can see Abyssal runes on the panels, but they aren’t in clear sight and what you can read doesn’t seem to have any meaning. The arcanaloth goes to a corner of the room and picks up the plumach’s spellbook from his frozen corpse there. Then, the fiend begins reading. He makes a comment every now and then, mostly something like “I really should carry my spellbook with me at all times. Now I’m stuck with this rilmani’s stupid cantrips... good thing those tanar’ric morons haven’t realized it”.

If they scry the Gardener, they will see this:

You see a prison cell, in a place you don't recognize. It is very small, maybe one meter by one, and the Gardener is sitting there, chained to the wall. You can't understand whether he is alive or dead, but he looks in a very bad shape.

If they scry Red Shroud, they will see this:

You see the succubus' throne room in Broken Reach. She is sitting on the throne in a beautiful green silk long dress, one leg over the armrest, listening intently to someone you know. The Gardener is there! He's talking to Red Shroud: "So you see, milady, I... wait...!"

The Gardener turns to look at you, and gestures with his hand. The vision ends abruptly.

Further attempts to scry either the Gardener or Red Shroud will fail (or, in the case of Red Shroud, may end up showing a past scene of her having sex with her nalfeshnee husband or something else – the *Mirror* enjoys embarrassing viewers).

15. This room contains the stairs leading downwards to room **21** on the second floor. Sometimes, there is a Mercykiller guard here, but not always. The third floor is considered to be safe. The room also contains heavy drapes on the northern and southern walls; they are painted with scenes of great tanar'ri leading baatezu away in silvery chains.

16. This used to be Tamanaguk's room. It is by far the most lavishly decorated place in Maldithar; its ceiling is about two meters taller than the rest of the third floor, and it features a huge canopy bed, large armoires full of costly Huge-sized clothing, two locked steel crates, and a great crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

A tanar'ri leader always has to be a step ahead, even when he sleeps. The room has several surprises. First of all, the poles sustaining the bed's canopy are made from cold iron. One of them can be twisted in a particular way, allowing it to be removed easily by someone who knows the trick, and is well-balanced for use as a Huge shortspear (damage 2d6). It takes a Search check, DC 21, to figure this out.

The chandelier has an aura of faint evocation (CL 10). With the right command word, the chandelier will fall on the floor and shatter with exceptional force, causing a shower of magically frozen crystal bits which will cause 5d6 physical damage and 10d6 ice damage to anyone within the room (Reflex halves, DC 18). The bed is conveniently placed in such a way as to shield anyone on it from the blast. Creatures that are lying on the bed have the benefits of improved evasion against this effect. Tamanaguk used to be the only one knowing the command word, but Tarlikin has learned it as well by casting *identify* on the chandelier.

The two crates are both locked (DC 32 to pick) and trapped with *greater glyphs of warding* (moderate abjuration, CL 16) which deal 8d8 sonic damage to anyone who opens them. A Reflex save, DC 22, halves the damage. It takes a 31 Search check for a rogue to find this trap, and a 31 Disable device check to disarm it. Luckily (or unluckily, depending on your point of view), Tarlikin hasn't yet bothered to dispel and open them. One of the crates contains 200 platinum coins, 2000 gold coins in diamonds, and a beautiful tiara made from mithral and gold, crafted to resemble a pit fiend and a balor clawing at each other, with gems for their eyes (it is worth 3000 gold coins).

The other crate, however, has a *nasty* surprise. First of all, the inside is lead-plated, preventing *detect magic* from detecting the magical aura inside. The crate's only content is a *symbol of insanity*, triggered by looking at it. A very skilled rogue could figure this out without triggering it and even disable it. He notices the presence of the symbol if he beats DC 33 while looking for traps (otherwise, he doesn't notice it). He can disable it with a DC 33 Disable Device check, but if he rolls 28 or less, he triggers it.

17. The eastern end of this corridor has the stairs leading downwards to area **15** on the second floor. Apart from this, it is empty and unguarded. Tarlikin has explicitly ordered all fiends not to bother him on the third floor.

18. This is the room where Tarlikin spends almost all of his time. The room was used to summon him, and the *magical circle against evil* is still on the floor though its magic has vanished. The room used to be a study of sorts; the furniture has been smashed and piled in the corners together with several dozens of books. The books, more than fifty of them, describe many layers of the Abyss and their inhabitants; anyone with access to this library has a +4 competence bonus to Knowledge (the Abyss) checks, and can perform those checks untrained.

If Tarlikin notices that the PCs are approaching, he will start casting defensive spells and illusions to get ready for a battle. However, he will not immediately attack unless the PCs are overtly hostile. Tarlikin hopes that they can help him figure out the puzzle blocking access to room **20**, and that he can manipulate them into opening the door before attacking.

Tarlikin		Al. Neutral Evil	Arcanaloth Wizard 1 st (Gehenna)	CR: 16
Str: 14 (+2)	HP: 12d8+1d4+39 (110)	Speed: 9, fly 18 (good)		
Dex: 14 (+2)	AC: 23 (+2 dex, +8 natural, +3 armor)	Armor: none		
Con: 17 (+3)	Initiative: +6 (+2 dex, +4 improved init)	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: -		
Int: 20 (+5)	Ref: +10 (+8 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +12 Grapple: +14		
Wis: 18 (+4)	For: +11 (+8 base, +3 con)	Melee: +14 (+12 base, +2 strength)		
Cha: 19 (+4)	Will: +14 (+10 base, +4 wis)	Ranged: +14 (+12 base, +2 dexterity)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, 2 claws +14 melee, damage 1d4+2 plus poison, and		Bluff +19 (+15 ranks, +4 cha)		
Bite, +9 melee, damage 1d6+1		Concentration +18 (+15 ranks, +3 con)		
Feats and special abilities		Diplomacy +23 (+15 ranks, +4 cha, +4 synergy)		
Feats: Dodge, Empower Spell, Improved Initiative, Maximize Spell, Quicken Spell, Scribe Scrolls.		Knowledge (Arcana) +20 (+15 ranks, +5 int)		
SR 22, DR 10/good. All attacks are considered evil aligned. Immune to mind-affecting spells and effects. Continuous <i>true seeing</i> and <i>fly</i> (CL 12).		Knowledge (Baator) +18 (+5 ranks, +8 synergy, +5 int)		
Item mastery (ex): can use any spell completion item.		Knowledge (Gehenna) +28 (+15 ranks, +8 synergy, +5 int)		
Poison (ex): DC 19, 1d6 Intelligence initial and secondary damage.		Knowledge (Gray waste) +18 (+5 ranks, +8 synergy, +5 int)		
Spell-like Abilities: at will – <i>deeper darkness</i> , desecrate, <i>fear</i> (DC 18), <i>heat metal</i> , <i>invisibility</i> , <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), <i>magic missile</i> , <i>major image</i> (DC 17), <i>polymorph</i> (self only), <i>telekinesis</i> (DC 19), <i>unholy blight</i> (DC 18). Caster level 12th. The save DC's are Charisma based.		Knowledge (Carceri) +18 (+5 ranks, +8 synergy, +5 int)		
Wizard spells per day: 4/6/5/5/5/4/2/1. CL 13.		Knowledge (Abyss) +18 (+5 ranks, +8 synergy, +5 int)		
Summon 1-2 nycaloths or 1 shadoloth with a 70% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 8th level spell.		Knowledge (Religion) +15 (+10 ranks, +5 int)		
Tarlikin has a <i>contingency</i> set to casting an empowered magic missile on non-fiends attacking him.		Listen +19 (+15 ranks, +4 wis)		
Equipment		Move Silently +17 (+15 ranks, +2 dex)		
1500 gp in ruby dust; a statuette depicting Saintrii worth 1500 gp; spell components pouch.		Search +20 (+15 ranks, +5 int)		
<i>Scroll of summon monster II</i> (faint conjuration, CL 3)		Sense Motive +19 (+15 ranks, +4 wis)		
<i>Scroll of protection from arrows</i> (faint abjuration, CL 5)		Spellcraft +20 (+15 ranks, +5 int)		
3 <i>potions of cure light wounds</i> (faint conjuration, CL 1)		Spot +19 (+15 ranks, +4 wis)		
<i>Potion of hide from undead</i> (faint abjuration, CL 1)				
<i>Bracers of armor</i> +3 (moderate abjuration, CL 9)				
Saintrii's Spellbook (0 th level: Detect Magic, Prestidigitation; 1 st level: Magic Missile, Protection from Evil; 2 nd level: Bear's Endurance, Fox's Cunning, See Invisibility; 3 rd level: Fireball, Fly, Magic Circle Against Evil; 4 th level: Arcane Eye, Summon Monster IV; 5 th level: Cone of Cold, Wall of Force; 6 th level: Chain Lightning, Contingency; 7 th level: Forcecage, Greater Teleport; 8 th level: Greater Planar Binding)				

Prepared spells:

0th level: Detect magic, Detect magic, Detect magic, Prestidigitation

1st level: Protection from Evil, Protection from Evil, Protection from Evil, Detect magic, Prestidigitation, Prestidigitation

2nd level: Bear's Endurance, Bear's Endurance, Bear's Endurance, Fox's Cunning, Fox's Cunning.

3rd level: Fireball, Fireball, Fireball, Fireball, Fireball.

4th level: Arcane Eye, Summon Monster IV, **Maximized** Magic Missile, **Maximized** Magic Missile, **Maximized** Magic Missile.

5th level: Wall of Force, Cone of Cold, **Quickened** Magic Missile, **Quickened** Magic Missile.

6th level: Chain Lightning, **Maximized** Fireball.

7th level: **Quickened** Fireball.

Tarlikin is *extremely* dangerous, especially here in the Abyss where all evocation spells are automatically enhanced. He can handily deal more than a hundred damage in a single round and while he probably wouldn't be able to defeat the combined force of the PCs and the Mercykillers, he could certainly kill a few of them before going down. Worse, he actually wants to get rid of the PCs, so convincing him not to attack isn't going to be easy.

Still, there are plenty of things that canny bloods can do to soften up the arcanaloth. First – Tarlikin has one major weakness: his lack of his own spellbook. The Mercykillers don't know this, but the PCs may be able to find out in some other way. A *globe of invulnerability* is going to make the fight a LOT easier; protections from fire and *shield* spells could work almost as well. A wizard readying actions to counterspell could also automatically counter lots of Tarlikin's artillery if he has in turn prepared *fireballs* and *magic missiles* (not an unreasonable assumption).

Talking with the fiend isn't out of discussion either. While Tarlikin would love to just be alone in the fortress, he is nervous about fighting, because he can't teleport, and he doesn't know that Hayazeikanatzeras is approaching. If the PCs point out this last fact, and convince Tarlikin of its truth, they may be able to persuade him to cooperate in studying the magic lying on the portal and in the laboratory, in order to get all the information before the lord of the layer destroys everything. The arcanaloth wants them dead, but his priority is to learn everything that can be found in Maldithar. He doesn't like the idea of sharing that, but it's better than losing it forever.

The door is exceptionally thick, and made from solid adamantium (hardness 20, 100 hit points). The front is covered with teak wood, into which a square depression is carved. Twelve wooden panels can fit in the depression; each panel bears a single letter in the Abyssal language. As they are placed now, the panels spell A A H H I L L O S T T = . The door emanates an aura of strong evocation (CL 16).

The magical lock opens when the panels are arranged so as to spell the correct password. Ithla-Sathlo not only managed to crack the puzzle, but he was even able to change the password. Being as egocentric as any other tanar'ri lord, and figuring that noone was going to get this far anyway, he changed it to his own name. If someone attempts to open the door while the panels are not arranged in the right way, or if someone attempts to damage the door, an invisible lance of force shoots from the door and hits him unerringly, dealing 12d4+12 force damage. A *shield* spell prevents the damage, but is immediately dispelled. A *brooch of shielding* works the same as against magic missiles. A *globe of invulnerability* is useless; an *antimagic field* protects from the damage but if the door is within the field it also prevents the opening mechanism from working even if the panels are placed in the right position.

Considering that the heroes have only heard the name until now, and that it isn't exactly easy to figure out how its spelling, the smartest thing they can do now is getting Lianne to tell them the correct written form of her grandfather's name. With that kind of trap, trial-and-error isn't a good option. If the PCs push the door while the panels spell "ITHLA-SATHLO", the door emits a loud "click" but only moves a few inches. It seems to be stuck; it takes a Strength check, DC 22, to fully open it.

19. This is the (rather small) laboratory which used to belong to Tamanaguk and was overtaken by Ithla-Sathlo and Rothakon. Right now, it is a real mess. There is a carpet of dead leaves and unknown putrefying fruits, covering the floor for five to ten centimeters. Thick vines and woodlike

organic growths climb over parts of the walls and ceiling. Syrupy sap drips from above, over the working bench and shelves.

The whole stuff is mostly dead and definitely inert, if disturbing. Over the desk, the PCs can see lots of bottles, vials, beakers and alchemical equipment, as well as a silver-studded human skull. Several magical auras come from the stuff over the bench, including a faint divination aura from the skull (CL 3). The other stuff lying on the table and on the shelves is mostly alchemical components, useless by themselves, but there are also a few magical potions. Five vials and bottles contain a *potion of barkskin* +5 (strong transmutation, CL 12), a *potion of cure serious wounds* (faint conjuration, CL 5), a *potion of protection from arrows* 10/magic (faint abjuration, CL 3), a *potion of heroism* (faint enchantment, CL 5), and a *potion of fly* (faint transmutation, CL 5). A pouch contains diamond dust for a total of 1000 gold pieces worth.

The skull is a *mimir* – a magical item designed to record voice. It contains a very interesting conversation between Rothakon and Ithla-Sathlo, which happened shortly after the fortress Maldithar was conquered. A third creature is present – a prototype of the plant monsters which Ithla-Sathlo was planning on breeding after the Orb is in his hands (well, tentacles).

As you touch the skull, it jumps in the air, with its eyes flaring. It immediately stops, hovering about ten centimeters from the surface of the table, and begins talking.

“Why the mimir? I don’t need to record this”. You have already heard this voice. It is Rothakon, the half-fiend who used to control this fortress and who apparently believes that you have the Selthian Orb.

“You need to do what I say”. This voice, on the other hand, you have never heard. It feels like a bunch of snake people or khaasta trying to talk above each other through a slime pit. It is like a very, very bad chorus. The voice echoes and reverberates; no humanoid vocal apparatus could produce something like this. “You will not forget my orders. Should you feel in doubt, you will listen to this skull, and do what it says, for it is my will”. There is a low noise after this sentence – it might be Rothakon grumbling.

The unearthly voice resumes talking. “You will take command of the retriever. You will send it to Arborea, where it will take the Orb. It will get back here. You will deliver the Orb to Infestant”.

Rothakon speaks again: “Are you sure that your spell will prevent the Orb from escaping?” The low growl is heard again. It is not Rothakon, after all. “I mean... what if the spell’s duration expires? We are very far from Infestant. What if enemies attempt to dispel it?”.

“The spell draws energy from my own essence. It will not expire. It will not be dispelled. Nevertheless, you will hurry in your task, and you will shield the Orb from attempts to undo my curse”.

“What are the plans after the Orb is delivered to our realm?”

“When the Orb is in MY realm,” The low noise, again, as the inhuman voice speaks. This time it’s louder. “I will corrupt it and bend it to my will. It will create a mighty army for me. You will lead this army to victory”.

“An entire army of... those things”. The growl again. “Assuming a surprise attack, we can easily take down Demogorgon before the rest of the lords even realize what’s happening. It’s almost too good to be true”.

The last sentence is followed by a loud slamming noise, followed by a roar by the same low growling creature. There is a rattling noise – like someone falling over the table. The other voice says: “You will not doubt my plans. You will execute them without flaw”. From the sound of the voice, it looks like the mimir has

Unusual Parties

Again, if the party lacks a character capable of reading the runes, Harken can help them. Alternatively, you may let them make a copy of the runes, though that will take a long time and some way of reading very small details.

A good way might be to use fine carbon powder to make an impression on paper.

If the characters can find some way to copy the runes, they can certainly find someone in Broken Reach who can decipher the spell for them, for the right price. The main problem here is that this means giving important information to someone who cannot be trusted.

fallen from the table.

“...of course, father”.

“Demogorgon’s realm will be conquered. The voices in his head will be silent, forever. Before Graz’zt, Pazuzu, Baphomet or anyone else can ready a bid for the three layers, I will seed them with my progeny and make them into my strongholds. Turn that skull off!”. A moment after this, the mimir’s eyes become dark again and it lowers itself on the table again.

The skull doesn’t contain anything else. If the PCs remove the organical growths from the walls, they find that the surface of the walls which they covered is inscribed in tiny runes, almost too small to discern. They cover every single centimeter of the area under the vines and branches. PCs that examine the runes can make a Knowledge (Arcana) check, DC 20, to understand that these runes are a prototype for the spell which was placed on the portal. If they make the check, they realize that they are inert, but they can be examined to obtain the same information that is described for room **14**, in much the same way. This allows the PCs a second shot at discovering information on their curse.

The Second Escape

After finding out everything they could in Maldithar, the PCs may have a variety of reactions. They may feel they are doomed, since the curse apparently won’t go away unless Ithla-Sathlo dies. They may decide to go look for Ithla-Sathlo and try to attack him (Lianne knows how to get to Infestant, though she isn’t too willing to reveal it right now). They will certainly, however, want to get out of Maldithar and away from the 76th layer. Even the unwise decision of going to Infestant passes through the Plains of Infinite Portals: the portal in the forest leads to Infestant sometimes, but the PCs don’t know when (hint: we’re talking about years).

The Mercykillers are of the same opinion, though Coriolis and Joseph disagree on what to do after reaching the Plains of Infinite Portals again. The paladin wants to abandon the search and get back to Sigil. He is not a coward by any means, but he knows his limits and the power of archfiends. Coriolis, on the other hand, wants to pursue Ithla-Sathlo, and now he has one more motivation – they, too, won’t go anywhere as long as the tanar’ri lord is alive.

The characters will have to figure out some way to leave Maldithar without being eaten by the Worm. Luckily though, this isn’t as difficult as getting in was. First of all, the river flows towards the forest; they can build a raft and sail it without drawing attention. Secondly, Hayazeikanatzeras’ army of creatures of darkness is approaching, and a part of it is already entering the slimed zone. Right now, the Worm is almost always busy there, eating the monsters as they come. It won’t necessarily ignore the characters completely, but the PCs may get away with small disturbances such as bumping the raft on the shores or resting for a while.

If they do go by raft, though, Hayazeikanatzeras is going to play a prank on them and suddenly reverse the river’s flow midway through the slimed zone. Everyone has to make a Balance check, DC 10 or 15 if they were standing, or fall into the water. The rafts cannot proceed against the current, even if full rowed; they may proceed, very slowly, if they are towed from the ground, but this is about as good as the characters walking by themselves. If the PCs find themselves having to walk, the Mercykillers will suggest a forced march, in order to get away from the Worm-controlled zone as soon as possible.

After getting out of the slimed area, the heroes will have to deal with the usual dangers of Tenebra – the creatures of darkness and the storms. By now, they should be able to handle the vast majority of the creatures easily and they should have learnt not to light fires in order not to attract attention. They may also use Wilmer’s magical lantern. This will provide light and also keep the smaller creatures away. Even those big enough to pass the save will invariably choose to feed on the ring of lesser creatures which the PCs are going to have.

This time, however, the PCs are going to have to face an additional danger. As said before, Hayazeikanatzeras' "advance troops" have already begun arriving in this part of the layer. The fiend lord has sent with them two of his favorite servants. These are the two great shadow fiends which the PCs saw in the dream, standing at the lord's left and right. Hayazeikanatzeras has sent them to kill the heroes before they leave the layer, and they are carrying the special weapons he has forged for them: the *Blackblades of Tenebra*.

These weapons are two Large greatswords that seem to be made of solid shadow, much like the shadow fiends' own bodies. The *Blackblades of Tenebra* have a +2 enhancement bonus and work as ghost touch weapons, capable of striking incorporeal foes normally. Their true power is only accessible to shadow fiends, though: the greatswords channel the abilities of the fiends' own natural weapons. The blades become incorporeal, and only become solid when striking flesh. As a result, they ignore armor and every attack made by the shadow fiends with them is a touch attack. Further, just as their claws, all damage they deal is vile damage.

Shadow Fiend (2)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Incorporeal) (Abyss)	CR: 13
Str: -	HP: 16d8+45 (120)	Speed: fly 12 (perfect)		
Dex: 22 (+6)	AC: 22 (-1 size, +7 deflection, +6 dex)	Armor: none		
Con: 16 (+3)	Initiative: +10 (+6 dex, +4 improved init)	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 17 (+3)	Ref: +18 (+10 base, +6 dex, +2 light ref)	BAB: +16 Grapple: +20		
Wis: 17 (+3)	For: +13 (+10 base, +3 con)	Melee: +15 (+16 base, -1 size)		
Cha: 20 (+5)	Will: +14 (+10 base, +4 wis)	Ranged: +21 (+16 base, +6 dexterity, -1 size)		
Attacks				Skills
<i>Blackblade</i> , +18/+13/+8/+3 melee touch reach 3mt, damage 3d6+2 vile, or 2 claws, +21 melee touch reach 3 mt, damage 1d6 vile				Bluff +24 (+19 ranks, +5 cha)
Feats and special abilities				Concentration +22 (+19 ranks, +3 con)
Feats: Expertise, Improved initiative, Lightning reflexes, Dodge, Weapon proficiency (greatsword), Weapon focus (greatsword).				Diplomacy +26 (+19 ranks, +5 cha, +2 synergy)
Incorporeal (immune to nonmagical weapons; 50% chance of ignoring damage from a corporeal source, can pass through solid objects, always moves silently).				Hide +31 (+19 ranks, -4 size, +10 racial, +6 dex)
Immune to fire, cold, electricity, mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, disease. Not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, energy drain or death from massive damage.				Intimidate +27 (+19 ranks, +5 cha, +2 synergy)
Pounce (ex): it can make a full attack when charging, including two rake attacks.				Knowledge (Arcana) +22 (+19 ranks, +3 int)
Improved grab (must hit with both claws), Large size or smaller. It can also rake in the same round.				Knowledge (the Abyss) +22 (+19 ranks, +3 int)
Rake (ex): it can make two melee attacks with 1d6 damage on a grappled opponent.				Listen +22 (+19 ranks, +3 wis)
Darkness enhancement (ex): in total darkness, +4 to AC, attack, damage, saves, skill and ability checks.				Search +22 (+19 ranks, +3 int)
Light powerlessness (ex): in bright light, -4 to AC, attack, damage, saves, skill and ability checks.				Spot +22 (+19 ranks, +3 wis)
Flesh-ripping claws (su): ignores armor but can still attack and grapple. Claws deal vile damage. Corporeal foes that are grappled can only attempt to escape.				Survival +5 (+3 wis, +2 synergy*)
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>deeper darkness</i> , <i>damning darkness</i> ; 1/week – <i>magic jar</i> (DC 20). Caster level 10 th .				* when following tracks
Equipment				
<i>Blackblade of Tenebra</i> (counts as a Large +2 ghost touch greatsword, and in the hands of a shadow fiend it maintains the same qualities as flesh-ripping claws) (strong transmutation, CL 16) (damage 3d6+2, crit 19-20/x2)				

The fiends aren't here to play games; they are here to kill. If the party has any light at all, they will know of their approach in advance. They will hide under the ground, and start using *mind jar* as soon as the PCs are within range, trying to get some of them to fight each other. They expect the PCs to cast *protection from evil* or similar spells, and they expect at least some of them to pass their saves. When the tactic no longer works, they'll pop up and cast *damning darkness* on any light the PCs are carrying. Then, they'll attack with the *Blackblades of Tenebra*.

If the PCs live through this fight, they will encounter no more really hard challenges until they get out of the layer. They will still have to deal with the creatures of darkness and maybe a storm or two, but that should pose them no problem. Hayazeikanatzeras is still too far to get his revenge, but they'd better never, ever, come back to the 76th layer.

Challenge Summary

Remember that for much of this chapter the party will be helped by the powerful Mercykillers. If they help the party with an encounter, divide the experience among the correct number of participants.

<i>Challenge</i>	<i>EL</i>
Escaping Maheros	10
Defeating two vrocks	11
Escaping Mithrengo's patrol team of 1 hezrou and 6 babaus	13
Defeating a tyrannosaur of darkness	12
Defeating the dire eagles of darknes	6
Reaching Maldithar	10
Defeating a demontree tendril in Maldithar	3
Defeating four demontree tendrils in Maldithar	7
Defeating a half-fiend shambling mound in Maldithar	8
Defeating two half-fiend shambling mounds in Maldithar	10
Defeating two shadows	5
Gaining useful information from Hayazeikanatzeras in the dream	9
Maldithar First Floor	
Defeating two babaus in room 1	8
Defeating the Demontree (yeah, right)	35
Defeating the hezrou and babau in room 6	12
Defeating the babau in room 7	6
Defeating the mutated carrion crawler in room 10	6
Defeating the mutated carrion crawler in room 12	6
Discovering Tamanaguk	9
Defeating Tamanaguk	16
Overcoming the trap in room 26	4
Defeating the hezrou in room 30	11
Defeating the babaus and dretches in room 33	10
Defeating the babaus in room 42	11
Maldithar Second Floor	
Defeating the fiendish viper swarm in room 10	8
Defeating the bulezau in room 12	10
Gaining useful information from the portal in room 14	5
Defeating the babau in room 16	6
Dealing with the deranged Mercykiller guard in room 19	6

<i>Challenge</i>	<i>EL</i>
Maldithar Third Floor	
Defeating the allip in room 2	3
Defeating the hezrou in room 4	11
Defeating the dire bats of darkness in room 5	8
Gaining useful information from Axitaminhasosyrillis	5
Gaining useful and correct information from the Mirror of Tenebra	7
Overcoming the <i>greater glyphs of warding</i> in room 17	7
Overcoming the <i>symbol of insanity</i> in room 17	8
Defeating or dealing with Tarlikin in room 19	16
Opening the door to room 20	7
Getting out of the slimed area around Maldithar	10
Defeating the two shadow fiends	15

CHAPTER V

In which the Heroes use the power of knowledge to destroy their enemy

Anything New While We Were Away?

You pop out back on the Plains of Infinite Portals, between Broken Reach and Mithrengo. But now, the landscape looks very different. It looks like the aftermath of a Blood War battle. After the weeks of travel on the 76th layer, your noses had cleansed themselves of the stench of blood and death which lingered in Maldithar. Now, you feel that smell again, in the reddish glow of the Plains of Infinite Portals.

A babau's corpse is rotting a few meters from where you have emerged. A hundred meters farther, three dead mercenaries surround the remains of an apelike bar'lgura. A vrock tanar'ri is picking the bodies clean, stealing the equipment and eating the flesh. When it sees you, it eyes you warily but doesn't move. The road between Broken Reach and Mithrengo is full of similar scenes. Bodies are scattered everywhere; most seem to have perished by battle wounds, though several have been killed by vicious magic and are unrecognizable, while others have already been partially devoured by fiends or scavengers. You have arrived during what passes for night on the Plains, and the somewhat reduced light only makes the scene more ghastly.

The PCs can just leave, or talk to the vrock. The vulture demon is rather satisfied with the looting, and it isn't too eager to attack. For some money or a minor magical item, it may be willing to recount the events of the last few days. If the PCs don't talk to the vrock, they can hear much the same tale from anyone from here to Broken Reach.

The Lord of Mithrengo finally decided to attack the city-fortress, just three days ago, with an army which was much larger than Red Shroud's own forces. After his mortal mercenaries defeated the city's surface defenses, the Lord sent a horde of manes down the tunnels. Predictably, Red's troops slaughtered the manes by the dozen. However, the noxious acidic fumes that were released by the instantaneous decomposition of the small demons quickly saturated the tunnels where the fight was taking place, killing or weakening most of the defenders that weren't fiends. The Lord still had all of his demon troops, and the battle seemed to be lost.

But at that point, the Lower Planar Mercenary League poured in from several *teleportation circles* and attacked the Lord's army. The maurezhi Mobley was giving them orders. The League's yugoloth shock troops and elite mortal mercenaries attacked Mithrengo's troops outside Broken Reach, cutting his reinforcements to the battle raging inside the city-fortress. Thanks to the maurezhi's help, the defenders inside Broken Reach quickly repelled the Lord's troops from the tunnels and got out into the fresh air again (as fresh as it gets in the Abyss, at least). At this point, the morale of Mithrengo's army was broken and most of the tanar'ri teleported away.

Everyone thought it was over, but then Mobley ordered his mercenaries to turn on the remains of Red's defenders of the Reach! Immediately, Red ordered her troops to retreat within the tunnels.

The double-crossing Lower Planar Mercenary League followed them to finish them off and hand over control of Broken Reach to Mobley the maurezhi. But down in the bowels of the Reach, a

More of the Dark

What is Rothakon doing anyway? After leaving Maldithar, the half-fiend remained in Broken Reach for a while, hiring thugs to get the PCs but uncertain on what else to do. He didn't know where the Orb was, but he figured that either the PCs or Lianne must have taken it.

In the second case, he needed to get her before she arrived to Infestant, claiming success before Ithla-Sathlo at the mission which Rothakon failed. But going after her on the path to Infestant meant leaving the PCs undisturbed.

Eventually, he decided to do it anyway, not knowing that Lianne was still behind him. But after a couple of weeks of travel and investigation, it became clear that Lianne didn't follow the path to Infestant.

So, Rothakon began going back to see if Lianne was behind him somehow. He will soon get back to Mal Arundak on the 403rd layer, the first step on the road to Infestant, and unless the characters have done something unpredictable with the plot, he won't find any trace of Lianne or the PCs there either.

fourth force appeared. A company of at least three thousands tanar’ri teleported in, carrying the banners and symbols of Lord Graz’zt. The demons routed Mobley’s mercenaries and chased both them and the remains of Mithrengo’s troops out of Broken Reach and all over the Plains of Infinite Portals, until most of the enemies were either dead or teleported away. Then, Graz’zt’s fiends simply vanished. Right now, Red Shroud is sitting in Broken Reach and the city is being cleared of the bodies. Mobley is nowhere to be found and the Lord is back in his fortress, minus his army. Most likely, someone will take advantage of his weakened state – in some time, there will be a new Lord of Mithrengo. The succubus, instead, is fairly safe. She doesn’t have any troops right now, but everyone around Broken Reach is still wondering how she got Graz’zt’s support and whether the arch-fiend would help her again should someone attack the city-fortress.

This tale doesn’t seem to directly affect the PCs. In fact, it doesn’t, but they still have a role. See, while they were in Maldithar, Graz’zt has sent his most trusted servant, Ztefano, disguised as the Gardener, to visit Broken Reach and talk to Red Shroud. Ztefano (also known as Verin) is rumored to be as powerful as an abyssal lord in his own right, and Graz’zt uses him to gather information about every other lord and to sow dissent among them. It was Ztefano who first knew about Ithla-Sathlo’s plans for the Orb of Selthian. The “Gardener” wanted all the chant Red knew about the PCs, as well as a promise that he would be immediately warned the moment they returned to Broken Reach (he could *scry* on the party, but he’s unsure of whether they are capable of detecting him). But the succubus got lucky – her idiotic nalfeshnee husband, Skullbiter, blundered into the audience room as she was speaking, and with his *true seeing* he immediately recognized the powerful demon under the powerful illusion. At first, Ztefano was fairly irritated for having been discovered, but the succubus is an exceptional diplomat and was able to keep her cool even when her husband telepathically told her that she was before one of the mightiest tanar’ri of the whole Abyss (and representative of *the* mightiest).

A note about Graz’zt’s favorite servant: Ztefano and Verin are not only two names for the same creature, but also two aspects and two personalities. The dark-skinned Ztefano is the master of subterfuge and cannot be detected by other lords; only *true seeing* can see his real form. The pale Verin is better known among the rulers of the Abyss and is a skilled diplomat. The creature entered Red’s room as Ztefano, but assumed Verin’s identity when discovered.

Red Shroud not only managed to avoid angering Verin, but she also squeezed a good deal out of him. In return for the whole chant on the PCs and their situation, she got aid from Graz’zt in the upcoming battle. Red Shroud knew that Mobley was going to double-cross her, but she didn’t know what to do to save the city until Ztefano arrived. As for Mobley himself, Graz’zt’s troops captured him before going back to Azzagrat.

The fiendish population in this area of the Plains has been drastically reduced, and most tanar’ri who have arrived here from elsewhere are just looking for easy loot, not for a fight. The PCs can spot the right direction to the city by the thin columns of smoke that can be faintly seen in that direction. Unfortunately, there are still some serious threats. A sizable flock of varrangoin has arrived here to scavenge and eat the occasional lesser fiend. The varrangoin are also known as “abyssal bats”, and that’s what they look like. Skeletal frames and leathery wings, their head is a skull with glowing eyes, and they have vicious forked tails.

Lesser varrangoins are divided into four castes. Their names are Rykso, Riptyce, Corteel and Caid. There are two of each caste here. The castes have no physical difference, making it impossible to tell one from the other.

Lesser Varrangoin (8)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Magical Beast (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: 10 (+0) Dex: 24 (+7) Con: 14 (+2) Int: 11 (+0) Wis: 14 (+2) Cha: 10 (+0)	HP: 5d10+10 (37) AC: 22 (+7 dex, +5 natural) Initiative: +7 dex Ref: +11 (+4 base, +7 dex) For: +6 (+4 base, +2 con) Will: +3 (+1 base, +2 wis)	Speed: 3, fly 18 (average) Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +5 Melee: +5 base Ranged: +12 (+5 base, +7 dexterity)		
Attacks 2 claws, +12 melee, damage 1d4, and Bite, +7 melee, damage 1d6		Skills Hide +11 (+4 ranks, +7 dex) Listen +10 (+4 ranks, +2 wis, +4 racial) Move Silently +11 (+4 ranks, +7 dex) Spot +10 (+4 ranks, +2 wis, +4 racial)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Ability Focus (breath weapon), Weapon Finesse Blindsense 20 ft, darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, SR 12, DR 5/silver. Light vulnerability (Ex): 2 damage/round in bright light, treat as shaken. Breath weapon (Su): 3/day, 5d6 damage, Reflex DC 16 for half. Rykso varrangoins deal cold damage in a 12 mt cone. Riptyce varrangoins deal fire damage in a 9 mt by 3 mt cloud. Corteel varrangoins deal lightning damage in a 18 mt by 1.5 mt line. Caïd varrangoins deal acid damage in a 1.5 mt radius blast with a range of 9 mt. Immunity (Ex): Each varrangoin is immune to its own breath weapon. Resistances (Ex): Rykso varrangoins have electricity resistance 10. Riptyce varrangoins have acid resistance 10. Corteel varrangoins have cold resistance 10. Caïd varrangoins have fire resistance 10.				

Normally, this number of varrangoins wouldn't work together. Varrangoins don't usually gather in numbers, travelling in smaller groups instead. However, this flock of varrangoins has been put together by one greater varrangoin, who has bullied all the others into submission. Greater varrangoins come in two varieties – meleers and spellcasters, or “ragers” and “arcanists”, as they are known among the tanar'ri. This one is a rager and he's willing to try his luck with the PCs.

Rager Varrangoin		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Magical Beast (Abyss)	CR: 10
Str: 16 (+3) Dex: 24 (+7) Con: 19 (+4) Int: 12 (+1) Wis: 14 (+2) Cha: 13 (+1)	HP: 8d10+32 (76) AC: 25 (+7 dex, +8 natural) Initiative: +7 dex Ref: +13 (+6 base, +7 dex) For: +10 (+6 base, +4 con) Will: +4 (+2 base, +2 wis)	Speed: 3, fly 18 (average) Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +8 Melee: +11 (+8 base, +3 strength) Ranged: +15 (+8 base, +7 dexterity)		
Attacks 2 claws, +15 melee, damage 1d6+3, and Bite, +10 melee, damage 1d10+1, and Tail, +10 melee, damage 1d8+1		Skills Hide +15 (+8 ranks, +7 dex) Listen +16 (+10 ranks, +2 wis, +4 racial) Move Silently +15 (+8 ranks, +7 dex) Spot +17 (+11 ranks, +2 wis, +4 racial)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Power Attack, Multiattack, Weapon Finesse Blindsense 20 ft, darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, SR 21, DR 10/silver, resistance to fire, cold and electricity 20. Spell-like abilities: 1/day - <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>symbol of pain</i> (DC 16); CL 10. Immune to charm effects and to ability damage caused by spells. Natural <i>freedom of action</i> (Ex). Rage (Ex): 1/day as a barbarian, except that the rager becomes immune to fear and illusions and doesn't get tired afterwards.				

The rager looks identical to the other varrangoins. It will prepare a *symbol of pain* on the PCs' path, and after it has been triggered it will order the flock to attack with their breath weapons. It will rage and attack; if the PCs start casting defensive spells, it will attempt a *dispel magic*. If the fight goes bad, it will flee and leave the other varrangoins behind – they, too, will try to escape soon afterwards.

When the heroes get to the outskirts of the Reach, they see that the town is indeed heavily damaged. Lots of watchtowers have been torn down, some of them seem to have burned down recently and are still smoking, and there are hundreds of corpses scattered everywhere. There are many people outside, more than the last time the PCs were here. Most of them seem to be mercenaries, and many are wounded. They have lit several campfires around the entrance to Broken Reach's underground, and they are sitting around them, cooking some meat and talking about the recent battles. The sol-

diers don't wear any particular sign or banner, and they each have their personal equipment. Most of them are warriors and fighters, but there are several low-level spellcasters as well. Regardless, they all were hired by Red and now they are waiting for the acid gases to clear out from Broken Reach before going down again.

If the PCs have brought Rob Benton here from Maldithar, they will find him outside Broken Reach, together with several other mercenaries. He's fought the battle and can recount the details if the PCs haven't heard them yet, and also give some chant on the current status of Broken Reach.

The city is depopulated, but still it isn't safe. Lots of people were killed, and many tunnels are saturated with toxic fumes. As a result, the town is a lot less busy than it used to be. The main road/tunnel has been cleared from corpses and the air there is breathable, if smelly. A few people can usually be seen walking down the tunnel or chatting around, but they always get out every now and then to breathe some fresh air. Characters that stay in Broken Reach for one consecutive day risk contracting mindfire (DC 12, incubation one day, damage 1d4 intelligence). Most of the shops and the few inns are open, though they are much less lively. Visitors have to take care not to stray too far into unknown tunnels; a large portion of them are saturated with acid gas. Characters within a contaminated tunnel must make a Fortitude save each minute or take 1d4 damage. The DC is generally 15, though it may rise to 20 in saturated caves and other places where the gas has no way to disperse. Many houses can't be entered because of this problem, but lots of people have died so there's more room than ever nonetheless, provided that a basher is willing to clear out the gas somehow and maybe a corpse or two. Noone can accurately estimate how long it will take for the city to be entirely decontaminated, but one month at the very least looks like a good bet.

The second big problem is that all those dead manes have started reforming, 24 hours after death. They are too stupid to do anything except wander around, gather in packs, and occasionally eat someone. They are certainly too stupid to find the way out of Broken Reach, and as a result people underground can easily encounter anything from a single manes to a pack of a dozen, anywhere in the city-fortress. Smart and tough cutters capture the manes, bind them with rope, get them out of the tunnels, and try to sell them to the demons. Around here, right now, the manes can fetch from 10 to 15 gold. Bashers that aren't that smart content themselves with avoiding the mindless critters, or killing them again (something which is somewhat frowned upon, as it further increases the amount of acid in the air).

By the time the PCs get to the entrance to Broken Reach, the succubus Red Shroud will have been warned about their arrival. Shortly after that, Graz'zt will know too, and he will start preparing to meet the heroes. But before that, the PCs have a day or so of time to kill in Broken Reach. Red Shroud doesn't want to talk to them; her guards will say that the lady is too busy, what with the war and widespread destruction and all.

The PCs can pick up miscellaneous rumors if they spend a few hours making a Gather Information check. Depending on their result, they can discover more useful facts.

- **1-15.** The character doesn't discover anything they didn't already know. People are talking about the battle, and about the situation of Broken Reach, but everything the character hears is well-known chant.
- **16-20.** "Mobley has vanished shortly after the Graz'zt bashers showed up. Red peeled him real good!"; "They say that now that the survivors have been paid, all the whores in Broken Reach are busy. They are making good money too – the pimp woman, Ledi, isn't collecting. She's acting confused since her servant Suleensh has been killed in the battle."; "The old bastard Hanatel lived through this one too. One hour after the last fiend was out of town, he was already doing deals, selling and buying as if nothing happened."
- **21-30.** "I've been around the Plains in these few days. Everyone is wondering how Red got the help of Graz'zt. That succubus certainly has more than her share of tricks up her sleeve. Noone is going to attack Broken Reach for a while now!"; "A stranger from Sigil has been seen around the Reach about one week ago. There are plenty of that, but this one was tough as nails – I've

heard a mob of babaus stained his white robe with their acid touch. Six seconds later, he had already painted the walls with their guts.”; “I was in town when the tanar’ri appeared. Thousands of babaus, bar’lgura, vlocks, chasmes, you name it, it was there. Everyone worn the symbols of Graz’zt. Mobley’s cross-trading scum didn’t stand a chance. I bet they would have cut me up too if I didn’t have the wits to hide in a pile of goristro dung!”

- **31+.** The PC meets one of Red Shroud’s palace guards. While Red usually conducts sensitive conversations by telepathy or in another room, in order to keep them confidential, the last one left some impressions. If the hero is willing to pony up the ridiculous sum of 500 gold as a garnish, he can hear the following recount: “The guy was wearing a white robe. He was humanoid and sounded like a human, but I can’t tell more; he had his hood on and I didn’t get a good look at his face. Anyway, he was chatting with Red, asking chant about you. Oh, yes, his description matches well enough. The lady didn’t look very interested, but then that bag of fat, Skullbiter, stumbled into the room, probably looking for a snack. Skullbiter spotted this guy, and he jumped backwards. I’ve never seen that tub of lard jump, but he did it. He was so astonished that you could hear his brain stopping. The rest of the conversation went on through telepathy, but I can tell that Red was just as surprised. The man looked angry but then he calmed down. I don’t know what happened, but everyone looked rather satisfied at the end. So, was this worth your money, eh?”

If the PCs want to sell or buy stuff, they can do so in relative ease. Right now, there’s a surplus of common magical weapons and armor, but anything else can be sold rather readily. For powerful items, they’ll be directed to the cleric of Hiddukel, Hanatel. Red has decided to lower the levies for the time being, hoping to get money back into Broken Reach. Goods can be bought and sold at their normal price, though many vendors are going to try to peel the PCs into paying triple as usual. If the PCs do go to Hanatel, he looks rather irritated at the reduction. The reason is that thanks to his agreements, he could use the taxation to gain a lot more money than anyone else – but Red Shroud basically told him to shut up and consider himself lucky that he escaped her little purge of rivals.

Let the PCs sell some of the stuff they picked up and purchase new equipment. The merchants in the city can provide them with basic supplies and minor magical items, and they will buy the stuff they’ve looted from Maldithar (though weapons and armor are currently in surplus and they won’t be paid as much as usual). If the PCs are in need of more powerful magic items, Hanatel may or may not have them for sale, depending on what the DM wants the party to have.

Lianne is growingly increasingly frightened by this situation. It is now clear that her “family” will not lift a finger to help her. In fact, her own father would probably like nothing more than using her as a scapegoat for his failure in retrieving the Orb. As she’s not strong enough to pull her own weight in the Abyss, Lianne has thought up the following plan. She will make this offer to the PCs: together, they retrieve the Orb. Then, they offer it to Ithla-Sathlo, and she will parlay for their freedom. After the Orb is safely in the archfiend’s hands (yeah, tentacles), Ithla-Sathlo has no reason to keep this taxing spell up. This way, if the PCs accept, Lianne hopes to be able to get back into her family’s good graces.

Coriolis and Joseph have been talking for most of the travel through Tenebra and they have reached a middle ground. The paladin has convinced the Mercykiller that while Ithla-Sathlo created the retriever and ordered it to steal from Arborea, it was Rothakon who actually ordered it to pass through Sigil, ignoring law and safety. After a fashion, Coriolis agreed that the half-fiend is at least as guilty as the demon lord. As a result, the expedition’s current plan is to get help from Sigil through Broken Reach’s portal (which will take a few days) and then seek out Rothakon.

If the PCs let them know that they are trapped in the Abyss until Ithla-Sathlo lets them go or dies, the matter changes slightly. Joseph will sigh and declare that he will not enter any agreement with any fiend, and that it clearly is the will of the powers that he destroys this archdemon or dies trying. The plan stands as it is: find Rothakon and capture him, see if they can find out anything that can be used against Ithla-Sathlo. Coriolis is unfazed – he came here to kill Ithla-Sathlo, and he wouldn’t have left anyway, he says.

Gardener, Mystery Man

The heroes' planning is shattered when they are approached by a figure wearing a white robe, dirty and with its borders coated in the reddish dust of the Plains of Infinite Portals. Under the hood, the characters can spot the shining eyes of the Gardener! The tuladhra greets them warmly and asks about their travels, saying how deeply sorry he is that he has dragged them into this mess.

Of course, this is not the real Gardener. It is Ztefano, first servant of Graz'zt and demon lord in his own right. Still, there is no way for the PCs to find this out for sure... unless one of them casts *true seeing*. If they do so, they see through Ztefano's magical disguise but not through his mundane disguise – that requires a Spot check, DC 45. Noticing something weird in his demeanor or speech, instead, takes a Sense Motive check, DC 40. If that seems steep, remember: this guy peels *abyssal lords* for a living. The DCs would be even higher if not for the fact that he doesn't know the Gardener and the PCs do (besides, we want the heroes to have a chance, even though Ztefano has been cheating beings far more powerful, ancient and cunning than they are, for eons). The DM should make the best use of his own bluffing ability to make this scene as good as possible.

Ztefano is going to chat with the PCs for a while, to get their trust and to gather more information. He's going to be very interested in the curse, especially about the part where it can be used to harm Ithla-Sathlo. Ztefano has an almost supernatural ability to glean information from body language and the slightest variations of tone; if the PCs talk to him for more than ten minutes or so about the curse, he will have learnt everything he wanted.

His cover story is as follows, though he will alter it to make it more plausible if he gets additional information from the heroes. As the "Gardener", he became desperate as the days passed and the PCs didn't return. Luckily though, he was able to contact a powerful druid from Arborea, who was able to save most of his plants from the ravages of the poison – though he had to move his greenhouse out of Sigil. At about the same time, he learned that the Orb went missing from its place in Arborea.

As part of his payment for saving his plants, the druid asked him to do what he could to recover the Selthian Orb. The "Gardener" was already feeling a bit guilty, fearing that the PCs got killed in the Abyss, and he wanted to know for sure what happened to them. So he thought to solve two problems in one and went to Broken Reach through Plague-Mort (but not before making sure that his precious plants were well taken care of). There, he talked to Red Shroud and, in return for some special herbs, she told him that the PCs were in Broken Reach just a few days before, and then left for another layer. But the succubus thought they would be coming back.

So, he waited in Broken Reach, trying to hide from the locals. When the battle broke out, he hid in the Ratholes; noone would bother to fight there since there is nothing to fight for. Now he's seen the PCs, and he's so very glad that they're alive.

The *real* facts are a lot different. The real Gardener saw his treasured plants die before him, unable to do anything with science or magic. He spent weeks in a haze of pain and feelings of frustration, doing nothing, hardly even feeding himself. Then, he gradually recovered and started trading what little he had to get back to producing useful herbs which he could sell... but, at about this point, a mob of tanar'ri got to his house and captured him.

The Gardener was brought to Azzagrat and tortured for days, until he had revealed all the useful information he had about the Orb and the PCs. Then, he was tortured a little more just for fun, and then put in jail on that ghastly layer. At this point, he is dead or dying, and Selthian is one step closer to being completely forgotten.

Ztefano is going to get the PCs to tell him about the mimir's recording. This is the only thing that Graz'zt didn't learn – who Ithla-Sathlo's target was supposed to be. As soon as the false "Gardener" hears the name Demogorgon, he is ready for the next move.

Ztefano will talk about how neither the PCs nor the Mercykillers will ever be able to kill Ithla-Sathlo. He's a minor abyssal lord – but one thing is "minor", and another is "abyssal lord". He's

substantially more powerful than the average balor, and *that* would easily kill the heroes and Mercykillers put together. However... tanar'ri are prone to fighting among themselves, and that includes the lords. They are paranoid, every single one of them, and they will jump at each other's throats at the mere suspect of double-crossing. His suggestion is to go to Demogorgon's palace, and tell him about Ithla-Sathlo's plans to destroy him. Demogorgon will certainly attack Infestant and kill Ithla-Sathlo. He will want to, and he will have to - that's how Abyssal politics work. Anything less would be a show of weakness, and no abyssal lord wants *that*.

If the PCs ask him to go with them, Ztefano may or may not do so. He will do whatever draws the least suspicion, but if he ends up following the PCs, he will conveniently disappear at some point of the trip, when it won't cause the party to go back.

The party now has three main courses of action. They may go with the Mercykiller's advice, seeking out Rothakon. Or, they may trust Lianne and go looking for the Orb. Finally, they may believe the fake Gardener and go to Demogorgon. This last approach is the most likely, even if they don't actually trust Ztefano. After all, they don't know where to look for Rothakon, and they don't know where to look for the Orb either. Gaining either of these informations is exceedingly difficult.

The Mercykillers will decide to seek out Rothakon while the PCs try to get Demogorgon to fight Ithla-Sathlo. As soon as Red Shroud is available again, they will send a messenger through Broken Reach's portal to Plague-Mort and from there to Sigil. Hopefully, they'll be able to show that their task isn't so hopeless, and they will get reinforcements. At that point, they will seek out Rothakon. To this end, Coriolis is going to ask the PCs to leave Lianne in their custody. If they are doubtful, Joseph will promise that she won't be hurt.

What if...?

At this point, the party has several choices. Going to Demogorgon is the easiest one (well, until they actually meet him, that is), and the most likely.

However, there is a good chance that your players will go with some other option, such as searching for the Orb or looking for Rothakon.

The first possibility is fairly safe, but it's also a waste of time. Graz'zt has the Orb, and he's using several divination-blocking spells, including *mind blank*, at all times. The Orb has only passed through Broken Reach when Graz'zt's githyanki carried it, and noone saw it. Graz'zt is no amateur.

Joining the Mercykillers in their search for Rothakon is much more dangerous. They have some chances, though. Rothakon's trail in Broken Reach is cold by now, but the party has Lianne. She knows that Rothakon is likely to be going back to Infestant at this time, and she knows how to go there as well. She doesn't want to meet her father, but she *really* doesn't want to go to Demogorgon.

Be ready to change the adventure accordingly.

To the Depths

Now, the PCs have to find a way to go to Demogorgon. The first step is knowing where he lives, and this is easy. The PCs can draw on their own knowledge, making a Knowledge (the Abyss) or Knowledge (the Planes) check. If this fails, they can go around Broken Reach for a day or so, picking up chant from the locals and making a Gather Information check. Either way, look up what they learn in the following table, but if they use Knowledge (the Planes) then consider the roll as one category lower, as that skill is less focused than Knowledge (the Abyss).

- **10-15:** Demogorgon, also known as The Demogorgon, lives in the Gaping Maw, the 88th layer of the Abyss.
- **16-20:** The Gaping Maw is a briny layer of salty oceans, rocky prominences, and unfathomable depths. Demogorgon, worshiped by kraken and ixitxachitls, rules from a stone palace rising from the water. His servants also include many powerful wastriliths. This layer can be reached by sailing on the Styx, which can be reached from the barracks-city of Styros on the Plains of Infinite Portals...
- **21-25:** ...but sailing on the Styx isn't a good idea, since visitors to the Gaping Maw get drawn there in a whirlpool, and noone wants to get into a whirlpool on the Styx since that means losing one's memory forever. In fact, the layer was only discovered when a few hydroloths, immune to the river's memory-draining water, were drawn there by accident (giving the layer its name).

- **26-34:** Recently, Demogorgon has conquered two other adjacent layers, expanding his realm to a size rivaling Graz'zt's own. Both Demozg (the 89th layer) and Gorgonashk (the 90th layer) are jungle layers. Demogorgon's grip on these two might be somewhat weaker than his home layer. They may be easier to travel than the oceanic Gaping Maw.
- **35+:** Demozg is a hot, thick, humid jungle full of fiendish monsters and petitioner cultists. Demogorgon's palace here is the Temple of Insanity. Gorgonashk is another jungle, where it constantly rains blood. It is less crowded with malevolent entities, but the major feature is the City of All Demons, which quickly drains the souls of any non-tanar'ri entering it.

There are many ways of getting to the three layers, besides using the Styx. There are various iron fortresses on the Plains of Infinite Portals which protect deep holes leading to the Gaping Maw, Demozg and Gorgonashk. Their locations aren't well known, though. The PCs can make Gather Information checks, with a DC of 30; each check takes one day and, if successful, reveals the location of one portal.

Alternatively, they can try to visit Red Shroud again. Despite rumors to the contrary, the succubus is alive and well, and she truly is busy rebuilding the city. Most of the time, she is around her palace, discussing with fiends and merchants from around the Plains and beyond. However, she also knows that her temporary alliance with Graz'zt involves the PCs as well, and she is willing to talk to them – but to do so, they'll need to get past the couple of tieflings guarding the gate to her palace. They have orders not to let anyone pass, and they may even be willing to fight if bothered enough. The way these chaotic evil guardsmen think, nothing's better than rounding up the wage with some loot.

Tiefling guards (2)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Tiefling Fighter 5 th (Abyss)	CR: 5
Str: 15 (+2)	HP: 5d10+5 (29)	Speed: 6	Armor: heavy % fail.: 35% Check pen.: -6	
Dex: 13 (+1)	AC: 15 (+8 armor, +1 dex)			
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +1 dex		BAB: +5	Grapple: +7
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +2 (+1 base, +1 dex)		Melee: +7 (+5 base, +2 dex)	
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +5 (+4 base, +1 con)		Ranged: +6 (+5 base, +1 dex)	
Cha: 9 (-1)	Will: +1 base			
Attacks		Skills		
Greatsword +1, +9 melee, damage 2d6+5, crit 19-20/x2		Bluff +1 (-1 cha, +2 racial)		
Feats and special abilities		Climb +0 (+6 ranks, -6 armor)		
Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative, Toughness, Weapon focus: greatsword, Weapon specialization: greatsword.		Hide -1 (+3 dex, +2 racial, -6 armor)		
Darkvision 18m; cold, fire and electricity resistance 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.		Intimidate +3 (+4 ranks, -1 cha)		
Equipment		Jump +0 (+6 ranks, -6 armor)		
Full plate armor (AB +8, max dex +1, check penalty -6, arcane failure 35%)				
Greatsword +1 (damage 2d6+1, crit 19-20/x2) (faint evocation, CL 3)				
13 gold coins				

Assuming that they get past somehow, they'll find Red Shroud quite busy indeed. Nevertheless, she will say that they have five minutes. The succubus wants to know what they are going to do, in case Graz'zt wants to know, but she's playing it so that it looks like only the PCs are looking for chant here. She will demand money or magic in return for her help, but if the PCs realize that she's interested in them, they may be able to arrange a trade in chant.

Red Shroud knows of no portal which leads to the Gaping Maw. For what she knows, the only way there is through the rivers Styx and Nihilus. Still, if the PCs want to meet Demogorgon, they don't necessarily have to go to the Gaping Maw. The demon lord spends time in all of his palaces (Abysm, the Temple of Insanity, and the City of All Demons), and may show up on any of his layers if the PCs bear interesting news. These are the portals to Demogorgon's realm that the succubus is aware of:

- A portal to the City of All Demons on Gorgonashk can be found among the Blood Lakes, a region of the Plains of Infinite Portals. The Blood Lakes are about a thousand kilometers from Broken Reach and they are rather easy to find, but Red Shroud doesn't know the precise loca-

tion of the portal or its key. Chances are that jumping into the portal is sufficient, but the succubus isn't certain of this.

- A medium-sized iron fortress guards a portal leading directly to the Temple of Insanity on Demozg. Unfortunately, this fortress is about 5000 kilometers away; it would take some fairly powerful magic to get there in a reasonable time and without getting lost. Also, the key to the portal consists in the murder of an innocent... which is probably a problem in itself.
- A small fortress guards a portal leading to Demozg. The fortress is relatively close, at about 200 kilometers from Broken Reach, and no key is needed. The portal leads to the jungle, at some days of travel from the Temple of Insanity; still, it is the easiest path for the PCs.

Chances are that the PCs will take the last route. By this time, the PCs may have access to 6th level spells, or have enough money to purchase a couple scrolls of *wind walk* or *shadow walk*. Either of these will make the journey a lot shorter and safer. Going on foot isn't unreasonable either, though it means that the party will have to deal with a lot more encounters.

What if...?

The party may decide to take a different route than Demozg. Near the end of this chapter, you will find brief descriptions of the Gaping Maw and Gorgonashk.

As you are leaving Red Shroud's room, the succubus' voice prompts you to turn: "One last advice, and this one is free. Demogorgon isn't as nice as I am. He isn't as nice as Rothakon. He isn't as nice as most of the Abyssal powers. In fact, he is quite insane. If you're going to talk to him, you should be very, very careful about what you say". Then, with a smile and a gesture, she motions for you to leave.

After the party has put some distance between themselves and Broken Reach, they will start meeting packs of armanites. These nomad fiends look like centaurs, but they are gaunt and sickly, and they usually wear heavy armored barding. Armanites can run on air, effectively flying at the same speed that they have on the ground, but they have no magical abilities. They only respect strength, and they tend not to mix with other tanar'ri unless they're getting paid for it. Many of them are organized in clans, with the biggest ones residing in the 377th layer, the Plains of Gallenshu. Armanites stayed away from Broken Reach for several months, after a Blood War recruiter run which rounded up several hundreds of them from Styros to Mithrengo. They are coming back now, mostly in small packs.

Other encounters between Broken Reach and the fortress, named Gedmazzar, may include just about every variety of fiends which the PCs have already met. Babaus prowl the Plains, looking for fiends or mortals to press into Blood War service. The PCs should be careful around these, because they don't know who is backing them – the babau may teleport away and get back with reinforcements in a matter of minutes. Manes and dretches can be encountered by chance everywhere on the first layer. They aren't dangerous for the PCs, but occasionally these wretched creatures gang together in mobs of twenty, thirty or more.

A serious threat is posed by mobs of tanar'ri under the control of someone. Often, a greater tanar'ri will take control of a bunch of lesser and least demons, driving them around the Plains in search of loot and destruction. Alternatively, they may be leading them off to Styros or to a similar place, to be sent to the Blood War battlefields. These hordes can be spotted from a distance thanks to the noise and clouds of dust they raise, and the PCs should take advantage of this and avoid them.

The greatest danger lies in drawing the attention of a molydeus. The Blood War recruiters have no qualms about pressing mortals into service, and their power is more than a match for the PCs. Luckily, one of the most dangerous of them, the White Shadow, has been ordered by Graz'tz not to bother the party, and most of the others will take a garnish to leave the PCs alone.

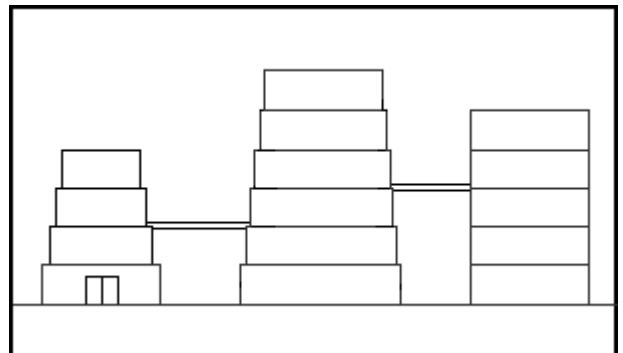
Sooner or later, the party will get in sight of their destination. From a distance, Gedmazzar seems to be composed of three towers of varying height, arranged in a row and linked by thick stone arches. At five kilometers from the fortress, the flat ground of the Abyss suddenly drops, forming an immense gorge. The gorge is wide enough that the PCs can't see the other side, and long enough that

it can't be walked around in a reasonable time. Vrocks fly high above it, tiny lethal dots in the sky. Fortunately, the heroes don't have to cross it. It leads to Torremor, the 503rd layer, belonging to the Abyssal lord Pazrael. It's a place of rocky pillars, ramps and interconnected beams, home of many flying fiends, where those that cannot fly are scorned. Torremor is also part of the path leading to Infestant, but none of Ithla-Sathlo's servants know about this particular passage.

One of the roaming packs of Armanites is around the fortress which the PCs are headed to. It is composed of eight fiends, who will charge and attack the PCs as soon as they see them.

Armanite (8)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 7
Str: 20 (+5)	HP: 5d8+15 (37)	Speed: 12, fly 12 (poor)		
Dex: 11 (+0)	AC: 25 (-1 size, +6 nat, +8 armor, +2 shield)	Armor: heavy		
Con: 17 (+3)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 50% Check pen.: -8		
Int: 8 (-1)	Ref: +4 base	BAB: +5 Grapple: +7		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +7 (+4 base, +3 con)	Melee: +9 (+5 base, +5 strength, -1 size)		
Cha: 13 (+1)	Will: +5 (+4 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +4 (+5 base, -1 size)		
Attacks				Skills
Lance, +9 melee reach 3 mt, damage 2d6+5, crit x3, and				Hide -4 (+8 ranks, -4 size, -8 armor)
Hooves, +4/+4 melee, damage 1d6+2				Intimidate +9 (+8 ranks, +1 cha)
Feats and special abilities				Jump +5 (+8 ranks, +5 str, -8 armor)
Feats: Ride-by Attack, Trample				Listen +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis)
Darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, SR 18, DR 10/cold iron or good, resistance to fire, cold and acid 10. Immune to electricity and poison, telepathy within 30 mt.				Spot +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis)
Armanites are considered mounted at all times, and they are considered as if having the Ride skill and the Mounted Combat feat for the purpose of meeting prerequisites.				Survival +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis)
Summon (Su): 1/day summon 1d10 dretches or 1 armanite with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 3 rd level spell.				Swim -3 (+8 ranks, +5 str, -16 armor)
Equipment				
Large lance (reach 3 mt, damage 2d6, crit x3)				
Full plate barding (+8 AC, +1 max dex, -6 check penalty, 35% arcane spell failure)				
Large heavy steel shield (+2 AC, -2 check penalty, 15% arcane spell failure)				

Gedmazzar is indeed a small fortress by Abyssal standards. The whole structure is built from dark iron and there are no windows, only arrow slits from which the defenders may fire spells on incoming assailants. The central tower is twelve meters wide and rises up six floors from the ground, each floor six meters high. It grows slightly smaller up until the top, where it is about nine meters in diameter. To its left, there is a smaller tower; it is nine meters wide at the base and six meters wide at the top, which is four floors from the ground. To the right of the central structure, the last tower is nine meters wide and rises five floors from the ground. Each of the smaller towers is connected to the largest one by an iron bridge, at the second-to-last floor.



Demogorgon's lieutenant here is a hezrou named Gunetez. Under his command, there are a dozen bar'lgura from Demozg, a force sufficient to repel random assaults from the average mob. There are also several manes and dretches, as usual for tanar'ri palaces. Gunetez has also captured a rutterkin somewhere; the broken fiend serves him now as a butler of sorts. Usually, there are four bar'lgura in each tower; Gunetez and the rutterkin are in the central one.

The party can try to sneak inside Gedmazzar. There are two main problems here. The first is getting close to the towers: the bar'lgura can *see invisibility* at will, and while none of them keep it constantly active, chances are that at least one will have it up at any given time. Coupled with their keen senses, this makes covert approach a difficult plan. Illusions other than invisibility might help more, if the party can think of something cunning. Or, they could always teleport.

Once they are in front of Gedmazzar, they have the trouble of getting inside. Each floor is one room, so the layout is simple, but only the smallest tower has doors at the ground floor, and the

room beyond them is full of twenty manes and ten dretches. The noise and moans are almost unbearable, and the stench coming from the tide of flesh is worse. The only other doors are at either side of each of the two bridges connecting the tower. All these doors are built for Large creatures, and they are made from iron. The bridge doors (HP 60, hardness 10, break DC 28) are locked (pick DC 30); the ground gate is thicker and also barred (HP 120, hardness 10, break DC 32).

Most of the other rooms are almost empty, except for a few squirming larvae and the bar'lgura themselves. The exception is Gunetez's own room, at the 6th floor of the central tower. It is decorated with quality wooden panels, a few paintings depicting Demogorgon's layers, and contains a sturdy Large-sized bed. The hezrou is usually here. The 5th and 4th floors contain doors leading to the bridges to the medium and smallest tower respectively. The rutterkin is generally around here; he is an unloyal coward and if confronted by an obviously superior force he will try his best to be servile and get his life spared. But if he can get away with it, he enjoys inflicting as much pain as possible. He is armed with a snap-tong; a sort of sharp trap mounted on an iron pole, similar to a mancatcher but designed to kill rather than imprison. The ground floor is built around a wide hole in the ground, leading into unpenetrable darkness. Characters that jump down here are transported to Demozg. Four bar'lgura are scattered around this tower.

The party might win a head-on battle if they take care to separate the fiends somehow. Surprise attacks, aimed to kill a few bar'lgura at a time or to catch Gunetez mostly alone can do the trick. The iron walls are quite good at keeping sound out, and if the party can enter into one tower without alerting the fiends within, they can engage them in combat before they are able to warn the rest of Gedmazzar.

The heroes can also try to parley with the fiends. Gunetez is self-confident enough, while the rutterkin is easily intimidated. If the PCs can get to them, they might be able to talk. The bar'lgura, however, are likely to attack without listening. Anyway, Gunetez is going to ask for a garnish to let the PCs pass to Demozg; he'd like more servants in the form of dretches or manes, but he'll settle for 1000 gold coins.

Gunetez		Al. Chaotic Evil	Hezrou Barbarian 1 st (Abyss)	CR: 12
Str: 26 (+8)	HP: 10d8+1d12+121 (172)	Speed: 18	Check pen.: 0	
Dex: 12 (+1)	AC: 24 (-1 size, +14 natural, +1 dex)	Armor: none		
Con: 33 (+11)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 0%		
Int: 14 (+2)	Ref: +8 (+7 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +11	Grapple: +23	
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +20 (+9 base, +11 con)	Melee: +19 (+11 base, +8 strength, -1 size)		
Cha: 20 (+5)	Will: +8 (+7 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +12 (+11 base, +1 dexterity, -1 size)		
<u>Attacks</u>			<u>Skills</u>	
Bite +19 melee reach 3 mt, damage 4d4+8, and 2 claws, +14 melee reach 3 mt, damage 1d8+4			Climb +21 (+13 ranks, +8 str)	
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>			Concentration +24 (+13 ranks, +11 con)	
Feats: Blind-fight, Cleave, Power attack, Toughness			Hide +10 (+13 ranks, +1 dex, -4 size)	
Improved grab (must hit with both claws), Barbarian rage 1/day.			Escape Artist +14 (+13 ranks, +1 dex)	
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>chaos hammer</i> (DC 19), <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22,5 kg of objects only), <i>unholy blight</i> (DC 19); 3/day – <i>blasphemy</i> (DC 22), <i>gaseous form</i> . Caster level 13 th .			Intimidate +19 (+14 ranks, +5 cha)	
DR 10/good, darkvision 18 mt, immune to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, SR 19, telepathy within 30 mt.			Listen +23 (+14 ranks, +1 wis, +8 racial)	
Stench: non-demons within 3 mt. must roll a Fortitude save versus DC 26 or be nauseated for as long as they remain in the area plus 1d4 rounds. Those that save are sickened for as long as they remain in the area. Creatures that succeed are unaffected by following exposures for 24 hours. <i>Delay poison</i> or <i>neutralize poison</i> removes the condition; creatures that are immune to poison are immune to this effect; poison resistance applies.			Move Silently +14 (+13 ranks, +1 dex)	
Summon demon: once per day it can attempt to summon 4d10 dretches or another hezrou with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 4th-level spell.			Search +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int)	
			Spellcraft +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int)	
			Spot +23 (+14 ranks, +1 wis, +8 racial)	
			Survival +1 wis*	
			Use Rope +1 dex**	
			* +2 synergy when following tracks	
			** +2 synergy when binding	

Bar'lgura		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 7
Str: 17 (+3)	HP: 6d8+12 (39)	Speed: 9, climb 9		
Dex: 13 (+1)	AC: 20 (+1 dex, +9 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 15 (+2)	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 10 (+0)	Ref: +6 (+5 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +6 Grapple: +9		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +7 (+5 base, +2 con)	Melee: +9 (+6 base, +3 strength)		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: +6 (+5 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +7 (+6 base, +1 dexterity)		
Attacks				Skills
2 claws, +9 melee, damage 1d4+3, and				Climb +12 (+9 ranks, +3 str)
Bite +4 melee, damage 1d6+1				Concentration +11 (+9 ranks, +2 con)
Feats and special abilities				Hide +22 (+9 ranks, +12 racial, +1 dex)
Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Mobility, Spring attack.				Move Silently +10 (+9 ranks, +1 dex)
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.				Listen +20 (+9 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis, +2 alertness)
Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 17, telepathy within 30 mt. Spring attack is a bonus feat.				Search +9 ranks
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness, desecrate, detect good, detect thoughts, dispel magic, entangle, fear, see invisibility, telekinesis, greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); 2/day – <i>change self, invisibility, spectral hand</i> . Caster level 8 th .				Sense motive +10 (+9 ranks, +1 wis)
Chameleon (ex): a bar'lgura can change its color to match its surroundings as a free action. This gives it a +12 racial bonus to Hide checks.				Spot +20 (+9 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis, +2 alertness)
Summon 1d6 babau 1/day with 35% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.				Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*)
				* when following tracks

Rutterkin		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 7
Str: 14 (+2)	HP: 5d8+10 (32)	Speed: 6		
Dex: 15 (+2)	AC: 18 (+2 dex, +6 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 14 (+2)	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: -		
Int: 9 (-1)	Ref: +6 (+4 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +5 Grapple: +7		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +6 (+4 base, +2 con)	Melee: +7 (+5 base, +2 strength)		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: +5 (+4 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +7 (+5 base, +2 dexterity)		
Attacks				Skills
Snap-tong, +8 melee, damage 2d6+3, or				Climb +10 (+8 ranks, +2 str)
Claws, +7/+7 melee, damage 1d6+2				Intimidate +8 ranks
Feats and special abilities				Jump +12 (+8 ranks, +2 str, +2 synergy)
Feats: Dodge, Weapon focus: snap-tong				Listen +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis)
Darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, SR 14, DR 5/cold iron or good, resistance to fire, cold and acid 10. Immune to electricity and poison, telepathy within 30 mt.				Move Silently +10 (+8 ranks, +2 dex)
Spell-like abilities: at will - <i>darkness, cause fear, telekinesis</i> (DC 15); CL 6.				Spot +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis)
Summon (Su): 1/day summon 1 rutterkin with a 35% chance of success or 1 chasme with a 10% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 3 rd level spell.				Tumble +12 (+8 ranks, +2 dex, +2 synergy)
Equipment				
Snap-tong (exotic two handed weapon, damage 2d6 piercing, crit 20/x2, improved grab and constrict for 2d6 damage)				

Whatever way the PCs choose to do it, they should eventually be able to reach the portal. Now it is the time to see if they have learnt their lessons. They are entering the deepest Abyss, to confront one of the most dangerous beings in existence. Most of Demogorgon's servants would fight the characters to death for so much as a misplaced gaze, and many of them are quite capable of destroying the party through either power or numbers. One mistake in diplomacy, and these creatures will attack, and the party simply can't afford to fight them all. Hopefully, this will serve as training for their greatest challenge yet – meeting Demogorgon himself.

The Frayed Ends Of Sanity

Once the PCs finally manage to enter the portal, they plummet through the darkness. In less than a moment, their sight clears and they land in the middle of what looks like a primitive jungle village. The village rests in a clearing a couple hundred meters wide, and it comprises no more than two dozen huts, built from bamboo. The characters are at the village's center, and fifty or so people are

looking at them with expressions ranging from stupor to worry. The PCs are slightly stunned by the sudden increase in temperature and humidity; this place is like a tropical jungle.

There is something quite off in the place. The buildings and setting are very primitive – bamboo huts, chickens and pigs roaming the streets, the jungle getting thick quickly just beyond the village’s border. However, the people living here look like any other Sigilian citizen. They wear shirts, pants and dresses, despite the hot, humid climate which makes the PCs wish to get undressed, and they look comfortable in them. There is no reason for this discrepancy – many, many things in Demogorgon’s realm make no sense. Put simply, the insane fiend’s multiple personalities don’t often agree and they aren’t keen on finding an agreement on how to shape their realm.

Demogorgon, much like Graz’zt, is halfway between being an archfiend and a power. He can grant spells up to the third level (fourth if a greater tanar’ri serving him is near the cleric; fifth if he gets there in person). His domains are Chaos, Evil, Water and Madness. If you have the *Book of Vile Darkness*, he can grant power in exchange for sacrifices as detailed there. He can have petitioners, such as most of the people here in the village. There are about 70 petitioners and 20 planars. The petitioners only speak Abyssal, but the planars among them also speak the common tongue. The petitioners are Commoners, Experts and Warriors between the 1st and 5th level; the planars, on the other hand, are planewalking fanatic followers of Demogorgon and they are much more dangerous. Most of them are Fighters, Barbarians and Rogues, between the 1st and 5th level, but there are a few spellcasters as well.

A few moments after the PCs have arrived, one villager gets out of the crowd and approaches them with a friendly smile. The man is called Samith and he is the village’s high priest and unofficial leader. He is about fifty years old, of average build, with dark hair turning slightly to white at the edges.

Samith		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Cleric 9 th (Abyss)	CR: 9
Str: 11 (+0)	HP: 9d8+63 (103)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 10	Armor: none		
Con: 24 (+7)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: -		
Int: 8 (-1)	Ref: +3 base	BAB: +6 Grapple: +6		
Wis: 15 (+2)	For: +11 (+6 base, +5 con)	Melee: +6 base		
Cha: 18 (+4)	Will: +8 (+6 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +6 base		
Attacks				Skills
+2 <i>spear</i> , +8/+3 melee, damage 1d8+2, crit x3				Bluff +13 (+6 ranks, +4 cha, +3 skill focus)
Feats and special abilities				Knowledge (religion) +11 (+12 ranks, -1 int)
Feats: Extend spell, Persistent spell (the spell lasts 24 hours; uses a slot three levels higher; only works on spells with a fixed range), Skill focus: Bluff, Widen spell, ?				
Evil Domain (evil spells cast at +1 CL); Water Domain (can turn fire creatures and rebuke water creatures), rebuke undead.				
Cleric spells/day: 6/5+1/5+1/3+1/2+1/1+1				
Cleric spells prepared: 0 th – <i>create water, detect magic, detect magic, light, purify food and drinks, resistance, virtue</i> ; 1 st – <i>cure light wounds, cure light wounds, detect good, obscuring mist, obscuring mist, shield of faith</i> ; 2 nd – <i>align weapon, bear’s endurance, cure moderate wounds, cure moderate wounds, fog cloud, silence</i> ; 3 rd – <i>create food and water, invisibility purge, magic circle against good, magic vestment</i> ; 4 th – widened obscuring mist, persistent sanctuary, persistent entropic shield ; 5 th – widened fog cloud, persistent bear’s endurance				
Equipment				
Common clothes and a priest’s vestment.				
+2 <i>spear</i> (damage 1d8+2, crit x3) (CL 6, moderate evocation)				
120 gold coins.				
<i>Scroll of restoration</i> (CL 7, moderate conjuration)				
<i>Scroll of righteous might</i> (CL 9, moderate transmutation)				

At any given time, Samith has already cast his persistent spells and therefore is under the influence of *sanctuary*, *entropic shield* and *bear’s endurance*. The latter spell’s effects are already counted in the table.

Samith is the village leader, though he and everyone else will always refer to him as the “high priest”. Everyone in the village loves him, but that’s just because everyone in the village is less or more insane. Samith pretends to have much greater powers than he actually wields, and in this way he increases the locals’ faith in Demogorgon as a deity. The weird part is that the petitioners are so deeply convinced of the truth of his power that some of the effects of his “high level spells” will actually take place! Here are some examples:

- Samith casts *create food and water*, and declares that it is a *heroes’ feast*. The petitioners that partake of the food get all the morale bonuses from a *heroes’ feast* spell as well as a +2 morale bonus to Fortitude saves against disease and poison for 12 hours.
- Samith casts *fog cloud*, and declares that it is an *acid fog*. The petitioners won’t enter the cloud unless forced to, and while they are there, they will scream as if their skin was being burned away, and take nonlethal damage until they fall unconscious.
- Samith casts *prayer*, and declares that it is a **widened** *prayer*. All the petitioners within 24 meters get the bonuses – though those beyond 12 meters will get morale bonuses instead of luck bonuses.

Other similar effects are possible. Generally speaking, the petitioners can take morale bonuses up to +2 as if they were affected by high level clerical spells, or nonlethal damage instead of lethal damage. These effects are purely psychological, caused by the petitioners’ insanity, and cannot be dispelled.

Samith and all the villagers will act very kind and helpful towards the PCs at first, even though there will always be something disturbing in their kindness. He will seem to assume that the PCs are followers of Demogorgon on a pilgrimage, and offer help for their travel. He will insist that they stay until the following day and leave in the morning, explaining that the jungle is very dangerous during the night; the PCs have arrived in this layer’s early evening and it will be dark in a few hours. Samith will state that a religious ceremony is planned for the evening and there will be a feast and some music, and that the PCs are definitely welcome to participate. He casually remarks that he would be very sad if they didn’t.

What if...?

As the evening progresses, the villagers’ actions are going to slowly slip from merely disturbing to some of the vilest practices that the party has ever witnessed, even in the Abyss.

Unless the party is mostly composed of Evil characters, their consciences will simply force them to act at some point of the celebration. No Good character could watch all of it without acting, no matter how dangerous the interruption would be.

The evening will be described assuming that the PCs do nothing. As soon as the party acts, the feast will stop as Samith confronts them. At that point, skip to the end of the section.

Samith points a couple of huts where the heroes may rest – the party will notice that the huts are already occupied by several young people (of the opposite sex compared to the party’s majority), but Samith simply smiles and says “hospitality is a tradition here!”. These people are obviously willing to have sex with the PCs if they just ask – and if this doesn’t happen before the “religious ceremony” and the PCs are still here after that, they will become a lot more direct during the night, stopping just short of rape. But the truth is that they are complete perverts – if any PC falls for this, the DM should pull no punches as the petitioners try to drag the characters into the vilest practices.

If the PCs ask about the religious ceremony, Samith minimizes and denies that any “evil” will take place. If they ask about the food, the high priest will say that he’ll cast *heroes’ feast*, and that the party shouldn’t trust the jungle’s food unless they are trained in recognizing the poisonous from the edible in Demozg. If they ask about the jungle’s other dangers, again Samith will minimize and say something about demons, and reassure the party that the monsters rarely enter the village.

The rest of the afternoon passes without incidents, unless the PCs try to dig behind the façade of somewhat weird kindness. Like the lustful petitioners the PCs have been sent to sleep with, everything and everyone in the village has several hidden or not-so-hidden habits that range from the disturbing to the outright evil.

In the evening, several large wooden tables are pulled out of the huts and laid in the middle of the village. Most of the tables are made from badly shapen jungle wood, irregular and quaking, except for one. The last table to be placed is a smooth, round table which wouldn't look out of place in the house of some Sigilian high-up. Several petitioners dress it with a cloth, knives and forks, and plates. Samith walks to this table and casts *create food and water*, producing enough simple food for himself, the party, and the planar villagers. One of the village's arcane spellcasters, meanwhile, casts *prestidigitation* to enhance the flavor of the bland food created by Samith's spell. The other tables are left bare; the petitioners bring fruit; vegetables and drinks with them and start eating with their bare hands, noisily and messily.

Samith does small talk with the PCs for about a half hour, while the rest of the planar cultists around the table stay silent and look at the PCs with expressions of hatred. Then, suddenly, he stands up and claps his hands. Eight petitioners jump from their chairs and benches and run towards one of the largest huts. They slowly come out, pushing and dragging a stone slab. Over the slab, a young girl is manacled to the rock. She isn't doing anything, besides staring at the sky.

"We'll take care of her as soon as dinner's over!", says Samith, cheerfully sharpening a couple of knives. If the PCs ask about what's going to happen to the girl, Samith replies that he's going to "send her to Demogorgon". If they ask more details, he makes it clear that he will kill the girl in some horrible fashion.

If the PCs object or make any comment about sacrifice, this is what Samith has to say: "I think that you have a biased view of the word 'sacrifice'. What my Lord requires isn't really a sacrifice. When you make a sacrifice, you destroy something which is dear or useful to you, or something the destruction of which pains you greatly, or something valuable - in exchange for a favor from your god. Some religions involve monetary sacrifice, or food sacrifice, or even human sacrifice. The idea is that you do something painful to prove your faith".

"What I'm going to do in an hour or so, on the other hand, isn't a sacrifice. Demogorgon wouldn't ask me to do something I don't like to do. So, knifing her guts out as I rape her will actually be a source of great entertainment for me and everyone else. Plus, we're going to eat her afterwards - I admit that my created food lacks a bit of flavor. As you can see, it's more a festivity than a sacrifice!"

The feast then resumes. Depending on the PCs' personalities and alignments, they may be willing to tolerate this - or not. If they approach the girl (*Hetre/female human commoner 2nd/chaotic evil/Abys*), she turns her head to look at them and greets them cordially. Her name is Hetre, she's a planar born in this village, and she's looking forward to being "sent to Demogorgon". With no seasons, the folks here don't keep track of years, but if they did Hetre would be around 15 years old, and she's been brought up a fanatic worshipper of Demogorgon for all of them. If the characters make any attempt to free her, she will rebel against them as vehemently as the rest of the villagers.

As the sun sets and the dinner progresses, the villagers' chaos and evil becomes more and more explicit. At one point, an argument breaks out between two petitioners, and one of the two ends up with a knife in his belly. Seeing this, Samith excuses himself, saying that it looks like his healing powers are needed. By the time he reaches the scene, two other petitioners are crouching around the victim - but instead of helping him, they are slowly torturing him, pulling out the intestines out of his screaming, twisting body. Samith shakes his head and says: "You have been weak, Androt. A real pity. Here, let me help you". He casts a *cure light wounds* - so that the torture can go on a bit longer, and then gets back to the main table with his hands dripping blood and resumes chatting and eating. Androt screams in agony, and Samith says "Well, we've finally got a bit of music. I would hate not delivering on my promises".

When the petitioner finally dies, the rest of the villagers tear his body apart, and start throwing the pieces around in a stupefying orgy of blood, shouting and laughing. Samith's table stays miraculously clean; the high priest and the planars continue their quiet dinner. When it's over, Samith claps his hands again, and all noise stops. The cleric leaves the table, goes into the closest hut, and

comes out dressed in a black priestly robe. He picks up two knives from the table, and slowly walks towards the stone slab. There, he leaves his spear on the ground and cuts away Hetre's clothes, leaving her naked as every other villager leaves the tables to watch the murder.

Then, without much ceremony, Samith sticks the knives deep into the girl's stomach and lung, with enough expertise to leave her alive. Hetre gives a single loud shout, crying and spitting blood for a moment, before fainting. Samith casts another *cure light wounds* – the cuts seal around the knives, and Hetre wakes up with a look of intense pain. Having done that, the priest moves right in front of her and drops his robe to the ground – but before anything more can happen, something interrupts the ceremony.

A huge, massive bar'lgura tanar'ri enters the clearing, carrying the broken body of a petitioner still clutching his primitive spear. "Samith!", the monster booms with a bestial voice. "I thought we had an agreement. You shouldn't have started without me!"

Kotongos	Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 11
Str: 26 (+8) Dex: 11 (+0) Con: 20 (+5) Int: 10 (+0) Wis: 12 (+1) Cha: 10 (+0)	HP: 13d8+65 (123) AC: 20 (-1 size, +11 natural) Initiative: +0 Ref: +8 base For: +12 (+8 base, +5 con) Will: +9 (+8 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 9, climb 9 Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +13 Melee: +20 (+13 base, +8 strength, -1 size) Ranged: +12 (+13 base, -1 size)	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +25
Attacks 2 claws, +21 melee, damage 1d6+8, and Bite +13 melee, damage 1d8+4		Skills Climb +19 (+16 ranks, +3 str) Concentration +18 (+16 ranks, +2 con) Hide +29 (+16 ranks, +12 racial, +1 dex) Move Silently +17 (+16 ranks, +1 dex) Listen +27 (+16 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis, +2 alertness) Search +16 ranks Sense motive +17 (+16 ranks, +1 wis) Spot +27 (+16 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis, +2 alertness) Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*)	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Mobility, Power attack, Spring attack, Weapon focus: claw. All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 17, telepathy within 30 mt. Spring attack is a bonus feat. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness, desecrate, detect good, detect thoughts, dispel magic, entangle, fear, see invisibility, telekinesis, greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); 2/day – <i>change self, invisibility, spectral hand</i> . Caster level 8 th . Chameleon (ex): a bar'lgura can change its color to match its surroundings as a free action. This gives it a +12 racial bonus to Hide checks. Summon 1d6 babau 1/day with 35% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.		* when following tracks	

Kotongos is the pack leader of the bar'lgura in the jungle surrounding the village. Like all tanar'ri, he is a cruel beast; with his apelike fiends, he attacks without question anyone who passes through the jungle, and only leaves the village alone in return for being allowed to participate in the sacrifices (sorry, "festivities"). He and Samith hate each other, but both aren't too keen on a direct confrontation.

In this particular case, Kotongos wants to kill the girl himself, right now. Which, obviously, would ruin Samith's plans and erode his sway over the villagers. Samith pulls up his robe, and as the two argue, this is the best moment for the PCs to act. The village's planars have gathered behind Samith, and a dozen bar'lgura have come out of the woods to stand behind Kotongos. If the PCs are skilled diplomats and psychologists, they could manage to start a fight, for example by making Kotongos believe that they have been hired by Samith to kill the fiend. Or, they could just create some general chaos and get away – as long as they don't aggravate both the villagers and the fiends at the same time, they have good chances. Sneaking away is a more difficult option, because the bar'lgura have very keen eyes and chances are they would spot the heroes.

If, on the other hand, the party does nothing, Samith grudgingly yields to the fiend. The ape demon grabs the knives and twists them; Hetre screams for long minutes before dying. Kotongos then leaves, flashing Samith an evil grin. The high priest is red with rage – when the fiend is gone, he regains his composure and shouts: "Resume the party! Hetre is thankful for having been sent to De-

mogorgon by one of his own demons. Oh, don't worry, the ceremony will proceed as planned, and we'll have the meat!" He reaches the girl's corpse and does what he was to do before the bar'lgura arrived. Then, he cuts her flesh up and distributes it to everyone. The cultist villagers cheer, but it is clear that the feast has been spoiled somehow.

Now what? Samith's real desire would be to keep the PCs in the village, using offerings of carnal pleasure and promises of unholy power. He'll send the most beautiful petitioners, describe the power that can be obtained from Demogorgon, and find excuses to keep them with him. When they are solidly his allies, he'd like to send them against Kotongos and get rid of the ape fiend for good. Obviously, though, the heroes aren't going to fall for this, even if they sat through the feast.

Whether it is as soon as they arrive, or at any moment during the feast, or after, the party is going to want to leave the village at all costs. If they can get out while noone is looking – during the night, for example – this won't be difficult. Samith will place a few guards, but nothing that can seriously oppose the PCs. They can be in the jungle before the village can wake up, and the cultists won't follow them there. However, this means sitting through the dinner and ritual, and many PCs won't tolerate this.

Leaving during the ceremony will result in a commotion, whether the PCs want it or not. Samith will order them captured or killed, and as soon as violence breaks out, the petitioners will start fleeing everywhere while Samith and the planars fight. As the fight continues, the petitioners will progressively come in aid of the planar fanatics; unless the PCs flee, they will be forced to slaughter over half of the villagers (including Samith and most of the planars) before the rest are scared enough to leave them alone.

Once the party leaves, they have to face Demozg's terrible jungle.

The Jungle

The jungle in Demozg is as bad for traveling as any Prime Material jungle – plus, it extends infinitely and is chock full of monsters.

The humid heat forces all characters who travel during the day to make a Fortitude save each hour, DC 15 plus 1 for each consecutive save, unless they use magic, frequent stops, or abundant water to cool themselves. Characters with heavy clothing or armor take a –4 penalty to this check. Characters that fail the save start taking 1d4 nonlethal damage per hour, and become fatigued. Due to the layer's magical conditions, natives are unaffected by the heat. Sometimes it rains – this is actually a good thing, as the water negates all heat penalties.

There is no track between the village and the Temple of Insanity, and the thick jungle makes all overland movement one-quarter normal; unless the party can fly, the "some days" between the two locations are going to become one full month. Tactical movement is normal in clear squares, but most squares are covered with light or dense undergrowth. Light undergrowth halves movement, provides 20% concealment, and raises the DC of Tumble and Move Silently checks by 2. Dense undergrowth reduces movement to one quarter, prevents running or charging, provides 30% concealment, raises the DC of Tumble and Move Silently checks by 5, and gives a +5 circumstance Hide bonus. Trees provide a +2 cover bonus to AC and a +1 cover bonus to Reflex saves to any character standing in the same square as one. Larger trees may occupy an entire square.

The vegetation blocks line of sight beyond 2d6x3 meters in any given place. Listen checks take a –2 penalty for every 3 meters of distance, instead of the usual –1. Travelers must make a Survival check every hour or become lost; the absence of sun or stars give a –2 penalty to anyone attempting this check.

All these problems pale when compared to the jungle's denizens. The most common tanar'ri here by far is the bar'lgura. The ape fiends move in pack, approach stealthily, and attack by surprise. They are extremely aggressive and will attack unprovoked if they think they can win. Close to the

village, a large pack of bar'lgura is ruled by Kotengos. If the party meets him, there will be no parley. Kotengos will attack, together with a sizeable force of ape fiends.

The bar'lgura are most dangerous when they know you're coming. In these cases, they will set up an ambush, taking advantage of their superior ability to hide. The bar'lgura on Demozg have also developed another nasty trick. They pick up some of the most poisonous plants from the jungle, grind them into a paste, and dip their claws in it before the battle. Being immune to poison, they aren't in danger from doing that, and they make their attacks very dangerous to their foes.

Bar'lgura		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 7
Str: 17 (+3)	HP: 6d8+12 (39)	Speed: 9, climb 9		
Dex: 13 (+1)	AC: 20 (+1 dex, +9 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 15 (+2)	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: -		
Int: 10 (+0)	Ref: +6 (+5 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +6 Grapple: +9		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +7 (+5 base, +2 con)	Melee: +9 (+6 base, +3 strength)		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: +6 (+5 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +7 (+6 base, +1 dexterity)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, +9 melee, damage 1d4+3 and poison, and		Climb +12 (+9 ranks, +3 str)		
Bite +4 melee, damage 1d6+1		Concentration +11 (+9 ranks, +2 con)		
Feats and special abilities		Hide +22 (+9 ranks, +12 racial, +1 dex)		
Feats: Alertness, Dodge, Mobility, Spring attack.		Move Silently +10 (+9 ranks, +1 dex)		
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.		Listen +20 (+9 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis, +2 alertness)		
Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 17, telepathy within 30 mt. Spring attack is a bonus feat.		Search +9 ranks		
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>desecrate</i> , <i>detect good</i> , <i>detect thoughts</i> , <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>entangle</i> , <i>fear</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>telekinesis</i> , <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects only); 2/day – <i>change self</i> , <i>invisibility</i> , <i>spectral hand</i> . Caster level 8 th .		Sense motive +10 (+9 ranks, +1 wis)		
Chameleon (ex): a bar'lgura can change its color to match its surroundings as a free action. This gives it a +12 racial bonus to Hide checks.		Spot +20 (+9 ranks, +8 racial, +1 wis, +2 alertness)		
Summon 1d6 babau 1/day with 35% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.		Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*)		
Their claws are dipped in malys root paste (DC 16, damage 1 Dex initial and 2d4 Dex secondary)		* when following tracks		

The plant life isn't too friendly either. An especially large and dangerous type of assassin vine is common in Demozg. In some of the most dangerous areas of the layer, they grow in groves hundred of meters wide; the natives know these places and avoid them, preferring to travel around them.

Fiendish Assassin Vine		Al. Chaotic Evil	Huge Plant (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: 28 (+9)	HP: 8d8+40 (76)	Speed: 1.5		
Dex: 8 (-1)	AC: 16 (-2 size, -1 dex, +9 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 20 (+5)	Initiative: -1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: -		
Int: -	Ref: +1 (+2 base, -1 dex)	BAB: +6 Grapple: +23		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +11 (+6 base, +5 con)	Melee: +13 (+6 base, +9 strength, -2 size)		
Cha: 9 (-1)	Will: +3 (+2 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +3 (+6 base, -1 dexterity, -2 size)		
Attacks		Slam +13 melee reach 9 mt, damage 1d8+13		
Feats and special abilities		Constrict 1d8+13, improved grab, blindsight 9 mt, darkvision 12 mt, immune to electricity, low-light vision, plant traits, resist cold and fire 10, SR 13, DR 5/magic.		
Entangle (su): can animate plants within 9 meters, as a free action. This effect is similar to <i>entangle</i> (DC 15).		Camouflage (ex): it takes a DC 20 Spot, Survival or Knowledge (nature) check to notice an assassin vine before it attacks.		
Smite good (su): 1/day, +8 damage to a Good creature.				

Demozg's assassin vine can grow to even greater size and power. Even the fiends avoid these creatures.

Fiendish Assassin Vine		Al. Chaotic Evil	Huge Plant (Abyss)	CR: 8
Str: 30 (+10)	HP: 16d8+80 (152)	Speed: 1.5	Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: -	
Dex: 8 (-1)	AC: 16 (-2 size, -1 dex, +9 natural)			
Con: 20 (+5)	Initiative: -1 dex			
Int: -	Ref: +4 (+5 base, -1 dex)	BAB: +12		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +15 (+10 base, +5 con)	Melee: +20 (+12 base, +10 strength, -2 size)	Grapple: +30	
Cha: 9 (-1)	Will: +6 (+5 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +9 (+12 base, -1 dexterity, -2 size)		
<u>Attacks</u>				
Slam +20 melee reach 9 mt, damage 1d8+15				
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>				
Constrict 1d8+15, improved grab, blindsight 9 mt, darkvision 12 mt, immune to electricity, low-light vision, plant traits, resist cold and fire 10, SR 21, DR 10/magic.				
Entangle (su): can animate plants within 9 meters, as a free action. This effect is similar to <i>entangle</i> (DC 19).				
Camouflage (ex): it takes a DC 20 Spot, Survival or Knowledge (nature) check to notice an assassin vine before it attacks.				
Smite good (su): 1/day, +16 damage to a Good creature.				

During the night, these dangers aren't any less present – and, in addition, varrangoins come out to prey.

Lesser Varrangoin		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Magical Beast (Abyss)	CR: 6
Str: 10 (+0)	HP: 5d10+10 (37)	Speed: 3, fly 18 (average)		
Dex: 24 (+7)	AC: 22 (+7 dex, +5 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 14 (+2)	Initiative: +7 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: -		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +11 (+4 base, +7 dex)	BAB: +5 Grapple: +5		
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +6 (+4 base, +2 con)	Melee: +5 base		
Cha: 10 (+0)	Will: +3 (+1 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +12 (+5 base, +7 dexterity)		
Attacks				Skills
2 claws, +12 melee, damage 1d4, and				Hide +11 (+4 ranks, +7 dex)
Bite, +7 melee, damage 1d6				Listen +10 (+4 ranks, +2 wis, +4 racial)
Feats and special abilities				Move Silently +11 (+4 ranks, +7 dex)
Feats: Ability Focus (breath weapon), Weapon Finesse				Spot +10 (+4 ranks, +2 wis, +4 racial)
Blindsense 20 ft, darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, SR 12, DR 5/silver.				
Light vulnerability (Ex): 2 damage/round in bright light, treat as shaken.				
Breath weapon (Su): 3/day, 5d6 damage, Reflex DC 16 for half. Rykso varrangoins deal cold damage in a 12 mt cone. Riptyce varrangoins deal fire damage in a 9 mt by 3 mt cloud. Corteel varrangoins deal lightning damage in a 18 mt by 1.5 mt line. Caid varrangoins deal acid damage in a 1.5 mt radius blast with a range of 9 mt.				
Immunity (Ex): Each varrangoin is immune to its own breath weapon.				
Resistances (Ex): Rykso varrangoins have electricity resistance 10. Riptyce varrangoins have acid resistance 10. Corteel varrangoins have cold resistance 10. Caid varrangoins have fire resistance 10.				

Varrangoins are usually solitary, but they occasionally form a pack of up to ten around a particularly powerful specimen. These packs can prey even on fiends, and are very dangerous.

There are many more hostile creatures in the jungle as well. The party can meet all the typical animals of a Prime jungle, except that the ones here are all fiendish. In addition, Demozg features fiendish dinosaurs. The following is just an example; many varieties of dinosaurs exist in the jungle.

Fiendish triceratops		Al. Chaotic Evil	Huge Magical Beast (Augmented animal) (Abyss)	CR: 13
Str: 30 (+10)	HP: 22d8+188 (267)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 9 (-1)	AC: 18 (-2 size, -1 dex, +11 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 26 (+8)	Initiative: -1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 3 (-4)	Ref: +12 (+13 base, -1 dex)	BAB: +16 Grapple: +34		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +23 (+13 base, +8 con, +2 great fort)	Melee: +24 (+16 base, +10 str, -2 size)		
Cha: 7 (-2)	Will: +8 (+7 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +13 (+16 base, -1 dex, -2 size)		
Attacks				Skills
Gore, +24 melee reach 3m, damage 3d8+15				Listen +16 (+13 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)
Feats and special abilities				Spot +15 (+12 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness)
Feats: Alertness, Great fortitude, Improved natural attack (gore), Power attack, Toughness (x4)				
Powerful charge (ex): on a charge, it deals 6d8+20 damage.				
Resist cold and fire 10, DR 10/magic, darkvision 18 mt, SR 27, trample (DC 31, damage 3d8+15)				
Smite good 1/day (deals 22 extra damage on a good creature)				

When the PCs have put some days between themselves and the village, insane cultists will be added to the list of dangers. These petitioners wear primitive clothes of skin or woven leaves and they are a lot less “civilized” than the villagers – they only wish to capture or the PCs to sacrifice them, and when they realize that the party is too tough to apprehend, they’ll content themselves with killing them. The petitioners are mostly warriors between the first and fifth level, with a few adepts giving some magical support. Most of them are armed with crude battleaxes made from sharpened stone or lances. Their favorite tactic is to set several crude pit traps, wait for the PCs to fall into them while staying hidden far enough for the foliage to cover them, and attack by surprise.

If the party stumbles into a pit trap, the first two PCs have to make a Reflex save (DC 20) or fall into it. The trap is 6 meters deep (2d6 damage), and each PC can be hurt by 1d4 spikes which attack at +10 dealing 1d4+2 damage (remember that the characters are flat-footed). Right after this, a band of up to a dozen petitioners will attack.

Demogorgon Petitioner Warrior		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Warrior 1 st	CR: ½
Str: 12 (+1)	HP: 1d8 (4)	Speed: 6		
Dex: 13 (+1)	AC: 16 (+3 armor, +2 shield, +1 dex)	Armor: medium		
Con: 11 (+0)	Initiative: +5 (+4 improved init, +1 dex)	% fail.: 35% Check pen.: -5		
Int: 9 (-1)	Ref: +1 (+0 base, +1 dex)	BAB: +1 Grapple: +2		
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +2 base	Melee: +2 (+1 base, +1 strength)		
Cha: 8 (-1)	Will: +0	Ranged: +2 (+1 base, +1 dexterity)		
Attacks				Skills
Battleaxe, +3 melee, damage 1d8+1, crit 20/x3, or				Hide -2 (+2 ranks, +1 dex, -5 armor)
Dart, +2 range 6m, damage 1d4+1 and poison, crit 20/x2				Survival +2 ranks
Feats and special abilities				
Feats: Improved initiative, Weapon focus: battleaxe				
Equipment				
Crude battleaxe (damage 1d8, crit 20/x3)				
10 darts (range 6m, damage 1d4) poisoned with small centipede poison (DC 11, damage 1d2 dex initial and secondary)				
Hide armor (AC +3, max dex +4, check penalty -3, spell failure 20%)				
Large wooden shield (AC +2, check penalty -2, spell failure 15%)				

Demogorgon Petitioner Warrior		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Warrior 3 rd	CR: 1
Str: 12 (+1) Dex: 13 (+1) Con: 11 (+0) Int: 9 (-1) Wis: 10 (+0) Cha: 8 (-1)	HP: 3d8+3 (11) AC: 14 (+3 armor, +1 dex) Initiative: +5 (+4 improved init, +1 dex) Ref: +2 (+1 base, +1 dex) For: +3 base Will: +1 base	Speed: 6 Armor: medium % fail.: 20% BAB: +3 Melee: +4 (+3 base, +1 strength) Ranged: +4 (+3 base, +1 dexterity)	Check pen.: -3 Grapple: +4	
Attacks Lance, +5 melee reach 3m, damage 1d8+1, crit 20/x3, or Dart, +4 range 6m, damage 1d4+1 and poison, crit 20/x2			Skills Hide +4 (+3 ranks, +1 dex) Survival +3 ranks	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Improved initiative, Weapon focus: lance, Toughness				
Equipment Crude lance (damage 1d8, reach 3m, crit 20/x3) 10 darts (range 6m, damage 1d4) poisoned with small centipede poison (DC 11, damage 1d2 dex initial and secondary) Hide armor (AC +3, max dex +4, check penalty -3, spell failure 20%)				

Demogorgon Petitioner Warrior		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Warrior 5 th	CR: 2
Str: 12 (+1) Dex: 13 (+1) Con: 12 (+1) Int: 9 (-1) Wis: 10 (+0) Cha: 8 (-1)	HP: 5d8+8 (30) AC: 16 (+3 armor, +2 shield, +1 dex) Initiative: +5 (+4 improved init, +1 dex) Ref: +2 (+1 base, +1 dex) For: +5 (+4 base, +1 con) Will: +1 base	Speed: 6 Armor: medium % fail.: 35% BAB: +5 Melee: +6 (+5 base, +1 strength) Ranged: +6 (+5 base, +1 dexterity)	Check pen.: -5 Grapple: +6	
Attacks Trident, +7 melee, damage 1d8+1, crit 20/x2, or Trident, +7 range 3m, damage 1d8+1, crit 20/x2, or Dart, +6 range 6m, damage 1d4+1 and poison, crit 20/x2			Skills Hide +0 (+4 ranks, +1 dex, -5 armor) Survival +4 ranks	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Improved initiative, Weapon focus: trident, Toughness				
Equipment Crude trident (damage 1d8, range inc 3m, crit 20/x2) 10 darts (range 6m, damage 1d4) poisoned with small centipede poison (DC 11, damage 1d2 dex initial and secondary) Hide armor (AC +3, max dex +4, check penalty -3, spell failure 20%) Large wooden shield (AC +2, check penalty -2, spell failure 15%)				

Demogorgon Petitioner Adept		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Warrior 5 th /Adept 5 th	CR: 5
Str: 10 (+0) Dex: 11 (+0) Con: 12 (+1) Int: 9 (-1) Wis: 13 (+1) Cha: 8 (-1)	HP: 5d8+5d6+10 (50) AC: 12 (+2 armor) Initiative: +4 improved init Ref: +2 base For: +6 (+5 base, +1 con) Will: +6 (+5 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 9 Armor: light % fail.: 10% BAB: +7 Melee: +7 base Ranged: +7 base	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +7	
Attacks Lance, +8 melee reach 3m, damage 1d8, crit 20/x3			Skills Appraise +2 (+3 familiar, -1 int) Concentration +6 (+5 ranks, +1 con) Hide +4 ranks Move Silently +5 ranks Survival +5 (+4 ranks, +1 wis)	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Eschew materials, Improved initiative, Toughness, Thrall to Demon (1/day +1 luck modifier to any one roll), Weapon focus: lance Adept spells/day: 3/3/1 Adept spells prepared: 0 th – <i>cure minor wounds, create water, purify food and drinks</i> ; 1 st – <i>endure elements, obscuring mist, protection from good</i> ; 2 nd – <i>web</i>				
Equipment Crude lance (damage 1d8, reach 3m, crit 20/x3) Leather armor (AC +2, max dex +6, check penalty 0, spell failure 10%)				

Typically, an adept will cast *web* on the PCs into the pit trap, to slow them down as they try to climb out. If things go badly, he'll use *obscuring mist* to cover the petitioners' retreat. If the PCs can capture one of the petitioners, they may be able to force him to guide them through the jungle.

This is risky, as the petitioner will certainly try to lead them into some sort of trap – but then again, these men aren't good bluffers at all and if the party can avoid this trick they can eventually get them to lead them to the Temple of Insanity. All the petitioners know where the Temple is and often perform sacrifices there; if the party is lead by one of them, their travel time is only half normal instead of one quarter as the petitioner uses hidden trails, and they won't get lost.

If the party is going to spend most of the travel flying (for example, by using a *wind walk* spell), they can reach the Temple much faster but they still aren't safe. Varrangoins fly, but the greatest danger are the bar'lgura. They can *dispel magic*, and they have good Spot checks (and *see invisibility* too). They may wait for the party to fly over a large assassine vine grove, and then fling multiple *dispel magic* spells at them until their flight magic fails. *Wind walk* can camouflage the characters as clouds, but when it isn't raining the sky over Demozg is clear and solitary clouds will draw attention.

Finally, the PCs can't effectively forage in the jungle without magic. The majority of the food that can be found here is poisonous and eating it leads to insanity. All the fruits and vegetables and most of the meat of native creatures is an ingestion poison. The DC is 19; the damage is 1d4 initial and secondary, on either Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma depending on the specific stuff eaten. A *purify food and drinks* spell will be enough to get rid of the poison.

The Temple Of Insanity

From above the treetops, the Temple of Insanity rises high enough that it can be seen from a distance of thirty kilometers. If an observer climbs a tree and looks in its direction, he could believe he is seeing Demogorgon himself, coming to get him, before realizing that he is looking at an immense statue, far away. No matter the point from where one is looking, the statue always seems to be facing him.

The temple does not rise from a clearing in the jungle. It sits in the middle of the trees, which grow right up to it. Vines grow all over the stone building, which from the ground and with the trees hiding the top looks like a step pyramid. From about halfway up, though, the vines become dead and dried, and the pyramid becomes the torso of a huge statue of Demogorgon, complete with two heads and stone tentacles in place of arms. The tentacles are a hundred meters long, two meters thick, and seem to defy any consideration of structural resilience or support. The PCs can see two vrockes perched on the tentacles, peering at them but making no motion to attack. The pyramid base is about ninety meters on a side, while the whole building rises 150 meters up to Demogorgon's heads.

There are many entrances to the Temple of Insanity. Four are easily accessible, located at ground level into each side of the pyramid. They seem to lead into dark corridors leading deep into the temple. However, these are just decoys. Characters entering any of the entrances will simply come out the opposite side after walking for about a half kilometer in a featureless pitch dark corridor.

Another entrance, located where the pyramid turns into the statue, can be reached by climbing the great stairs of the pyramid. Two hundred steps lead to that entrance, and most of them are trapped. The party has to walk 70 meters to get to the entrance; every 1.5 meters, there is a 50% chance of a trap being on the step. The traps shoot arrows; they attack at +12, dealing 1d8 damage and poisoning the character with bloodroot (DC 12, initial damage 0, secondary damage 1d4 Con and 1d3 Wis). This is the entrance the petitioners actually use to get into and out of the temple – they all know which steps are trapped and with a little care they can walk the stairs without danger. The passage leads to the Main Entrance in the Temple.

Alternatively, the PCs may climb the great steps which form the pyramid; there are sixteen of them, each 3 meters tall, before reaching the entrance. While this way is free of traps, it will draw the vrockes' attention. The fiends have an agreement with Demogorgon's clergy, and they are not supposed to kill anyone who climbs the stairs. However, the way they see it, anyone trying an alternative route is fair game.

Vrock (2)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 9
Str: 23 (+6)	HP: 10d8+70 (115)	Speed: 9, fly 15	Armor: none % fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0	
Dex: 15 (+2)	AC: 22 (-1 size, +2 dex, +11 natural)	Initiative: +2 dex		
Con: 25 (+7)	Ref: +9 (+7 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +10	Grapple: +20	
Int: 14 (+2)	For: +14 (+7 base, +7 con)	Melee: +15 (+10 base, +6 strength, -1 size)	Ranged: +11 (+10 base, +2 dexterity, -1 size)	
Wis: 16 (+3)	Will: +10 (+7 base, +3 wis)			
Cha: 16 (+3)				
Attacks 2 claws, +15 melee reach 3mt, damage 2d6+6, and Bite +13 melee reach 3mt, damage 1d8+3, and 2 talons +13 melee reach 3mt, damage 1d6+3			Skills Concentration +20 (+13 ranks, +7 con) Diplomacy +5 (+3 cha, +2 synergy) Hide +11 (+13 ranks, +2 dex, -4 size) Intimidate +16 (+13 ranks, +3 cha) Knowledge (abyss) +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int) Listen +24 (+13 ranks, +8 racial, +3 wis) Move Silently +15 (+13 ranks, +2 dex) Search +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int) Sense motive +16 (+13 ranks, +3 wis) Spellcraft +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int) Spot +24 (+13 ranks, + racial, +3 wis) Survival +7 (+3 wis, +2 synergy*, +2 synergy**)	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Cleave, Combat reflexes, Multiattack, Power attack All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 18, telepathy within 30 mt. Dance of ruin (su): three or more vrocks can dance for three rounds, if they are not interrupted by stunning, paralyzing or killing one of them, a wave of energy deals 20d6 damage to every non-demon within 33 meters. Reflex half, DC 18. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>mirror image</i> , <i>telekinesis</i> (DC 18), <i>greater teleport</i> (self and 22.5 kg only); 1/day – <i>heroism</i> ; caster level 12 th . Spores (ex): 1/3 rounds, free action, they deal 1d8 damage to every adjacent creature and 1d4 damage/round for 10 rounds; <i>bless</i> , <i>neutralize poison</i> , <i>remove disease</i> or holy water kills them. Stunning screech (su): 1/hour, all non-demons within 10 meters must save on Fortitude, DC 22, or be stunned for 1 round. Summon 2d10 dretches or 1 vrock 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.			* when following tracks ** in the Abyss	

If they decide to attack, their first move will be to summon more vrocks. The fiends know that anyone getting this far must be a tough customer.

Finally, there are two more entrances: through the mouths of Demogorgon's statue. The characters need to fly to get there, or to climb the statue (DC 25). Either way, they'll have to deal with the vrocks. Once they reach the mouths, they can enjoy a stunning view of the jungle and then enter the Temple, to the High Stair.

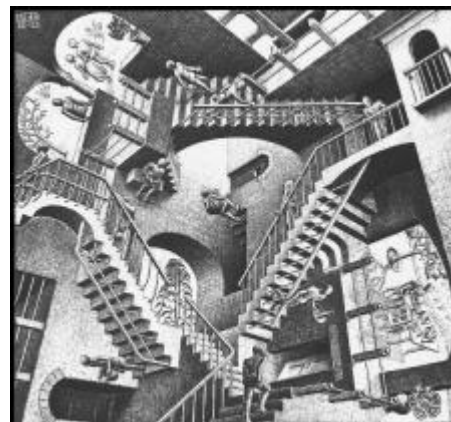
The inside of the Temple of Insanity has basically no relation to its exterior aspect. In fact, the interior is spatially distorted to the point where it cannot be mapped; we will describe each of the various areas of the Temple and explain their relations and how they are connected.

The Temple of Insanity has a few peculiar effects on magic and distance. Any teleportation spell which has its destination inside the Temple will take the target to a random point of the Great Hall. Any spell has a 25% chance of being **widened** as the feat. Further, distance is difficult to measure; anyone who wants to estimate a range beyond 18 meters will make an error of (1d10-1 x 10) percent. This applies to ranged attacks and ranged spells, but it doesn't affect character movement. For example, if a wizard wishes to cast a *fireball* at a target 36 meters away, he has to roll 1d10. If he rolls 4, he has made an error of 30%, or around 11 meters. The *fireball* will land at either 25 or 47 meters from the wizard (determine randomly). For another example, if an archer shoots at someone 42 meters away, he has to roll 1d10. If he rolls 1, he targets the right person; anything else will cause him to attack another square.

- **The Great Hall.** This immense room is the largest space inside the Temple. To tell the truth, it is difficult to compare areas within the Temple of Insanity, and "largest space" doesn't really make sense – but it definitely *feels* huge. The Great Hall looks like the inside of a massive sphere, which looks like 200 meters in diameter (though in reality it isn't a sphere and it hasn't got a diameter). From any given point in the sphere, gravity seems to point "downwards" and the characters seem to be in the lower half; there are stairs leading up towards the sphere's equator, and stairs leading

down towards the bottom. There are ledges and walkways running along the sphere's meridian lines; some of them are very narrow, while others are up to six meters wide.

Locally, this looks like a weird place, but not *too* weird. When the party looks beyond a few dozen meters, however, they'll quickly get a headache. Unlike what one would expect, the stairs do not become steeper as they climb upwards and then end into a wall at the sphere's equator. Rather, they turn overhead and join at impossible angles, much like an Escher drawing. Scattered around there are archways and passages; looking into them, the characters can see another Great Hall on the other side – in truth, that's the same Great Hall and PCs that pass through the doorway will end up in another point of the room.



Like said above, at any point of the sphere gravity seems to point downwards and the character feel like they are in the lower half of the room. But if they look around, they can see people walking overhead, their heads pointing downwards or at right angles, climbing stairs from which they should fall. Sometimes they enter an archway or passage, and vanish there, while someone else comes out from somewhere else. These people are cultist petitioners, and their wandering in the Temple of Insanity is a form of ritual worship of Demogorgon. The air in the whole Great Hall vibrates from the hum of chanting.

Most of them are hooded humanoids in monachal robes. These are petitioners that have been sent by Demogorgon directly into the Temple. They never get out of the Temple, eat or sleep; they wander, sometimes by themselves but more often in long, eternal processions, doing nothing but walk and chant hymns to Demogorgon. For all intents and purposes, these petitioners are mindless servants – but each procession is headed by one petitioner who is smarter and capable of reaction. These leaders invariably talk in religious riddles and short prayers to Demogorgon, giving very little actual help. As soon as the party makes a statement which sounds like an offense to Demogorgon or his servants, or if they use the wrong tone of voice or simply drag out the conversation for too long, the leader will order the procession to attack – the petitioners will obey and fight to the death, without stopping their chant.

Temple Petitioner Chanter		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Commoner 4 th	CR: 2
Str: 11 (+0)	HP: 4d4+11 (21)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 10	Armor: none		
Con: 14 (+2)	Initiative: +4 improved initiative	% fail.: 0%	Check pen.: -	
Int: 5 (-3)	Ref: +1 base	BAB: +2	Grapple: +2	
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +3 (+1 base, +2 con)	Melee: +2 base		
Cha: 5 (-3)	Will: +4 (+1 base, +1 wis, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +2 base		
<u>Attacks</u>			<u>Skills</u>	
Dagger, +3 melee, damage 1d4, crit 19-20/x2			Spot +8 (+7 ranks, +1 wis)	
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>				
Feats: Improved initiative, Iron will, Toughness				
Proficient in dagger.				
<u>Equipment</u>				
Ceremonial dagger (damage 1d4, crit 19-20/x2, masterwork).				
Monachal robe.				

A typical procession includes anything between four and forty chanters. In combat, they either attack with their ceremonial daggers, or they try to bull rush opponents and push them off the balconies and stairs.

Temple Petitioner Leader		Al. Chaotic Evil	Human Commoner 4 th /Adept 4 th	CR: 4
Str: 11 (+0)	HP: 4d4+4d6+19 (43)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 10	Armor: none		
Con: 14 (+2)	Initiative: +4 improved initiative	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: -		
Int: 7 (-2)	Ref: +2 base	BAB: +3 Grapple: +3		
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +4 (+2 base, +2 con)	Melee: +3 base		
Cha: 8 (-1)	Will: +8 (+4 base, +2 wis, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +3 base		
<u>Attacks</u>				<u>Skills</u>
Dagger, +5 melee, damage 1d4, crit 19-20/x2				Concentration +6 (+4 ranks, +2 wis)
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>				Knowledge (religion) +2 (+4 ranks, -2 int)
Feats: Improved initiative, Iron will, Toughness, Weapon focus: dagger				Spot +9 (+7 ranks, +2 wis)
Adept spells/day: 3/3/1				Listen +9 (+7 ranks, +2 wis)
Adept spells prepared: 0 th – <i>detect magic, ghost sound, touch of fatigue</i> ; 1 st – <i>protection from good, protection from law, obscuring mist</i> ; 2 nd – <i>invisibility</i> .				
<u>Equipment</u>				
Ceremonial dagger (damage 1d4, crit 19-20/x2, masterwork).				
Monachal robe, spell components.				

In case of a fight, the leader will cast *obscuring mist* and *invisibility*, but he won't flee. While the chanters get slaughtered, he'll cast the *protection* spells on himself and then try to cast *touch of fatigue* on a PC, so that he is easier to bull rush.

Any PC who falls will come to a stop after 2d6x3 meters, taking appropriate damage – but if the character falls further than 18 meters, he will tumble out of sight of his comrades, and find himself in another point of the Great Hall entirely. This is a problem, because getting to a particular point of the Great Hall is tricky. The sphere's surface is entirely covered by stairs and walkways, but these passages aren't all connected – unless the party decides to enter one of the archways and see where they come out, they'll have to jump from a stair to another at several points. If they fall, they risk taking damage and becoming even more separated.

Flying might seem a good idea. While this will definitely solve the problem of jumping, the PCs shouldn't try to directly fly across the sphere's center. If they try to do so, they will notice that their vision becomes foggy, as if they were entering a bank of mist – despite the fact that, from close to the ground, the air seemed clear. If they push on, they'll lose sight of everything else at a height of about 30 meters; at this point, when they come out it will be at a random point of the Great Hall.

Not all of the petitioners are the robed chanters. The party can occasionally see a few of the jungle petitioners around, in their skins and woven leaves clothing. They are going to or from a ceremony, held somewhere else in the temple. These petitioners can instinctively navigate the Temple of Insanity, and if the PCs follow one of them, they will be able to identify a passage leading into one of the Ceremonial Rooms. This is, in fact, the only way to get out of the Great Hall (save for teleporting out of the Temple entirely).

- **The Main Entrance.** If the party enters through the main door, they see a long corridor, built from limestone, plain except for some patches of lichens every now and then. After twenty or so meters, the party can spot some missing stones in the walls, ceiling and floor. Through these holes, they see only blackness which no light or darkvision can pierce. As the party proceeds, more and more stones are missing; at the same time, the corridor becomes wider and wider. At a certain point, there are in fact less than half the stones it'd take to cover the corridor, and the sparse slabs of rock which do exist seem to hang in the black void as if suspended by an invisible force. By this time, the party has already walked several hundred meters, many times the size of the temple, and the corridor is more than thirty meters wide.

If they proceed, they eventually have to jump from one stone to another, and the walls and ceiling get far enough to be out of sight. The stones keep getting more and more sparse, and the jumps more and more difficult, until there is one stone every ten meters, and then one every hundred. Unless the PCs can fly, they will eventually be unable to proceed.

Here's the dark. The corridor is infinite; the only way out is through the blackness. Basically, the party has to go anywhere except in the direction of the corridor; jumping down or flying anywhere will do. If they do so (or if they accidentally fall), they will plummet without harm in a random point of the Great Hall.

- **The High Stair.** This place can only be reached from the outside, by entering either of the mouths of Demogorgon's statue. The mouth opens on a corridor made from uniform gray stone, about twenty meters long (longer than what the mouths themselves look from the outside). The corridor ends in a stone door, with the shape of Demogorgon chiseled onto it.

The door opens on the side of a stairway, in a round cylindrical well about twenty meters wide. The characters can't see the ceiling or floor of the well. The stairs climb upwards and downwards from the point where the door is, running along the well's side. At the opposite side of the well, the party can see another identical door. If they look to their left, it seems that they have to climb the stairs to reach the door, which seems to be a few meters higher than they are. If they look to their right, it seems that they have to descend the stairs to reach the door, which seems to be a few meters lower.

The stairs are circular. They can be climbed up or down endlessly, and they won't lead anywhere. The only way out is to jump down into the well. The characters will plummet without harm in a random point of the Great Hall. Flying upwards is useless; the well is endless in that direction.

- **The Ceremonial Halls.** There are many Ceremonial Halls in the Temple of Insanity; no one knows exactly how many. They are normal rooms by most criteria, but they can only be reached from the Great Hall. The appearance of each Ceremonial Hall is somewhat different, but they all have a black basalt altar, stained with the blood of countless sacrifices, and several rows of benches, made from either stone or wood. Here are some examples of Ceremonial Halls:

- A hemispherical dome of gray stone, with a single entrance. The center is occupied by a black altar; around the altar, several lines of ebony benches occupy the room. Lit braziers hang from the ceiling at varying height, providing a faint illumination. Every step and noise rebound on the walls, echoing for several seconds.
- A long room with a tall ceiling, similar to a church or temple, lined by wide columns. The left and right parts of the room are full of stone benches, while the opposite side from the entrance features a basalt altar. Tall candles at irregular intervals provide light, and the smell of incense can be felt faintly.
- A semicircular amphitheater, with many rows of marble benches at varying heights looking towards a central altar. A single, huge chandelier, hanging over the altar, provides light to the closest rows of benches, while the outer ones are shrouded in darkness.

These halls are used by the jungle petitioners to perform ritual sacrifices to Demogorgon. Each ceremony lasts about one hour, during which the victim is slowly tortured to death while the cultists chant or shout louder and louder. These are the only constants; the details of the ritual are always different, but they are always insanely cruel and depraved. At the height of the ceremony, the Ceremonial Hall begins to shake as the cultists shout at the top of their lungs. The whole room quakes, pillars begin to fall, braziers are upturned, stone breaks, and the floor begins to crumble revealing an inky blackness below. The cultists run around the room, shouting and screaming and trying to avoid the falling stones, until they plummet into the dark and vanish; the priest stands before the door, preventing anyone from getting out. Only the altar seems to stay still, with the corpse still grisly lying on it. The quake proceeds until the entire room is completely destroyed and everyone has fallen into the blackness... which leads to the Main Entrance, not far from the exit. So, the only way out of the Temple short of teleportation is a human sacrifice. By this time the PCs should be able to *teleport* or *plane shift*, so this shouldn't be a problem even for Good characters (well, not more of a problem than it would be in other circumstances).

If someone manages to get through the officiant and out of the doors, it shouldn't come as a surprise that he won't come out in the Great Hall. Instead, he'll find himself in front of the Conduit.

- **The Conduit.** There are actually an unknown number of Conduits in the Temple of Insanity, but if there are more than one, they all look the same. They can be entered from one of the Ceremonial Halls after completing a ceremony there, but Demogorgon's priests won't let anyone in, at the cost of their lives.

The Conduit looks like a tunnel, about two meters wide, with a roughly circular section. More than a tunnel, though, it seems like a rubbery tube; it constantly twists and flails, like a thread in a strong wind. Or, more accurately, like an actual conduit in the Astral plane. The resemblance to astral conduits is striking to characters that have seen them, but this place is solidly in the Abyss. The Conduit is twisted and visibility is generally limited to less than ten meters.

The Conduit doesn't provide instant transportation; characters have to walk through it, making Balance checks (DC 15) every round or falling prone. Alternatively, they may crawl, proceeding slower but without risk of falling. Eventually, they'll have to crawl anyway: the conduit becomes progressively narrower over the course of several hundred meters, up to the point where the PCs find themselves virtually enveloped by it and find it difficult to move. Luckily, the rubbery material from which the conduit is made seems to be quite elastic; creatures of any size can squeeze through with some effort and a Strength check (DC 15; +3 for each size category beyond Medium; -3 for each size category below Medium). However, characters that fail this check take 2d6 subdual damage from crushing and suffocation. The PCs can aid another as usual, but if anyone faints, he'll have to be pushed or pulled, which increase the DC by 5 for the character moving him. Obviously, the characters have to proceed one by one and if one gets stuck, all those behind him can't proceed.

If a PC panics and tries to cut a way out of the Conduit, he has to deal at least 30 damage to the wall (which has hardness 5) before cutting a hole wide enough to pass through. He can only use a one-handed slashing or piercing weapon to do this. At that point, a sudden rush of air envelops him and drags him outwards; the character can make a Reflex save, DC 19, to avoid being sucked out immediately, in which case the hole will close within one round. If the character goes out, he finds himself outside in Demozg, one of the statue's tentacles, near the tip. Now, the character has been expelled violently; he may fall down. He needs to immediately make a Reflex save, DC 15. If he fails, he plummets. If he succeeds, he hangs on the top of the stone tentacle. Either way, he's in trouble. The tentacles are 120 meters high and falling means 20d6 damage. But even if he doesn't fall, he'll have to deal with the vrock there, and the hole he carved will close in the following round, preventing his friends from coming through to help unless they can get out in a single round (making their Strength checks). After that, they need to cut a new hole.

If the party manages, after 5 checks, to reach the end of the Conduit, they find that it comes out through a hole in a stone wall. Muffled screaming can be heard from the other side. From inside the Conduit, this wall seems to have the same rubbery consistence and allows creatures of any size to pass. But as soon as a character passes through, the Conduit closes and the wall assumes the consistence of stone; the Conduit cannot be opened from the chamber (though someone could open it from inside and let someone in). The PCs come out in the Audience Chamber.

- **The Audience Chamber.** Every one of Demogorgon's priests in Demozg has been through the Conduit and into this chamber, usually killing his predecessor in order to enter the doors from one of the Ceremonial Halls. The chamber is square, built like the inside of a pyramid, about 85 meters to a side and just as high. The air is full of screams of terrible pain, manic laughter, howls and wails, coming from the pyramid walls: forty rutterkins have been nailed there and their heads have been set on fire, providing illumination like lanterns. Their fire resistance prevents them from dying, but not from suffering. There are ten rutterkins for each wall, disposed in a triangle pattern: a row of four, a row of three further up, a row of two further up, and a single rutterkin nearest the pyramid's top. This pattern lights the walls in a clear (if gruesome) way, leaving the center of the room shrouded in darkness. The center is occupied by a square pool of water, sixty meters to a side and mostly pitch dark.

In this place, Demogorgon's petitioners on Demozg can meet their lord in person and become lesser priests (taking the Adept class). Demogorgon cannot make petitioners into proxies, as this power is reserved to true deities.

Flaming Rutterkin (40)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 10
Str: 16 (+3)	HP: 9d8+27 (81)	Speed: 6		
Dex: 18 (+4)	AC: 20 (+4 dex, +6 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 16 (+3)	Initiative: +4 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: -		
Int: 9 (-1)	Ref: +8 (+4 base, +4 dex)	BAB: +9 Grapple: +12		
Wis: 14 (+2)	For: +7 (+4 base, +3 con)	Melee: +12 (+9 base, +3 strength)		
Cha: 11 (+0)	Will: +6 (+4 base, +2 wis)	Ranged: +13 (+9 base, +4 dexterity)		
Attacks				Skills
Claws, +11/+11 melee, damage 1d6+3				Climb +15 (+12 ranks, +3 str)
Feats and special abilities				Intimidate +16 ranks
Feats: Two-weapon fighting, Weapon focus: claw				Jump +17 (+12 ranks, +3 str, +2 synergy)
Darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, SR 14, DR 5/cold iron or good, resistance to fire, cold and acid 10. Immune to electricity and poison, telepathy within 30 mt. All attacks are considered chaotic and evil.				Listen +14 (+12 ranks, +2 wis)
Spell-like abilities: at will - <i>darkness</i> , <i>cause fear</i> , <i>telekinesis</i> (DC 15); CL 6.				Move Silently +15 (+12 ranks, +3 dex)
Summon (Su): 1/day summon 1 rutterkin with a 35% chance of success or 1 chasme with a 10% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 3 rd level spell.				Spot +14 (+12 ranks, +2 wis)
Flames (su): these rutterkins are perpetually on fire, and they can use their <i>telekinesis</i> to fling flames at the enemy. They can launch two flames per round, each of which deals 3d6 damage on a successful ranged touch attack.				Tumble +17 (+12 ranks, +3 dex, +2 synergy)

The rutterkin may or may not attack the PCs – the DM should decide, depending on whether he wants more or less combat. If they do attack, they don't do it all at once. Rather, they struggle against the spikes holding them to the wall, until a few of those nearest the ground fall down harmlessly. Only some of them will manage to break free and attack the party; the others are out of the combat and, due to the intense pain from being spiked, they can't even concentrate to use their special powers and spell-like abilities.

When there are no more rutterkins attacking the party, the PCs hear a bubbling sound from the central pool. The water is boiling, and in just a few seconds it is violently moving within its basin, pouring jets of steam into the air. The roaring noise is almost enough to cover the rutterkin's screams. Any PC within 3 meters from the pool's edge will take 1d6 damage per minute, PCs touching the water will take 1d6 damage, and if anyone was inside the water when the phenomenon started, he will take 1d6 damage in the first round and 5d6 in the second (once the water is fully boiling, it deals 10d6 damage per round).

After several minutes of this, several flaming rutterkins fall from near the top of the pyramid into the water, but even then their flame is not extinguished. Rather, they scream even louder as they are both roasted and boiled – but now the party can see the center of the pool clearly.

Two fiendish heads are slowly rising from the water. Two tentacles are attached to the figure's shoulders, flailing in the air. The water seems to reach the archfiend's hips, but even half-submerged the creature's heads tower six meters above the party. One of them is staring at the PC with an unmoving, cold gaze. The other is facing upwards, and letting out a deafening roar of hatred towards all that exists. Demogorgon has come, expecting his faithful.

Demogorgon

Demogorgon is of Huge size, close to 10 meters tall. His skin is dark and scaly, dripping water and absorbing light. In place of arms, he has two tentacles, about seven meters long, giving him a reach of 6 meters. Two heads on unnaturally long necks stand on his torso, each head capable of thinking and acting independently.

This aspect may make the viewer think that Demogorgon is possessed by two conflicting personalities, each with its own goals and each trying to subvert the others. This is not true. Demogorgon has a whole array of split personalities, and while their goals tend to resolve to "killing all that oppose

us and conquer the Abyss”, their methods can vary wildly. They will never directly act against each other, though; that would pose Demogorgon himself in a situation of personal weakness. When they act, they act either in concert with the other facets, or in secret from them. This makes the archfiend slower and more thoughtful in reaction than many other tanar’ri, which may be the PCs’ only advantage. Demogorgon’s internal struggles are more subtle and political in nature than simply hitting himself. Demogorgon goes from one demeanour to the next in a matter of minutes, and talking with him is tricky at best. Roleplaying Demogorgon can be a serious challenge for the DM; not only he may change personality during the conversation, but he generally has two of them at the same time – one for each head, even talking over each other during passionate debates. Luckily, however, two of them are dominant and they are manifest for most of the time. The other tend to stay in the background, incessantly whispering into the archfiend’s mind, though they surface sometimes.

The first dominant personality is Demos, the Creator. Demos is the aspect of Demogorgon that concerns himself with the creation of magic and artifacts. If rumors are to be believed, Demos has the ability to slice parts of the Abyss, creating new layers, and he uses this power to create domains for the weaker personalities to rule, thus getting rid of them. But it is ultimately futile, as new minds keep appearing within Demogorgon. Demos is the most intelligent aspect of Demogorgon, as well as the most tractable; he commands many servants and wishes to have more, and isn’t prone to killing reporters of bad news. He views all other life as tools, nothing more, and he will manifest his wrath on a tool that doesn’t work, but not on one that is doing its job. He wants all possible information from the PCs, to better prepare for striking vengeance on Ithla-Sathlo, and he also wants the details of the curse, as he is obsessed with finding new arcane power. Demos tends to use long periods, rare words, and to keep calm more often than not. He also has a keen ear for lies, and the party shouldn’t try to peel him.

The second dominant personality is Gorgos, the Monster. Gorgos is a creature of hatred, who wishes to destroy everything it looks upon. If the PCs anger Gorgos, they are dead meat; their best strategy is to redirect his fury against another target until Demos assumes control again. Flattery may slow him down, as well as a constant reminder that Ithla-Sathlo is the one he wants to kill. Gorgos doesn’t speak much, and when he does he uses growls and short words. Gorgos is relatively bad at understanding the feelings and motives of others, and the party may be able to lie to him and get away with it... if Demos isn’t listening.

Then there are the minor personalities, who may surface when the party talks about something related to them. For example, suggesting to the archfiend that he goes to conquer Infestant may awaken the Conqueror and trigger a rant about planar domination before Demos or Gorgos suppress him.

The Ruler is a splinter aspect of Demos who wishes to have more minions and servants than anyone else, but who is also paranoid about his slaves plotting against him at all times. He may summon ixitachitls to feel safer, and then waste time looking at them suspiciously. He will try to persuade the party to worship him, only to start making absurd demands to prove their loyalty.

The Conqueror is a personality who wants to dominate the multiverse, but lacks the determination to act. He is prone to hold long discourses about how he will subjugate the Abyss and what he will do when all of creation will bow to him, but like the other minor personalities he doesn’t actually do much.

The Rager can hardly be called a personality at all; when he surfaces, Demogorgon will randomly destroy something or someone close by, either through his immense strength or powerful magic. The Rager doesn’t really have a motivation, being a purely destructive force. Unlike Gorgos, the Rager is even incapable of making plans to further his own will of destruction.

The Furies are a chorus of voices, always calling for vengeance on everything and everyone that has ever slighted Demogorgon. Chances are that the PCs will cause them to pop up at least once, and if they speak carefully they may become allies, at least for a while.

The Lusting One is a creature of base desires and urges, as well as corrupted instincts. He is the corruption of all the natural desires of living beings. The Lusting One revels in perverted sex, in gluttony, in the eating of things that sane beings find revolting, in sadism and masochism.

So what can the PCs do to persuade Demogorgon not to kill them? The party actually has the advantage. Demogorgon has no reason to be hostile to them, and all reasons to be hostile to Ithla-Sathlo. Unlike the heroes, the lord of Infestant is actually a direct threat to his power. Also, Demogorgon can see the PCs' motives clearly – they want Ithla-Sathlo dead so that they can go home – and this makes them somewhat more reliable.

If the party plays their cards well, Demogorgon may even turn out to know something that they don't. The archfiend has spies in many places, and one of them has recently reported informations from the city of Mal Arundak on the 403rd layer. Rothakon the half-fiend was recently seen in that place, and just a few days ago a squad of Mercykillers has arrived, pursuing him.

The PCs mostly need to avoid making mistakes. Assuming that they aren't stupid enough to insult or threaten the archfiend, there is a non-obvious pit in which they may fall. The PCs should not tell the archfiend the reason for which they can't dispel the curse themselves – that the counterspells would only hurt Ithla-Sathlo and possibly kill the PCs – because Demogorgon has interest in hurting Ithla-Sathlo, but no interest in keeping the PCs alive! He might throw a *greater dispel magic* or two just to check, teleport everyone to a prison, and then use them to hurt Ithla-Sathlo during the battle by casting dispels at them until they die.

Even if the party commits this blunder, all is not lost; there are a few things they can do or say to avoid being sacrificed as tools of war. The most evil but effective one would be to offer the Mercykillers to be used for that purpose in place of them. They are more numerous, and can be used to greater effect to damage Ithla-Sathlo. It would take some arguing to convince Demogorgon – to get the Mercykillers, he would need to let the PCs go. Obviously, if they do convince him, he will assign some powerful fiends as “escorts” to the party, and he would not think for a moment about honoring the pact. But this would get the PCs away from his presence, which is already a good result.

Or, they can just suddenly *teleport* or *plane shift* away. Archfiends aren't immune to a surprise round, after all. Normally, Demogorgon would have arranged to have the party in an antimagic field, or dimensionally anchored, but right now he was expecting just another enterprising petitioner to be made into a shaman. Of course, that surprise action is everything they're going to get; Demogorgon has plenty of spells of mass destruction ready at his fingertips (if he had fingers, that is) and his melee prowess isn't any lesser. In a direct confrontation, the PCs will die in two rounds at most.

Once Demogorgon knows of Ithla-Sathlo's plan, he will be enraged – hopefully, the party has wrapped the information so that he is not enraged at *them*. “We bring great news! A plot against your mighty realm has been discovered!” works better than “We bring dire news! Another abyssal lord is coming here with an army of empowered fiend-plants!”. In any case, the archfiend is now forced to act. First, even if the PCs tell him that Ithla-Sathlo doesn't seem to have the Orb he needs, Demogorgon cannot be certain of this, or that the lord of Infestant won't try something else. If the PCs let out that the information is known to other people besides them, Demogorgon will feel additional pressure – the other lords will soon know about the whole debacle, and he needs to crush the upstart immediately or they may believe him weak.

It would be wise for the PCs to teleport away as soon as they are certain that the archfiend has understood the situation and is convinced of the necessity of an attack. Courtesy has no place in a demon lord's abode. In any case, once Demogorgon is satisfied with the information he has received from the characters, he will declare that an attack will take place in a week's time. If the PCs are still around, or if they have in any other way proven a bit too interesting, he will take care of sending them back to the Plains of Infinite Portals – together with a servant who will keep an eye on them. If Demogorgon wants the PCs to capture the Mercykillers, this servant will make sure that they do and provide them with the information the archfiend has about the Sigilians' location in

Mal Arundak; otherwise, she will simply stay with them and make sure that they don't speak with the wrong people before the attack is over and Ithla-Sathlo is history. Demogorgon is very paranoid about the other archdemons.

Jamixena		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 17
Str: 33 (+11)	HP: 16d8+144 (216)	Speed: 12		Check pen.: -
Dex: 19 (+4)	AC: 29 (+4 dex, +16 natural, -1 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 29 (+9)	Initiative: +4 dex	% fail.: 0%		BAB: +16 Grapple: +31 Melee: +26 (+16 base, +11 strength, -1 size) Ranged: +19 (+16 base, +4 dexterity,-1 size)
Int: 18 (+4)	Ref: +14 (+10 base, +4 dex)			
Wis: 18 (+4)	For: +19 (+10 base, +9 con)			
Cha: 24 (+7)	Will: +14 (+10 base, +4 wis)			
Attacks			Skills	
Longswords +1, +28/+28/+28/+28/+28/+28/+23/+18/+13 melee, damage 2d6+12 (primary) or 2d6+6 (secondary), crit 19-20/x2, and Tail slap, +25 melee, damage 4d6+4			Bluff +26 (+19 ranks, +7 cha) Concentration +28 (+19 ranks, +9 con) Diplomacy +30 (+19 ranks, +7 cha, +4 synergy) Disguise +19 (+7 cha, +2 synergy*, +10 competence) Hide +19 (+19 ranks, +4 dex, -4 size) Intimidate +28 (+19 ranks, +7 cha, +2 synergy) Knowledge (the Abyss) +23 (+19 ranks, +4 int) Listen +31 (+19 ranks, +4 wis, +8 racial) Move silently +23 (+19 ranks, +4 dex) Search +23 (+19 ranks, +4 int) Sense motive +23 (+19 ranks, +4 wis) Spellcraft +25 (+19 ranks, +4 int, +2 synergy**) Spot +31 (+19 ranks, +4 wis, +8 racial) Survival +8 (+4 wis, +2 synergy***, +2 synergy****)	
Feats and special abilities				
Feats: Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Multiattack, Multiweapon Fighting, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword) A marilith can use Multiweapon Fighting to negate all penalties for attacking with multiple weapons. All attacks are considered chaotic and evil. Darkvision 60 ft, SR 25, DR 10/cold iron and good, resistance to fire, cold and acid 10. Immune to electricity and poison, telepathy within 30 mt. Improved grab (tail). Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>align weapon</i> , <i>blade barrier</i> (DC 23), <i>magic weapon</i> , <i>project image</i> (DC 23), <i>polymorph</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>telekinesis</i> (DC 22), <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22.5 kg of objects), <i>unholy aura</i> (DC 25); CL 16. Constrict (Ex): 4d6+16 damage with a grapple check ; the creature must make a Fortitude save (DC 29) or fall unconscious until released and for 2d4 rounds afterwards. Summon (Su): 1/day summon 4d10 dretches, 1d4 hezrou or one nalfeshnee with a 50% chance of success or 1 glabrezu or 1 marilith with a 20% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 5 th level spell. True seeing (Su): continuous as the spell.				
Equipment			* when acting ** with scrolls *** following tracks **** on the Abyss	
6 long swords +1 (damage 1d8+1, crit 19-20/x2) (faint evocation, CL 3) Belt of giant strength +4 (moderate transmutation, CL 10) Jewelry of the Betrayer (faint abjuration, CL 3) (Jamixena’s jewels prevent her alignment from being discovered through magical means and provide a +10 competence bonus to Disguise checks. However, they have to be worn together, occupying all of the wearer’s amulet, bracelet, and ring slots).				

After wondering briefly whether to send a balor, Demogorgon will summon Jamixena into the room. She is a marilith – the tail of a giant snake, the torso of a beautiful woman, with six agile arms. She wears a belt, with six long swords hanging from it, but no other clothes. Several rows of necklaces, medallions and assorted jewelry cover her breasts and dangle from her wrists and ears. The powerful fiend bows briefly before Demogorgon, and then the demon lord gives her her orders (in Abyssal).

While they speak, the party can assay Jamixena. Despite the jewelry, she seems able to move very quietly and dexterously, and only rarely the party can hear her trinkets tinkling. Jamixena is cold and aloof, and gives an impression of extreme efficiency. Still, it is more a display of her personality than a sign of orderly thinking. She is very intelligent and can make plans, but she also tends to change them on the fly and to rely on herself more than on lieutenants. Like all mariliths, she enjoys close combat, in which she is simply lethal.

Once Jamixena is briefed to Demogorgon's satisfaction, the archfiend gestures fluidly with his tentacles, and the Temple of Insanity slowly vanishes, to be replaced with the now familiar sight of the Plains of Infinite Portals.

Gorgonashk

The party may decide to go to Gorgonashk to meet Demogorgon, or they might get there later during their travels. The portal is a maelstrom in one of the Blood Lakes on the Plains of Infinite Portals; characters jumping in the water there will find themselves funneled to the City of All Demons on this layer, in the middle of a blood fountain. The same method can be used to come back. The fountain is guarded by tanar'ri at all times, though.

Gorgonashk is a jungle layer, similar to Demozg and yet different. Like Demozg, it is a layer which houses Demogorgon's petitioners that aren't water dwellers. It is a thick, boundless jungle, where most plants are poisonous and all animals are fiendish. The River Nihilus flows through Gorgonashk, linking it to Demozg and the Gaping Maw.

Whatever portal the players use to get there, they will arrive in some sort of settlement. In the best case, they'll end up in a village, similar to the one on Demozg. Since on Gorgonashk the rain is constant, this village will have a wide thatched roof all over the central square, and much more resilient buildings. If the party is going here instead of Demozg, the DM may run the village part here as it is written. The petitioners and the few planars are every bit as degenerate, but luckily there are less fiends in the jungle. Most of the hostile creatures are fiendish animals.

The jungle itself presents similar conditions as Demozg's, with several major differences. This layer is cloaked in eternal night, and therefore heat isn't as much of a problem. The good bits end here, though. There is the constant blood rain. Everything the party is wearing gets stained in a matter of minutes, and the green of the jungle is entirely covered by crimson. The foul blood is tainted; anyone that suffers a wound while exposed to the rain is exposed to the Red Ache, a disease which bloats the skin and causes high fever. Characters must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or contract the disease; after 1d3 days of incubation, they take 1d6 Strength damage. Every subsequent day they must make another save or suffer the same consequences. Two consecutive successful saves mean that the character has fought off the disease. This layer's petitioners have a natural immunity to the Red Ache.

The last big difference is in the sky. The jungle canopy all but covers it, but if a character can get a good look at it, he may wish he hadn't. There are no clouds, and the rain seems to come directly from the stars – and the firmament is patterned by slow-moving ripples, as if vast tentacles, thousands of miles long, were crawling across the sky. Characters that fly for more than one hour per day will start sensing the touch of something slimy on them, and feeling that unless they stay on the ground, the tentacles will grab them and crush them, adding their blood to the rain. This terrible feeling forces the characters to make a Will save, DC 17, or take 1d6 points of Wisdom damage. Only one save per day is needed, regardless of how much the character flies.

The main feature of the layer, and the place the party needs to go to if they want to meet Demogorgon, is the City of All Demons. This is an immense city, almost as big as Sigil itself, inhabited by close to half a million tanar'ri. Most of them are least and lesser fiends, but all tanar'ri varieties are represented here. The rulers of city and the layer are a group of six balors, called the Furies. The nastiest of them is a fiend that simply calls himself Balor, believing to be the best and most powerful of its species. The PCs are unlikely to run into any of them unless they make a big show in the jungle or enter the City of All Demons; a mortal entering the city is a rare occurrence and will certainly draw the attention of one of the balors. The reason for this is that at the center of the city, Demogorgon has placed an artefact which saps the life essence of any non-tanar'ri who enters its walls. Characters take a negative level for each day they stay in the city; the DC to remove these negative levels is 20, and it increases by one for each day spent in the city (days where the PCs have been in the city for less than 12 hours don't count).

That's the least of a berk's worries, though. After all, the City of All Demons *is* chock full of tanar'ri. If the PCs can talk fast and convincingly, then speaking with one of the Furies can be a good idea, as they are the only ones with the authority to force the rest of the fiends not to attack the party. The only thing the heroes need is a good reason for one of the Furies to declare as such.

Luckily though, the party doesn't really need to spend time in the City. Demogorgon has a palace at just a few dozen kilometers from the city, amounting to three days of travel in the jungle. The palace is a massive, lavish structure, built from sandstone and metal, at the same time a residence and a temple – as fitting for a creature such as Demogorgon, whose status is between mortal and deity. The archfiend comes here irregularly; when he's not in the palace, one of the Furies balors occupies it, lording over the tanar'ri servants and treating the petitioners as slaves, amusement and occasionally food. The PCs have to speak to the resident balor if they want Demogorgon to come here. The fiend will demand to know what business the characters have with the archfiend, and if the PCs tell him the truth, he will recognize that they are important news but also that they are *bad* news – and that he should call the boss but someone else ought to relate the chant.

The Gaping Maw

The party may end up in the Gaping Maw as they travel the realm of Demogorgon, either deliberately or by accident. The Gaping Maw is the least hospitable of Demogorgon's layers, but it is also the one where the archfiend spends most of his time. The best-known route passes through the Styx, and involves traveling down a funneling maelstrom – but anyone touching the Styx water will lose his memories, so few travelers can pass through there. The same spot can be used to get back on the river, if the character can resist the memory-draining effect and if he can swim back up.

The Gaping Maw is an endless, deep ocean, punctuated by rocky prominences blasted by wind and inhabited only by sparse vrock. The ocean surface is flat and uninteresting, as Demogorgon is the lord of beings of the depths. The archfiend's realm is near the bottom, at thousands or even tens of thousands of meters below the surface. There, the bulk of the layer's creatures dwell. Surface dwellers can't survive here without some sort of specialized magic, because of the immense pressure, and there is no light at all.

The most common true tanar'ri here is the wastrilith. Many of them make their home in the Gaping Maw as well, but as a rule they are not Demogorgon's servants. Still, they may be employed by him for specific missions, as mercenaries; individual water lords may be servants to the archfiend as well.

Demogorgon's petitioners on this part of his realm take the form of ixitxachitl, or devil rays – creatures that have the shape of a manta ray, but are intelligent and thoroughly chaotic evil. The bulk of the ixitxachitls here are low-level commoners or warriors, with a few members of the other NPC classes as well. But there are also many devil rays that have arrived here from the Prime or from other planes. Demogorgon is, among other things, the deity of their race; for this reason, the most powerful of his clerics are ixitxachitl. On this layer, where Demogorgon usually lives, these clerics can cast spells up to the fourth level (fifth within Demogorgon's palace).

Ixitxachitl		Al. Chaotic Evil	Small Aberration (Aquatic) (Abyss)	CR: 1
Str: 12 (+1)	HP: 1d8+1 (5)	Speed: swim 9		
Dex: 16 (+3)	AC: 16 (+1 size, +3 dex, +2 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 12 (+1)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: -		
Int: 12 (+1)	Ref: +3 (+0 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +0 Grapple: -3		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +1 (+0 base, +1 con)	Melee: +2 (+0 base, +1 strength, +1 size)		
Cha: 7 (-2)	Will: +3 (+2 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +4 (+0 base, +3 dexterity, +1 size)		
<u>Attacks</u>		<u>Skills</u>		
Bite, +2 melee, damage 1d6+1		Hide +11 (+8 racial, +3 dex)		
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>		Knowledge (Nature) +5 (+4 ranks, +1 int)		
Feats: Dodge		Listen +5 (+4 racial, +1 wis)		
Darkvision 60 ft.		Spot +5 (+4 racial, +1 wis)		
		Survival +5 (+4 ranks, +1 wis)		
		Swim +9 (+8 racial*, +1 str)		
		Tumble +7 (+4 ranks, +3 dex)		
		* to perform special actions or avoid hazards		

Speaking of which – the palace of the archfiend on the Gaping Maw is one of the largest structures on the Abyss. It rises from the sea surface like a small island, a building made from wood, coral, limestone, steel, and many more materials. Demogorgon's lair is a beautiful sight, massive and graceful at the same time, and adorned with sculptures representing creatures of the depth.

The part of the palace that is above the surface, however, is only a small fraction of the building. The palace is actually an immense tower, anchored on the sea floor ten thousand kilometers below, and rising for hundreds of floors. On the inside, everything is built to a huge scale – the ceilings are no less than twelve meters high, the narrowest corridors are at least six meters wide, and the palace's rooms are simply immense. In this enormous space, Demogorgon houses thousands of his favorite ixitxachitl petitioners, as well as hundreds of tanar'ri of all sorts. The archfiend is also a master crafter of arcane devices, and the palace is full of obscure items and magical machines. Tampering with these things may be rewarding, but it is very dangerous; most of them are half-finished or even purposefully hostile or dangerous. Once activated, it is hard to predict what they'll actually *do*. Demogorgon is especially adept at the manipulation of time and space, and while this place isn't as complex as the Temple of Insanity in that respect, some of the devices may very well transport careless berks into dangerous places of the palace, bizarre demiplanes, or out in the water (where the pressure will kill instantly). There are those that say that Demogorgon can create whole new Abyssal layers (which would explain the weirdness of the Temple of Insanity).

Some parts of the palace are flooded, while some are full of air. Hidden mechanisms exist that allow one to flood or dry individual sections of the palace; supposedly, only Demogorgon himself knows of all of these controls. In any case, the entire palace, even the underwater sections, is at normal pressure, so that visitors don't die (at least, not without providing some amusement in the process). But virtually noone comes here; the layer is far too difficult to reach and it offers no real services. The ixitxachitls don't create anything that is much useful for other species, and certainly nothing that is worth the risk of coming here and dealing with them.

Yet, the PCs may decide to do just that. Demogorgon roams the halls of his palace night and day, lost in his madness, and the building is so massive that finding him may take days. If the PCs don't want to spend that much time avoiding, bribing or fighting fiends and petitioners, then convincing one of the archfiend's servants to summon him could be a viable option.

CHAPTER VI

In which the Heroes abandon all hope as the curse upon them remains as strong as ever

The Everchanging Tides Of War

It seems that all the party needs to do is to wait until Demogorgon has killed Ithla-Sathlo, and then the curse will be broken. Sure, they probably have Jamixena the marilith to deal with, but keeping one fiend from attacking them shouldn't be too difficult after all they've been through. Still, chances are that the PCs want to find the Mercykillers, for any of a plethora of reasons. They may want to join forces with them and turn on the marilith, or they may want to actually hand them to Demogorgon. They may want to seek Rothakon, even though their curse is going to be broken, perhaps hoping to find news of the Selthian Orb, or perhaps out of sheer desire of revenge. They may just want to make sure they're still alive.

If the party has been teleported by Demogorgon together with Jamixena, they will find themselves at a couple kilometers from Broken Reach, atop a low hill in the blasted Plains of Infinite Portals. And once again, they see the aftermaths of a battle, and even though this time the carnage is somewhat less, the sight is unsettling nevertheless – because Broken Reach is burning.

Pillars of smoke rise from the towers and barricades of Red Shroud's city, and those with keen eyes can spot a fairly large army of fiends and mortals camped just outside of the town. The army bears the banners and standards of at least a half dozen different demon princes (rulers of regions of the Plains, like the Lord of Mithrengo was). Jamixena, if she is with the party, will immediately offer an interpretation of the sight – Lord Graz'zt has retired his support to Red Shroud and has let the princes know of this. The marilith quickly *polymorphs* into a humanoid form, explaining that many in the Abyss know that she is an agent of Demogorgon, and that she doesn't wish to be recognized for now.

In fact, the fiend is right. Six minor rulers of the Plains of Infinite Portals have combined their strength and attacked Broken Reach. Already depleted of its own defenses by the Lord of Mithrengo, the city fell while waiting for reinforcements from Graz'zt, which never came. Red Shroud teleported away and is nowhere to be found. The fighting has ceased just yesterday, and the civilians are just now coming out of their holes.

The six lords are Gurthanis (male balor/Abyss/Chaotic Evil), Naya (female balor/Abyss/Chaotic Evil), The Black Devourer (male nalfeshnee barbarian 2nd/Abyss/Chaotic Evil), Akathainon, Farantor (male balor/Abyss/Chaotic Evil) and Jaranda (female marilith/Abyss/Chaotic Evil). The fires in Broken Reach still have to cool down, and these conquerors are already plotting against each other. Anyone who knows anything about tanar'ri should know that an alliance of six powerful demons that finds itself without an enemy is nothing less than a powderkeg. A big one. With torches dangling over it.

Right now, entering the city isn't too easy. The army outside questions everyone who wants to get in or out, and those who don't have permission from one of the lords get pressed into service or used as food. If only the party knew where the portal to Mal Arundak is and how it is opened, they wouldn't need to enter Broken Reach.

Unfortunately, Jamixena has never been to Mal Arundak and doesn't know the dark of getting there. What she knows is that the city is in the Rainless Waste, a desert layer which has no other interesting features except for immense fixtures large enough to swallow a fortress. Also, she knows that the city has been founded and is supposedly ruled by a trumpet archon – but for why the archon is there or what he does, there are only heaps of rumors. It seems quite probable, though, that the city doesn't welcome tanar'ri.

If the party approaches the city, they will have to be stealthy, or risk meeting patrols from the sieging army. These patrols will demand to see documents from one of the six generals, or they will attack the party.

But the patrols and the PCs aren't the only groups wandering around Broken Reach. Hanatel, the aged cleric of the god of deceit and powerful merchant of magic, has got out of the city and struck an alliance with the nalfeshnee known as the Black Devourer. The cleric has permission to travel in or around the city-fortress. A bodyguard of four mezzoloth mercenaries travel with him at all times. Right now, Hanatel is desperately looking for a way to come out on top of the whole mess. He knows that if – *when* – the alliance finally collapses, the Black Devourer will not be exactly the favorite. In fact, his forces are the weakest in the alliance, and this is the very reason for which Hanatel was able to bargain with him. Since his house has been wrecked by the invaders (but not before he could secure his belongings) and the inside of Broken Reach is full of the stink of dead manes, he wanders the Plains near the city looking for a solution to his problems.

If the PCs meet him, in just moments Hanatel conceives a plan. He must cause the alliance to collapse in a controlled way, as if it was a condemned building. And the PCs just might be his demolition team. He greets the party amicably and makes some small talk about the sorry state of things, before making his offer.

Simply put, the PCs have to kill one of the six generals. Specifically, Hanatel is thinking about the vrock Akathainon, because he is the least formidable in combat. The party only needs to draw him away from the encampment with as few guards as possible, cast *dimensional anchor* on him, and butcher him. Then, get the hell away, and they will be richly rewarded. The cleric is willing to offer thousands of gold pieces – maybe even more – for this murder. He is also willing to pay in magical items. He certainly has no shortage of those, considering the sudden and drastical reduction in his market.

If possible, Hanatel would rather not have to tell them the reason, but here they are: with Akathainon dead, the other lords will immediately believe that one of the others has ordered the murder, and that the alliance is off. They'll jump on each other before they can even finish saying "betrayal!". Meanwhile, Akathainon's troops will be without a leader, and getting them to the Black Devourer's side shouldn't be too difficult. This would make the forces of Hanatel's patron the second strongest in the alliance, and with some careful management they might get the other four to wear each other out to the point where the nalfeshnee could actually win. Hanatel knows that there are details missing in this plan and chinks to be smoothed out, but it can work if he can get the PCs to actually do the deed. He can't do it himself – first, because even though virtually everyone including the party believes him to be a very high level character, he actually doesn't think he could take on the vrock. And second, because the other five lords know that he works for the Black Devourer. If anyone spots him, the plan will turn against him.

Of course, time is of the essence. If the powderkeg explodes before he can do something about it, the Black Devourer will have to either retreat or be defeated; either way, Hanatel's destiny is very uncertain. Despite all his magic and power, he is still an aging mortal. He doesn't like change and this revolution has shaken him deeply. He could grab the chance and move out of the Abyss for good, but right now what he really wants is to return to the status quo. Someone in charge of Broken Reach, keeping the city survivable if not orderly, and him quietly living there as a merchant. Best of all would be to get the succubus Red Shroud back in charge, since she has been able to give the Reach stability for as long as Hanatel has lived there, but this doesn't seem to be possible. Noone even knows where the cunning demoness has vanished.

As the party considers this proposal, Jamixena (if she's with them) warns them telepathically. She is willing to help them out against Akathainon, but she will not assume her true form. In fact, she will initially propose that she stays hidden and only intervene if things seem to be going badly for the heroes. She has been a servant of Demogorgon for many centuries, and too many fiends around the Abyss know this. If she is recognized, the other generals would interpret this as a sign that Demo-

gorgon has decided to weigh in on the Broken Reach crisis. The consequences of this are unpredictable; the only certain thing is that Demogorgon wouldn't like it at all.

Akathainon		Al. Chaotic Evil	Vrock Sorcerer 10 th	CR: 14
Str: 21 (+5) Dex: 19 (+4) Con: 28 (+9) Int: 14 (+2) Wis: 18 (+4) Cha: 23 (+6)	HP: 10d8+10d4+180 (250) AC: 24 (-1 size, +4 dex, +11 natural) Initiative: +4 dex Ref: +14 (+10 base, +4 dex) For: +19 (+10 base, +9 con) Will: +18 (+14 base, +4 wis)	Speed: 9, fly 15 Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +15 Melee: +19 (+15 base, +5 strength, -1 size) Ranged: +18 (+15 base, +4 dexterity, -1 size)	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +24	
Attacks 2 claws, +19 melee reach 3mt, damage 2d6+5, and Bite +17 melee reach 3mt, damage 1d8+2, and 2 talons +17 melee reach 3mt, damage 1d6+2		Skills Concentration +27 (+18 ranks, +9 con) Bluff +26 (+20 ranks, +6 cha) Diplomacy +10 (+6 cha, +4 synergy) Hide +13 (+13 ranks, +4 dex, -4 size) Intimidate +21 (+13 ranks, +6 cha, +2 synergy) Knowledge (abyss) +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int) Knowledge (arcane) +12 (+10 ranks, +2 int) Listen +25 (+13 ranks, +8 racial, +4 wis) Move Silently +17 (+13 ranks, +4 dex) Search +15 (+13 ranks, +2 int) Sense motive +17 (+13 ranks, +4 wis) Spellcraft +20 (+18 ranks, +2 int) Spot +25 (+13 ranks, +4 wis) Survival +8 (+4 wis, +2 synergy*, +2 synergy**)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Cleave, Combat reflexes, Multiattack, Power attack, Quicken Spell-like Ability (mirror image), Maximize Spell, Violate Spell (metamagic; the spell takes up a slot one level higher; half of the damage inflicted is vile damage and thus can only be healed by magic in a consecrated area). All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 18, telepathy within 30 mt. Dance of ruin (su): three or more vrock can dance for three rounds, if they are not interrupted by stunning, paralyzing or killing one of them, a wave of energy deals 20d6 damage to every non-demon within 33 meters. Reflex half, DC 18. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>mirror image</i> , <i>telekinesis</i> (DC 21), <i>greater teleport</i> (self and 22.5 kg only); 1/day – <i>heroism</i> ; caster level 12 th . Spores (ex): 1/3 rounds, free action, they deal 1d8 damage to every adjacent creature and 1d4 damage/round for 10 rounds; <i>bless</i> , <i>neutralize poison</i> , <i>remove disease</i> or holy water kills them. Stunning screech (su): 1/hour, all non-demons within 10 meters must save on Fortitude, DC 22, or be stunned for 1 round. Summon 2d10 dretches or 1 vrock 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell. Sorcerer spells known (DC 13 + spell level): 0 th level: <i>disrupt undead</i> , <i>touch of fatigue</i> , <i>prestidigitatation</i> , <i>detect magic</i> , <i>read magic</i> , <i>flare</i> , <i>ray of frost</i> , <i>resistance</i> , <i>message</i> ; 1 st level: <i>alarm</i> , <i>charm person</i> , <i>magic aura</i> , <i>shield</i> , <i>magic missile</i> ; 2 nd level: <i>scorching ray</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>minor image</i> , <i>bear's endurance</i> ; 3 rd level: <i>dispel magic</i> , <i>vampiric touch</i> , <i>haste</i> ; 4 th level: <i>lesser globe of invulnerability</i> , <i>cone of cold</i> ; 5 th level: <i>wall of force</i> Sorcerer spells/day: 6/8/8/7/6/4, caster level 10		* when following tracks ** in the Abyss		

Akathainon is an exceptional vrock, who was able to conquer a remote fortress on the Plains of Infinite Portals through cunning and powerful innate magic. In combat, he is a coward, preferring to stay away from melee and teleport to safety if things seem dangerous. When he has to fight, his weapon of choice are maximized scorching rays (further empowered by the Abyss' destructive nature).

Gallowsgate

Hanatel does know how to get to Mal Arundak, and he'll tell the PCs if they do this job for him. But if they don't want to, there are several other people around that know this dark. The party only needs to ask the right questions. Almost noone around Broken Reach will recognize the city's name, but the fiends can remember the "archon's city" and they may know how to get to the Rainless Waste. The Gather Information DC to find the chant is 30, but if the party mentions these two elements in their questionings, it is lowered to 25. Eventually, they will be pointed to the troops belonging to the marilith Jaranda. This fiendish general is the mistress of Gallowsgate, a black iron fortress at about twenty days of travel from Broken Reach. One feature of the territory surrounding Gallowsgate is a triangular gate which is known to lead to the archon's city on the Rainless Waste. However, few of the fiends here know the key; Jaranda certainly does but chances are the party

doesn't want to meet her (certainly, Jamixena is against the idea). Unless the party can make a DC 35 Gather Information check, they'll have to ask in Gallowsgate.

The party could just walk there, risking encounters with roaming tanar'ri or press gangs, but there is an easy way. One of Broken Reach's deepest tunnels is in fact a portal linking to the inside of Gallowsgate itself. Jamixena knows of this, but if she's not with the party, they can find out with relative ease – Jaranda used that portal to get troops inside the city. Since it was very well guarded, this cost many lives, but the marilith considered her minions expendable.

The portal is now guarded by four babaus under Jaranda's control, herding twenty dretches with them. The marilith doesn't really expect anyone to try to break through, since there is no military force that she isn't keeping an eye on in the area. Still, the babaus aren't going to let anyone in any time soon. They'll take a bribe of five hundred gold pieces, or a few minor magical items, but otherwise the PCs will have to fight.

Inside Gallowsgate, the portal exits in a narrow corridor. The corridor, in turn, leads into a large hallway, about six meters wide and fifty meters long, from which several similar corridors depart. The walls are made of stone and metal in equal parts. From what the PCs can see here, the fortress is largely empty. At the end of the hallway, an iron arch leads into what looks like a tavern's common room.

Gallowsgate is not nearly as friendly towards mortals as Broken Reach. The “tavern” is the only place in the fortress where mortals are allowed to stay freely; two babaus there keep watch and “escort” anyone who wants to go in or out. The rest of the folk in the room include several tieflings and humans, all of them either mercenaries hired to keep Gallowsgate safe or merchants trading in Abyssal drugs and magical items. A one-eyed tiefling stands behind the bar, occasionally serving a strong-smelling beer.

If the PCs enter the room, one of the fiends will quickly move to question them. He's peery because the party hasn't arrived under escort, but he'll hint that a quick bribe could smoothly fix everything. The babau isn't too bright, and some bluffing and fast-talking could work just as well.

Gallowsgate looks empty because it is; most of the fiends have followed Jaranda in the assault on Broken Reach, though it is known that they could all teleport back here at any moment if Jaranda decided to do so. Noone is allowed to get out of the tavern room without a fiend escorting him or her, and noone is allowed to go anywhere without a good reason.

By asking the resident mercenaries, the PCs can easily find out that the portal to Mal Arundak is not far from the fortress and can be reached by keeping going straight from Gallowsgate's doors. The key is a broken feather. The PCs need to find a way to get out of Gallowsgate without having to fight their way through the fiends. Again, good diplomacy or bribery can do the trick. Brute force is also a solution, but the heroes should be very quick to get away before reinforcements teleport in!

The portal stands in the middle of nowhere; the only feature of notice is Gallowsgate at about ten kilometers of distance. The arch itself is built from silver, iron and copper, and readily flares to life when a feather is thrown into it.

Mal Arundak, City Of Confusion

The middle of Mal Arundak's market is occupied by the portal to the first layer, and this is where the PCs appear when they first reach the city.

Stepping through the active portal, you find yourselves in Mal Arundak's market – the Grand Market, as a few roadposts proclaim. Stands and stalls, shops and vendors, are everywhere in this large town square. People of many races can be seen: mostly humans and tieflings, then elves, dwarves, orcs, goblins, halflings, kobolds, gnomes, and a few aasimars. There are even a few githzerai and githyanki, and the reason for which they aren't killing each other is that two squads of hound archons are patrolling the market, keeping watch. Unsurprisingly, there are no fiends in sight. Three large roads and a myriad of narrow streets leave the market; the city is at least three or four kilometers wide.

New visitors always get a positive first impression of Mal Arundak. In a stark contrast with the desert surrounding it, Mal Arundak is full of parks and verdant places. The archons keep the place very civil, and the inhabitants, while occasionally weird, aren't outright hostile. The truth is, this place is as terrible as anywhere else in the Abyss. Maybe more so, since it is ruled by a former champion of good – the trumpet archon Alusiel, who has fallen from the Mount and is now more and more similar to a tanar'ri as she delves deeper into chaos and evil.

Alusiel thought that she would create a celestial city in the Abyss, a point of light where travelers could find solace and evil souls could seek redemption. She brought a cadre of loyal hound archons to help with her task, located a suitable spot, and the city slowly grew. The hounds kept it secure while Alusiel decided how to best purify mortals entering it. But things went spiraling down from there, as the trumpet archon derailed from her original plan and adopted stricter measures of "purification". Alusiel felt that mortals in Mal Arundak needed to get rid of earthly desires and devote themselves to spiritual pursuits in order to rise from chaos and evil. To this end, she created a magical web of enchantments which encompasses the whole city.

Anyone who brushes against this web will find his greatest desires laid before him for the taking. Whatever he wants, he will receive it. But it is only an illusion, into which he will be trapped and eventually destroyed. In Alusiel's mind, contorted by the evil of the plane, those wicked people who could not let go of material wealth deserved no better. Nowadays, the city is ruled by Alusiel's mood swings, and the rules regarding what is an acceptable desire and what isn't change day by day. If you seek something which the archon deems sinful, you could get caught into the web. Alusiel gives no second chances; the web will do anything to keep the people it ensnares into the city. Until either they redeem themselves, or they become completely insane. So far, noone has succeeded at Alusiel's perverse test. In this place, chasing your dreams is the way to madness. The city has more criminals than one would think, considering the illusion web and the hound archons. The underground has managed to form a relatively solid organization to protect itself from both threats.

There are three roads into Mal Arundak. They are the Silver Bridge, the Iron Way, and Copper Road. They enter the city and meet between the Grand Market and the Stables. These roads are the only relatively safe parts of Mal Arundak, in that the services provided there are usually real. As

More of the Dark

Many things happened in Mal Arundak while the PCs were in Demogorgon's realm.

First, Rothakon arrived in town. Mal Arundak is part of the long path leading to Infestant, and Rothakon knows its dangers. The half-fiend has searched that path for the Orb, the PCs, or Lianne, and has found nothing. He was going back to the Plains of Infinite Portals, and had just arrived in Mal Arundak, when Ithla-Sathlo contacted him and ordered him back to Infestant. Worried but unwilling to disobey, Rothakon left the city the way he arrived.

The Mercykillers arrived in hot pursuit, mere hours later. They chased Rothakon's trail into the town's slums, and were caught in Alusiel's web very soon. Only Joseph the paladin was able to come out, shaken and despairing. Every other member of his party has succumbed to the illusions.

Coriolis now believes that he has killed Rothakon and Ithla-Sathlo, and that he has returned to Sigil to become the new Factol of the Mercykillers. The wizard Harken thinks that he has unravelled dark and powerful Abyssal magic from the tome that he found in Maldithar, and that he is now a mighty archmage capable of imposing his will upon anyone and establishing his own order. The rest of the Mercykillers are worse off, and they have been reduced to dreamcurse, comatose or insane. They are all deep into Mal Arundak's slums, trapped in their own minds.

Lianne – who, like her father, has been in Mal Arundak before – has taken advantage of the situation and escaped.

long as the party stays along the roads and in the market and doubt of anything that seems too easy, they will probably not be caught into Alusiel's web of illusions.

As soon as they start moving around or expressing wish of anything, however, they are in great danger. The city will create a powerful illusion of the characters' greatest desires. This is an enchantment effect, as the delusion is only in the characters' minds. The DM should make a Will save for each character in secret. The DC is 23. Those that fail will see the illusion, while the others won't. Any *protection from [alignment]* or a *mind blank* spell will also shield them from the city's power. An *anti-magic field* will work too. The effects, however, will resume as soon as the spell ends, and illusions that are already in place will not disappear. The caster level for this enchantment is 21, making normal *dispel magic* spells entirely useless. More powerful magic may work, but remember that every failed saving throw is considered as a different effect. Even characters that make their save will have to repeat it every time the city presents a new trickery, and the web can even present the same illusion repeatedly (after at least a day). Once the city has them seeing and hearing one of its illusions, it will search the character's mind and subconscious for another wish to fulfill.

Interacting with the illusion does not allow any further saving throw. In fact, it only makes the enchantment stronger. Every time a character pursues one of these dreams, or indulges in the desires which the city seems to fulfill, he takes 1 point of Charisma damage, and the DC for any subsequent save increases by 1. Situations may arise in which part of the PCs fail their save, but even those that succeed believe in the delusion. In this case, the DC for subsequent saves is increased for everyone involved. For example, the city may conjure up a scene of Coriolis and Joseph walking in a nearby alley and then turning a corner, in order to draw the characters deeper into the web. Then, two PCs fail their save and tell the others that they have spotted the Mercykillers, and that they should go after them. If the other characters believe this and follow the deluded PCs, then the next save they'll make will have its DC increased by 1, even though they succeeded at the first save. Basically, the city's spell becomes strongest against those that pursue their desires. On the contrary, ignoring an illusion will cause it to vanish after some time, depending on how long and hard it was pursued. Everyone sane in Mal Arundak knows this; they can live in relative normality by always remembering to never try to have anything they want.

The city can create delusions of anything and everything a character wants. If they fail the save, they will see, hear, smell, taste and touch the object of their desire as if it was fully real. The effect is permanent as long as they are within the city. Obviously, the city will arrange the illusions so that the character is kept well inside. If the character begins desiring an exit from the city, then Mal Arundak could "make" one for him... except that it would be false, and only lead deeper into madness. If a character does exit the web, the illusion still affects him, but he can make a saving throw every day to shake it off. The DC of this save is the last DC he had, but it decreases by 1 for every day spent away from Mal Arundak.

The illusion can reproduce sentience, magic, draw from the character's own memories, or even recreate the whole multiverse inside his mind if need be. In fact, this is exactly what happened to the "dreamcursed", the barmies of Mal Arundak, a category which now includes several of the Mercykiller friends of the PCs.

What if...?

This part assumes that all the important Mercykillers survived and went on to chase Rothakon. However, this isn't necessarily true in your case.

While the barmy Mercykillers are a good way to demonstrate the terrible nature of Mal Arundak, they aren't truly needed for the plot to go on. Let the party find clues on Rothakon some other way.

Similarly, the presence of the marilith Jamixena isn't required. In fact, as Demogorgon's pawn, she is a problem more than an asset and if the party managed to get out of the demon lord's presence without her, they deserve not to be harassed by her.

What matters is that the party finds out about Graz'zt involvement, and that they realize that Demogorgon's action hasn't freed them yet.

Unusual Parties

Sensates are masters of their own senses. Any character that belongs to this faction and has at least one faction feat has a +2 bonus to any save against Alusiel's web.

The enchantment is considered an insanity effect for the purposes of Bleaker faction feats or abilities.

As soon as the heroes stray from the main streets, they will soon meet many of these poor souls. They have followed their dreams, and Alusiel has rewarded them by giving them what they wanted – at least, in their minds. The severity of the condition can vary depending on how much their version of reality differs from what is actually real. Those with small dreams and desires are the sanest. They may seem a little odd, they may have imaginary friends or possessions, but they can still at least perceive and react to the reality around them. For many others, however, reality no longer exists. They have pursued enough fantasies that their Charisma or Wisdom has been reduced to zero. They wander randomly around the alleys and roads, or just stand there drooling. In their minds, they are the kings of entire Prime worlds, or they are surrounded by a harem of beautiful women; they have health, riches, power, everything anyone can desire. In reality, they are slowly starving to death in the mud.

The effect is present in the main streets and market too, but creatures have several advantages there. First, there are inns and merchants; most everyday desires can be quickly satisfied in reality with little chance of triggering an illusion. Going beyond the basic survival needs is still dangerous, though; developing a habit for any sort of luxury is a ticket to madness in Mal Arundak. Most people stick to simple food and housing. Second, the numbers – these places are crowded and one can ask the people around him a confirmation of what he is seeing at any time. Again, this isn't completely safe because the city could fake a reassuring response, but it's better than nothing.

Finally, there is another aspect of the spell which is useful to know. The web is an actual web of magic threads which may trigger the enchantment when "touched". These threads are of course invisible and insubstantial, and they are so thick that even if one could see them it wouldn't help much, but they do have a spatial location and direction. The more you move within the web, the greater chances to be affected. This means that if you don't move around, you won't be affected much. By contrast, running through the city means that you'll see illusions all around you. Not even most of the citizens know this, though.

The people who live in the city have developed a very defensive behaviour towards the web. They know that every time an occasion presents itself to fulfill their desire, it is very likely an illusion designed to bring them to madness. As a result, they never attempt to realize their dreams, they never try to pursue them. What they do is nurture their own fantasies instead, indulging in their mental appetites. Since no one dares seeking material wealth, the market for mental vices is great in this town; not surprisingly, the philosophers are the richest folks in Mal Arundak. People pay them to hear something, anything, that may distract them from their misery. Elsewhere, that jink may be spent on booze or whores – but Alusiel could forbid anything and everything, at any moment. If you want a clean bed or a glass of wine, you could be in danger already.

Unsurprisingly, the suppression of all desires makes the citizens' fantasies tend by reaction to chaos and evil. After all, it's just imagination. So, they gather to spin invented tales of depravity that would shock a tanar'ri, and describe roads to power that they'll never attempt to walk. The citizens don't know the difference between "good" and "evil" desires. They roleplay everything they ever want, letting the darkest parts of their psyche roam free. Alusiel has conditioned them to think that what you desire is irrelevant, as long as you don't get it.

The citizens avoid everything they want and can't stop thinking about it, a painful paradox as tragic as any other of the tortures of the Abyss – not that Alusiel realizes this, of course. In her eyes, this is all part of the purification from earthly desires which her "protégés" must go through in order to free themselves of the corruption of the Abyss. The other archons living in the city follow this ideal as well, but they are not as deeply convinced (or corrupted) as Alusiel herself.

The hounds are tasked with eliminating any wrongdoer that doesn't fall prey to Alusiel's web, as well as any tanar'ri trying to sneak into town. The life in the Abyss has toughened them up, but it is also slowly corrupting them. Some of the archons are becoming less than good, fanatically following Alusiel's orders to the letter. They don't warn people about the city's effects and they don't explain the barmies. Alusiel has told them that newcomers must learn the lesson by themselves, and they believe it. Other archons are becoming not exactly lawful; maybe they would even plan to un-

seat Alusiel but they can't trust each other. So they content themselves on slacking on the job, disrupting patrol schedules, and letting criminals get away. None of these celestials have actually changed alignment as Alusiel did, but it is only a matter of time.

Among the hound archon militia, the least corrupted ones are those that have doubts about Alusiel's leadership, but follow her because of trust or hierarchy. They are inclined to have mercy on those guilty of minor crimes, at least the first time, occasionally ignoring the trumpet archon's law of killing all criminals. They think that the whole venture into the Abyss has been a bad idea from the start, which is turning out even worse than expected, but they still think that maybe Alusiel has a grand plan to which they are not privy. Some think that it is *they* who are put to the test. Others think that Alusiel is straying from the path, but that she will get better if they just have faith in her. Most of them, however, won't hear any proposal of revolt or rebellion. Archons simply don't do that sort of things. Certainly, Alusiel knows what she's doing, even if it seems nonsensical or chaotic. The evil, if any there is, is necessary for a much greater good. The archons are not happy with the situation, but they know that this is normal, they are in the Abyss after all. They have to be careful to avoid temptation from all sides, and surely anyone suggesting that Alusiel is fallen and must be eliminated is an agent of the fiends... surely, even doubting the trumpet archon is a symptom of corruption.

Obviously, the hounds are confused. Still, they'll mostly do what Alusiel says, and they won't go against her (despite what the trumpet herself thinks). They also do their utmost not to show this confusion to anyone else, knowing that they are supposed to act as shining, strong examples for everyone else. The hounds always look certain and secure, even if the suppression of their feelings is only making their situation worse.

In recent months, Alusiel has decided that noone should explain the dark of the city to anyone else. In her corrupted mind, this should better serve her purpose of purification. Unfortunately, this means that most inhabitants won't tell anything to the PCs about what they should avoid, except for cryptic warnings or half-sentences. If the party gets lucky and finds some dissident, they may get a full explanation of the nature of the town. Paradoxically, some thief or criminal would be the best friend in this town.

Mal Arundak is a big town, though not as big as Broken Reach. Its shape is roughly triangular, with the longest side running parallel to a deep canyon in the desert 403rd layer, the Rainless Waste. The canyon, dubbed the Stench, constantly spews forth sulphuric fumes, though the worst of the toxic gases are kept out by the city walls. Locations within the city include:

- **The Grand Market.** The Market is possibly the safest place in town. This being one of the few Abyssal cities where noone is going to kill you outright for no good reason, Mal Arundak has a certain success as a commercial burg, despite its dangers to the mind. All common goods and some exotic wares can be found in the Market with relative ease, and they are the actual real stuff more often than not. The price is usually a bit higher than what marked in the Player's Handbook, but it doesn't reach the excesses of Broken Reach with its fiendish taxation levels.

Of the merchants here, more than half don't really live in Mal Arundak. As one of the few spots on the Abyss where trade can be made without the need for a small army of bodyguards, the Grand Market draws traders from the whole plane. Those that do regular business here are aware of the nature of the place as much as the residents, and know how to survive. The newbies learn quickly, or become dreamcursed like everyone else.

The market square is surrounded by shops, belonging to the permanent residents, and several inns and taverns. Most patrons stick to water and simple food, though some may dare to have some beer every now and then.

At all moments, there are two teams of four hound archons in the market, officially to prevent thefts. In truth, the main reason for their continued presence is to keep tabs on who comes in or goes out through the portal. The triangular gate is the real door to the city; the actual city doors don't see

much use and are locked shut. Every now and then, tanar’ris try to enter the city, and the archons (along with whatever militia they can muster) must be ready to repel them.

If something similar happens while the PCs are there, helping the archons out could be a way to get on their good side. If the party befriends a hound among those that are less than loyal to Alusiel, they may get themselves a very good source of information on the city.

The most prominent inn in the town square is the Chained Djinni, a simple place that serves decent stuff at cheap prices and rents clean rooms. This is also the place where a group of githyanki are staying, the same group of githyanki that stole the Selthian Orb from under Rothakon’s nose. See the next section for details.

SITIELL? WHAT
SITIELL?
- A SLUTTIER IN HIS
HOUSE NEAR MAL
ARUNDAL’S SEWAGE
DUMP

- **The Slums.** This huge section of the city, located near the walls between the Silver Bridge and the Iron Way, is where the city’s poor and homeless dwell. It is composed of a few hundreds tiny shacks built from old wood or sandstone, always on the verge of crumbling. Anywhere you are in the Slums, the smell is terrible – on one side, the Stench is just beyond the wall. On the other, a big artificial lake constitutes the city’s sewage dump. The residents don’t even know about the smell any more – sometimes, literally. The Slums is the area with the largest number of dreamcursed by far; virtually everyone in the Slums lives a minor illusion of some sort, so all the residents seem to be a bit odd every now and then. Others are much worse off; every road features one or two people who spend their time wandering with a vacant stare or drooling in the mud. The lucky ones are still connected enough with reality to feed themselves; the others simply die in the street. The Slum folk that don’t fall prey to the web live in small, decent houses, with enough to live a somber life.

If the party wanders the Slums, they may meet a few of the Mercykiller soldiers that arrived in Mal Arundak. However, they are all stuck in their own little worlds, and they are unable to help the heroes, or even to perceive their presence. The exception is Tarinee, the Mercykiller cleric. She has understood what was happening to them, albeit too late. Much of her world consists of illusions now, but she is aware of this and is trying to save herself somehow. The middle-aged woman has occupied a shack in the Slums and spends most of her time meditating on the tenets of Justice and doing her best to ignore everything around her.

If the PCs enter the Slums and start making questions about a group of bashers from Sigil who were after a half-fiend, they may be pointed to Tarinee’s kip. There, she sits cross-legged in the middle of the floor, reciting: “I will uphold Justice before all else, purging the multiverse of those who break the law. In all situations I shall weigh the rights and wrongs with a clear and impartial mind. I shall decide where Justice must fall under the law, and I will mete out that Justice with a firm and unyielding hand. I believe in the righteousness of my faction: we alone answer to the higher law of Justice. I will not pass judgment on good or evil, only on law-abiding and law-breaking, for therein lies wrongdoing. I will punish the guilty as the crime demands. I will be diligent in my pursuit of the guilty, and while so engaged I will remain innocent of any wrongdoing in the eyes of others. I will never release a lawbreaker until his sentence has been carried out...”. Over and over again. The cleric figures that feeding and defending herself is safe, and with her magic she can do that without leaving the hut, but isn’t sure about anything else. So, she will purposely ignore the PCs on the off chance that they are illusions sent to further ensnare her. But if they are insistent and convincing enough, or if they do something that illusions could not (such as picking her forcefully to drag her out; the city could simulate that but only if the victim wanted such a thing), then she will open her eyes and cast a *protection from chaos* on herself. Somewhat reassured about the party’s reality (but what if she didn’t really cast the spell, what if she only thinks she did...), she is willing to talk to them.

“First of all, let me recount how we reached Mal Arundak. We searched Broken Reach and the surrounding area, questioning everyone who could know anything about the half-fiend. Coriolis directed the operations in a masterful way. Eventually, we decided that Rothakon must have tried to

go back to Infestant. He probably gave up on looking for the Orb and decided to go back home. We questioned Lianne and forced her to tell us how to follow him. This led us to Mal Arundak”.

The woman lightly bites her lip, thoughtful. “From that point, I cannot be certain... of anything. This city has been assaulting our minds ever since we arrived, but I only realized it when I was too late. Anyway, we questioned people around Mal Arundak and while noone saw Rothakon, some did see a man corresponding to a disguise which, according to Lianne, her father used several times to infiltrate the city undetected when passing through it. This person was seen through at a time compatible to when Rothakon supposedly left Broken Reach, but he was also seen again just a few hours before we arrived! We started scouring the city for traces of Rothakon. In hindsight, we should have asked for help by the archons, but I have to wonder if even that would have saved us”.

Tarinee makes another pause. “That’s when it all fell apart. We found loads of evidence that he was just a hour or so ahead of us. People gave us good descriptions, some of us said that they saw spell components on the road... it was almost too easy. Then one of the men claimed that he saw Rothakon in an alley. We ran there, and found nothing. But the soldier was jumping around and screaming: ‘There he is, let’s get him!’, and pointing at the void”.

“That’s when we figured something was wrong. The man was obviously nuts, for unknown reason. Maybe we were following a false trail. Maybe Rothakon had set some sort of insanity trap to cover him! We had to be more cautious, so we decided to hole up in an inn and make a plan. I don’t know if any of us even reached the inn. Men were going insane by the minute. They would desert the team, for the most disparate reasons. We were struggling to keep together; even Harken, the wizard, vanished. Then Coriolis shouted, said that he saw Rothakon, and ran, but neither I nor Joseph had seen anything at all. I prayed for guidance, and saw ... Factol Mallin, out in the street. The old factol of our faction, before Nilesia”.

The cleric chuckles. “Those were good times. We talked and talked, and he explained me what was going on, reassuring me that everything was going according to plan and that both Rothakon and Ithla-Sathlo were about to be served Justice. We left Coriolis and the Harmonium, had a good dinner, rested in a comfy inn... enough. What Mallin told me and everything else I did afterwards is irrelevant to you, because it was all illusion. I realized it far too late”.

Tarinee closes her eyes. “He is still with me. I must ignore him. I do not know where I am now. I do not know whether the bed I rest on is real or not. I do not know whether you are real, but I had to take the chance. If I was wrong, you will be another delusion among many. There is only one thing that I know is the Truth, and that is Justice. Leave me now. I dare not attempt to leave Mal Arundak in this state; I would risk falling deeper into insanity. In time, if I can keep my mind strong, I will break free of these chains. Now, go away. There is nothing more that I can tell you. All the rest is madness. I will uphold Justice before all else, purging the multiverse of those who break the law. In all situations I shall weigh the rights and wrongs with a clear and impartial mind...”

Tarinee will not respond to anything else, and if the PCs try to take her out of the shack by force she may even attack them.

- **Philosophers’ Row.** This wide road, lined by great mansions and beautiful gardens, is Mal Arundak’s rich ward. Philosophers’ Row starts from the Slums and goes all the way to the Grand Market. The great houses demonstrate the strange nature of Mal Arundak’s consumer market – terrified of pursuing material objectives, the townsfolk give their money to sages and graybeards to find some theoretical relief for their wretched existence. But, in a way, even this is an illusion. The inside of these manors is largely empty; there are no servants, no luxuries, no decoration. Even the philosophers must avoid falling prey to Alusiel’s web. Many of these houses are actually less comfortable and more squalid and vermin-infested than the kips in the Slums.

Some of the houses work as small clubs where people gather to recount stories and spin tales. Most of these are gatherings of friends, but the best are actual clubs which people pay to gain access to. Here, the people of Mal Arundak chat and roleplay what they will never dare to have. They talk about imaginary banquets and orgies, about dreams of conquest and luxury, about the wonders, real

or fictional, of the Civic Feshall in Sigil, all the while drinking water and eating bread or hard biscuits. The widespread psychic disorders of Mal Arundak are made manifest in these meetings, as all storytelling sessions invariably end in disgusting stories where the speakers try to beat each other to creating the most shocking or gross narration. Unable to fulfill even the tiniest of them, the citizens make their own wishes without morals or ethics.

Coriolis ended up here. He can be seen going around the street, and seems to live in one of the manors. If the PCs ask around this place, he can be located rather easily, though news of his presence haven't yet leaked much to the rest of the city. Coriolis is in a pitiful state, compared to the last time the party has seen him. He walks the street as if he owned it, with his chin high and a radiant expression, but he is in a sorry state. His lips are parched and he is beginning to grow thin for lack of water and food; yet, he doesn't feel thirst or hunger. Every now and then, he stops to talk with someone, either treating them as an inferior and issuing orders, or by addressing them as if they were entirely different people. Most of the bodies in this street are philosophers with lots of time to waste anyway, and they indulge his delusions more often than not. They all know that he is dream-cursed and unable to feed himself, but they won't do anything about it. According to Alusiel's imposed morality, he brought this on himself and deserves to die.

Coriolis' world has taken a turn when he thought he saw Rothakon in the alleys of the Slums. After that, his perception diverged from reality at an exponential rate. The Justiciar has always been an ambitious man, and as soon as the city found a chink in his will, he fell easily. If the party can find him, probably in the barren manor which he calls "the City Prison", he will certainly find some time in his "busy schedule" to talk to his friends.

Coriolis' weakened form seems to be carrying around his armor and weapons through sheer force of will. In the empty manor hall, he sits down heavily on the floor, smiling at you. "Please, my friends, take a seat, have something to drink if you want. You deserve it, after escaping from the Abyss!" There are no seats or drinks in the room, or in the entire house for that matter, but Coriolis proceeds unabashed. His breath stinks, but with his pale and desiccated face that's no surprise. "I'm glad that our rescue teams found you. I'm certain you have plenty of questions. Let me recount what happened after you left Broken Reach".

"We found Rothakon's trail and discovered that he was going back to Infestant, Ithla-Sathlo's layer. I got Lianne to tell us the way – no, don't worry, we didn't do anything physical on her. We went to Mal Arundak, a surprisingly decent place for the Abyss. Ran by archons, it seems; I know this is incredible and probably suspicious but it no longer matters. Once there, we discovered that the half-fiend was seen in the city mere hours before our arrival!"

Coriolis moves his hand as if he was sipping a drink. "The chase in the alleys was harder than we thought. I immediately realized that the fiend had left some madness spells on his path, for several of our men seemed to go insane as we walked. It was just me and Joseph when we finally found him. I opened the Warrant and read his crimes, and he was frozen in place. Before the magic expired, we bound him well and then proceeded to interrogate him. He was a tough one to crack; I thought Joseph would object to torture but it seems that even paladins can tell a berk who deserves the hardest brand of Justice when they see him. Before long, I had a confession. The verdict was unanimous. With Rothakon's head, we holed up in an inn and waited for the curse to expire. Luckily, you succeeded in your mission!"

"It didn't take much for Demogorgon to kill Ithla-Sathlo. You must have scared him pretty well. My respects and congratulations! It seemed strange to me, using a fiend to bring Justice to another. But you know what? It made my resolve even stronger. It is a proof of the Truth of our faction! Justice IS the force that drives the multiverse! How else could you explain this? A demon lord committing a crime and getting his rightful punishment – by none other than another demon lord?"

"Anyway, we returned to Sigil, and the whole faction was astonished more than you can imagine. I've never told you, but... they didn't think our mission could succeed. They thought I was certainly doomed. That no matter how dangerous the criminals I had already faced, a fiend lord was beyond

mortal Justice. Even Nilesia was doubtful; she said to be patient, that Ithla-Sathlo would eventually meet his end by himself... hah! Noone is beyond Justice. Noone. We showed them, eh? The rest of the factors were so shocked that I could accomplish such a feat, that they started doubting the leadership of young Alisohn. And here I am, as you can see”.

Coriolis opens his arms to encompass the whole barren room. “Factol of the Mercykillers. But this Prison is only the beginning. I have proven that resisting Justice is futile, regardless of one’s strength. The new project of the Mercykiller faction will be made public shortly. We are going to bring Justice to the Powers themselves. We will seek and destroy the gods of crime, theft, murder, trickery, all of them. And destroy them”.

“You think I’m mad? Other people thought that, too. And now, I am the factol. Already, the activity of the Anarchists, Xaositects and Indeps is dwindling in the whole Cage. As the Tenets of Justice say, there is nothing you cannot do while pursuing Justice!”

Coriolis lifts again his hand to his lips, parched by thirst. “Don’t look at me like that. I can drink, I’m not on patrol!”. He chuckles, grinning.

Coriolis isn’t completely dreamcursed, in the sense that he can still recognize the presence and occasionally the identity of something in the real world. But in a way, he’s gone very far. The delusion he’s living in has gripped him deeply. He sees the Prison and the whole Sigil around himself. There is virtually nothing that the PCs can tell him to convince him of the unreality of his life after leaving Broken Reach. In fact, if they try too hard to persuade him, Coriolis will shake his head, assume that they are insane, and order imaginary guards to take them away to Harbinger House (Sigil’s sanitarium for the rich folk, as opposed to the Gatehouse), paid for by the Factol of the Mercykillers. After that, the heroes vanish from his delusion, locked up in a padded room, and the party will become unable to talk to him in any way.

Coriolis is most often found on Philosophers’ Row, but he occasionally wanders the city as well, so the party could really meet him anywhere. The Justiciar still perceives most of what’s going on around him, even though he believes that he is the Mercykiller Factol in Sigil. As a result, he stills jumps and does his duty whenever he sees a crime. This hasn’t happened often enough for the archons or the organized criminal gangs to notice him yet, but it’s just a matter of time.

- **Blades and Chains.** This shop, adjacent to the city walls and deep inside Mal Arundak’s web of enchantment, is specialized in the sale of discount magical weapons and items. The owner (Gerziano/male tiefling sorcerer 4th/Outlands/Neutral Evil), a tiefling of vague Baatezu ascendance, has found a way to make money off the city’s illusions, by basically selling them to outsiders. Gerziano uses *magic aura* spells to create fake magical items and sells them for ridiculously cheap prices. Before the spell expires, the customer has fallen under Alusiel’s enchantment and will believe the item to be genuine in face of proof to the contrary. The more evil-minded shopkeepers in the Market direct people to the Blades and Chains when they haggle too much and waste their time.

- **Alusiel’s Secret Palace.** There are many palaces and manors in Mal Arundak, but noone knows where the city’s leader, the trumpet archon Alusiel, dwells. Her palace is not in Philosopher’s Row, but this is the only certain fact. Even though there aren’t many mansions beside those in the rich street, noone has figured out where Alusiel lives. Fact is, noone has searched very hard, and the place is probably shrouded in illusions anyway. They say that only the hounds know where she lives, and they aren’t talking.

Some say that she lives in the Tower of Light between Copper Road and the Iron Way, but most people agree that this isn’t true. An opinion which is gaining consensus is that Alusiel changes her residence often, choosing between the manors of all those that have fallen to the enchantment web. Supposedly, she does this because she doesn’t trust her archon minions, and not even the hounds know the location of their leader at all times. With her ability to teleport and her perfect knowledge of the city, it is obvious that there is no finding the trumpet archon unless she wants to be found.

This opinion corresponds to the truth, especially the part where Alusiel doesn't trust the hounds. The fallen trumpet archon is acquiring the tanar'ri mindset, and she believes that some of the hounds are planning to kill her and take control of Mal Arundak. She thinks that these archons are fallen, that they have lost the glory of law and goodness and are now little better than fiends. The irony, of course, escapes her. Alusiel lives an illusion which rivals those of the dreamcurse.

The fallen celestial hasn't been seen even by the hounds for the last forty years. Whenever she meets the leaders of the lesser archons, she is shrouded in darkness or illusions. Partly, this is because Alusiel thinks that they may decide to attack her at any moment, and not being clearly seen gives her a tactical advantage. But the main reason is that her corruption is beginning to show on the outside. See, celestials, like fiends and all other exemplars, aren't just strongly aligned creatures. They are quite literally composed of Good. The Outer Planes spring from the beliefs of primes, and so do exemplars. An archon that is no longer Lawful Good is effectively no longer an archon, in a very literal and physical sense. While she becomes more and more similar to tanar'ri in soul, Alusiel is becoming more and more fiendish in aspect and abilities as well. At the same time, she retains all of her celestial powers and qualities, though she will likely lose some of them at some point in the future.

Alusiel	Al. Chaotic Evil	Half-Fiend Trumpet Archon Sorcerer 2 nd	CR: 18
Str: 35 (+12) Dex: 19 (+4) Con: 28 (+9) Int: 20 (+5) Wis: 18 (+4) Cha: 22 (+6)	HP: 12d8+2d4+114 (173) AC: 29 (+4 dex, +15 natural) Initiative: +8 (+4 dex, +4 improved init) Ref: +12 (+8 base, +4 dex) For: +17 (+8 base, +9 con) Will: +12 (+8 base, +4 wis)	Speed: 12, fly 30 (good) Armor: none % fail.: 0% BAB: +12 Melee: +26 (+12 base, +12 strength) Ranged: +16 (+12 base, +4 dexterity)	Check pen.: 0 Grapple: +24
Attacks 2 claws, +26 melee, damage 1d4+12, and Bite, +21 melee, damage 1d6+6			Skills Concentration +24 (+15 ranks, +9 con) Bluff +20 (+14 ranks, +6 cha) Diplomacy +25 (+15 ranks, +6 cha, +4 synergy) Escape Artist +19 (+15 ranks, +4 dex) Handle Animal +21 (+15 ranks, +6 cha) Knowledge (arcane) +20 (+15 ranks, +5 int) Listen +19 (+15 ranks, +4 wis) Move Silently +19 (+15 ranks, +4 dex) Perform (wind instruments) +21 (+15 ranks, +6 cha) Ride +21 (+15 ranks, +4 dex, +2 synergy) Sense Motive +19 (+15 ranks, +4 wis) Spot +19 (+15 ranks, +4 wis) Use Rope +6 (+4 dex, +2 synergy*)
Feats and special abilities Feats: Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Power Attack All attacks are considered magical as well as lawful and good aligned. Damage reduction 10/evil, darkvision 18 mt, low-light vision, immunity to electricity, poison and petrification, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 29, tongues, +4 to saves vs poison. Aura of menace (su): hostiles within 6 mt take -2 to hit, AC and saves for 24 hours or until they hit Alusiel. Will save negates, DC 22. Magic circle against evil (su): CL 14. Smite good (su): 1/day, +14 damage against a good foe. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>detect evil</i> , <i>continual flame</i> , <i>message</i> ; caster level 12 th . <i>Greater teleport</i> at will (self plus 22.5 kg of objects); caster level 14 th . Half-fiend spell-like abilities: 3/day – <i>darkness</i> , <i>poison</i> (DC 18), <i>unholy aura</i> ; 1/day – <i>deseccrate</i> , <i>unholy blight</i> (DC 18), <i>contagion</i> (DC 17), <i>blasphemy</i> (DC 21), <i>unhallow</i> . Caster level 14 th . Alusiel can cast spells from the air and destruction domains. Cleric spells/day: 6/6+1/6+1/5+1/5+1/3+1/3+1/2+1; caster level 14 th . Cleric spells prepared (DC 14 + spell level): 0 th level: <i>create water</i> , <i>guidance</i> , <i>light</i> , <i>read magic</i> , <i>detect magic</i> , <i>detect magic</i> ; 1 st level: <i>entropic shield</i> , <i>shield of faith</i> , <i>divine favor</i> , <i>doom</i> , <i>command</i> , <i>bane</i> , <i>inflict light wounds</i> ; 2 nd level: <i>align weapon</i> , <i>eagle's splendor</i> , <i>undetectable alignment</i> , <i>hold person</i> , <i>bear's endurance</i> , <i>silence</i> , <i>wind wall</i> ; 3 rd level: <i>bestow curse</i> , <i>invisibility purge</i> , <i>searing light</i> , <i>speak with dead</i> , <i>magic vestment</i> , <i>gaseous form</i> ; 4 th level: <i>death ward</i> , <i>divine power</i> , <i>inflict critical wounds</i> , <i>dismissal</i> , <i>dimensional anchor</i> , <i>restoration</i> ; 5 th level: <i>mass inflict light wounds</i> , <i>dispel chaos</i> , <i>true seeing</i> , <i>slay living</i> ; 6 th level: <i>antilife shell</i> , <i>greater dispel magic</i> , <i>heal</i> , <i>chain lightning</i> ; 7 th level: <i>destruction</i> , <i>disintegrate</i> , <i>mass inflict serious wounds</i> Sorcerer spells/day: 6/6; caster level 2 nd . Sorcerer spells known (DC 16 + spell level): 0 th level: <i>prestidigitation</i> , <i>detect poison</i> , <i>touch of fatigue</i> , <i>arcane mark</i> , <i>open/close</i> ; 1 st level: <i>disguise self</i> , <i>silent image</i> .			* when binding

Equipment	
1000 gold worth of ointment for the <i>true seeing</i> spell. 5000 gold worth of diamond dust. A tarnished silver holy symbol, worth 500 gold.	
The <i>ebon shard</i> (overwhelming enchantment, CL unknown).	
Useless lump of metal which used to be a silver trumpet.	
<i>Belt of giant strength</i> +6 (moderate transmutation, CL 8).	
<i>Cloak of resistance</i> +3 (moderate abjuration, CL 9)	

Alusiel's feathery wings look mangled like those of a diseased bird. Only scattered feathers can be seen, over naked bone and tense, sickly-white skin. The rest of her body is similarly transformed, having become gaunt and skeletal with leathery skin, but she is wrapped in *disguise self* spells that give her the appearance of a beautiful woman – but she cannot hide those sickly wings, no matter how hard she tries, and she does not realize that her evil is evident in her face regardless of how smooth her skin is. Her facial expression is something that no celestial could wear. A fixed, malevolent stare over a fiendish grin composed of bared teeth which seems a bit more pointed than normal. Even in clear light, her face always looks slightly darker than her surroundings. Similarly, her voice sounds like perfect music but her mannerisms and words have lost the serene tranquility of the archons. She only speaks with superior coldness, or barely-controlled rage. Finally, her silver trumpet has turned into silent iron.

Alusiel blames the Abyss and the tanar'ri for her transformation. If ever discovered, she would hold that the fiends are doing everything they can to drive her away from their plane, or to get her ousted by her own hounds, and that they have placed a terrible curse on her to demoralize her and her underlings. Is Alusiel beyond redemption? It seems so – but on the planes, only a fool believes in impossibility.

Alusiel's powers over Mal Arundak stem from an artefact known as the *ebon shard*, a multifaceted crystal which refracts light like glass, despite being jet black. In addition to creating the enchantment web, the *ebon shard* can also be used as a *crystal ball*. Alusiel scribes her hound archons frequently using this function of the item, to see whether they need an audience with her. If so, she organizes a meeting, taking care to be ready for combat by casting several combat-oriented clerical spells beforehand in addition to *disguise self*. It is unknown whether Alusiel created the *ebon shard* or found it somewhere. Originally, it was an artefact of Good. Its powers only worked on creatures with the [Evil] descriptor, granting them their darkest desires, but only in their minds. By imprisoning them into their own little world, it prevented them from doing evil in the real one, without directly killing or harming them. Back when she first founded the city, Alusiel thought that the protection of the artefact was the key to creating an outpost of Heaven into the Abyss.

Over time, something changed. One day, watching her city constantly wrecked by chaos and evil wrought from people who weren't the least interested in purification, an Alusiel who was already spiraling downwards mentioned to her archons that the shard wasn't doing enough. That hardest measures were needed. She did something. In the Abyss, maybe simple belief in the need for more cruelty was enough to cause corruption. The shard now worked on all creatures of evil alignment. The city quickly quieted down, but still the trumpet archon didn't feel she had enough control. Again, she managed to modify the shard's magic, letting it operate on creatures of chaotic or evil alignment. Year by year, she moved the line a bit further, until only a paladin or another archon could walk through the city without fear. And today, no mortal is immune.

Now that the hound archons are supposedly plotting against her, Alusiel is wondering whether she should take the final step and let the *ebon shard* exert its influence unbound on every creature in Mal Arundak, including celestials. And, in doing so, irrevocably hand the city back to the Abyss, along with her soul.

- **The Hounds' Barracks.** These six big buildings house the hound archons which patrol Mal Arundak's streets and walls. There are about two dozen hounds in the city, all of them toughened bloods with extra hit dice and/or class levels. Unaffected by the enchantment web, they live Spartan lives because they choose to, and occupy only two of the barracks buildings. Alusiel had the others built to house reinforcements which never came.

Few people in the city know about this, but the seeds of a revolt are actually taking root among the hounds, even if only one of them has admitted it to himself. One of the six leaders, a hound named White, has made the troubled decision of ousting Alusiel. After doing that, White will pick her up along with all the other hounds and anyone in the city who he deems deserving and get back to Mount Celestia as soon as possible, leaving Mal Arundak to its destiny. Hopefully, leaving the Abyss before it's too late, Alusiel can still be saved.

White is slowly, very slowly and carefully, probing the other hounds for supporters. While no official rebellion exists yet, the hounds have divided themselves in two groups, each living in one of the two occupied barracks. There is no open animosity between the two; the division has arisen spontaneously and no archon would dare to say that he or any of the others are anything less than completely loyal to Alusiel. But the sixteen archons living in the first barrack are truly and completely loyal to their superior, either because they think she has a plan, or because they aren't smart enough to question her methods. The eight archons living in the second barrack are those most likely to let a first-time offender go, or to warn people not to stray away from the market – and the most likely, in White's hopes, to join a revolt.

Hound Archon Leader	Al. Lawful Good	Hound Archon Fighter 6 th	CR: 10
Str: 16 (+3) Dex: 10 (+0) Con: 14 (+2) Int: 10 (+0) Wis: 13 (+1) Cha: 12 (+1)	HP: 6d8+6d10+24 (84) AC: 25 (+9 natural, +6 armor) Initiative: +4 improved init Ref: +9 (+7 base, +2 lightning reflexes) For: +12 (+10 base, +2 con) Will: +10 (+7 base, +1 wis, +2 iron will)	Speed: 9 Armor: medium % fail.: 25% BAB: +12 Melee: +15 (+12 base, +3 strength) Ranged: +12 base	Check pen.: -3 Grapple: +15
Attacks +1 <i>greatsword</i> , +17/+12/+7 melee, damage 2d6+6, crit 17-20/x2, and Bite, +11 melee, damage 1d8+1			Skills Concentration +11 (+9 ranks, +2 con) Diplomacy +3 (+1 cha, +2 synergy) Hide +10 (+9 ranks, +4 racial*, -3 armor) Intimidate +13 (+12 ranks, +1 cha) Jump +9 (+9 ranks, +3 str, -3 armor) Listen +10 (+9 ranks, +1 wis) Move Silently +6 (+9 ranks, -3 armor) Sense Motive +10 (+9 ranks, +1 wis) Spot +13 (+9 ranks, +1 wis, +3 skill focus) Survival +14 (+9 ranks, +1 wis, +4 racial*)
Feats and special abilities Feats: Improved Critical: greatsword, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Skill Focus: sense motive, Weapon Focus: greatsword, Weapon Specialization: greatsword, Track All attacks are considered magical as well as lawful and good aligned. Damage reduction 10/evil, darkvision 18 mt, low-light vision, immunity to electricity and petrification, spell resistance 16, tongues, +4 to saves vs poison. Aura of menace (su): hostiles within 6 mt take -2 to hit, AC and saves for 24 hours or until they hit Alusiel. Will save negates, DC 16. Magic circle against evil (su): CL 12. Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>aid</i> , <i>detect evil</i> , <i>continual flame</i> , <i>message</i> ; caster level 6 th . <i>Greater teleport</i> at will (self plus 22.5 kg of objects); caster level 14 th . Change shape (su): can <i>polymorph</i> into any canine or wolf of the animal type from Small to Large size.			
Equipment +1 <i>breastplate</i> (AC +6, max dex +3, check penalty -3, spell failure 25%) (faint abjuration, CL 3) +1 <i>greatsword</i> (damage 2d6+1, crit 19-20/x2) (faint evocation, CL 3)			* in canine form

Hound Archon Militia		Al. Lawful Good	Hound Archon Fighter 6 th	CR: 10
Str: 16 (+3)	HP: 6d8+6d10+24 (84)	Speed: 9	Check pen.: -3	
Dex: 10 (+0)	AC: 25 (+9 natural, +6 armor)	Armor: medium		
Con: 14 (+2)	Initiative: +4 improved init	% fail.: 25%	Grapple: +15	
Int: 10 (+0)	Ref: +9 (+7 base, +2 lightning reflexes)	BAB: +12		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +12 (+10 base, +2 con)	Melee: +15 (+12 base, +3 strength)	Ranged: +12 base	
Cha: 12 (+1)	Will: +10 (+7 base, +1 wis, +2 iron will)			
Attacks			Skills	
+1 <i>greatsword</i> , +17/+12/+7 melee, damage 2d6+6, crit 17-20/x2, and Bite, +11 melee, damage 1d8+1			Concentration +11 (+9 ranks, +2 con)	
Feats and special abilities			Diplomacy +3 (+1 cha, +2 synergy)	
Feats: Improved Critical: greatsword, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Skill Focus: sense motive, Weapon Focus: greatsword, Weapon Specialization: greatsword, Track			Hide +10 (+9 ranks, +4 racial*, -3 armor)	
All attacks are considered magical as well as lawful and good aligned.			Intimidate +13 (+12 ranks, +1 cha)	
Damage reduction 10/evil, darkvision 18 mt, low-light vision, immunity to electricity and petrification, spell resistance 16, tongues, +4 to saves vs poison.			Jump +9 (+9 ranks, +3 str, -3 armor)	
Aura of menace (su): hostiles within 6 mt take -2 to hit, AC and saves for 24 hours or until they hit Alusiel. Will save negates, DC 16.			Listen +10 (+9 ranks, +1 wis)	
Magic circle against evil (su): CL 12.			Move Silently +6 (+9 ranks, -3 armor)	
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>aid</i> , <i>detect evil</i> , <i>continual flame</i> , <i>message</i> ; caster level 6 th .			Sense Motive +10 (+9 ranks, +1 wis)	
<i>Greater teleport</i> at will (self plus 22.5 kg of objects); caster level 14 th .			Spot +13 (+9 ranks, +1 wis, +3 skill focus)	
Change shape (su): can <i>polymorph</i> into any canine or wolf of the animal type from Small to Large size.			Survival +14 (+9 ranks, +1 wis, +4 racial*)	
Equipment			* in canine form	
+1 <i>breastplate</i> (AC +6, max dex +3, check penalty -3, spell failure 25%) (faint abjuration, CL 3)				
+1 <i>greatsword</i> (damage 2d6+1, crit 19-20/x2) (faint evocation, CL 3)				

Not many people know or care about it, but the barracks have recently taken up another resident. That's Joseph, the Harmonium paladin, who stays in the second building, courtesy of White. If the PCs find him, he has a story to tell as well.

The paladin is overjoyed at seeing you. After the initial greetings, he relays his story. "I was found by White in a state of terrible confusion, crying on the street because I couldn't save my friends from whatever was driving us all insane. The hound quickly brought me to the barracks and managed to explain me what was happening. I understood that I couldn't help anyone until I recovered myself. As near as I can tell, the Mercykillers are all out of action, without even a fight. Coriolis has holed up somewhere on Philosophers' Row, and the rest have vanished. Not that I could search very hard, unfortunately. I rely on what the archons tell me, and they don't act to prevent people from going mad".

Joseph looks around. "Is there anyone else in the room besides us? No? Good. I can't trust what I see or hear. I'm not fully healed yet. The hounds are faithful to Alusiel, they wouldn't dream of betraying her. A noble attitude, but in this case it is misplaced. Only White agrees with me that Alusiel is fallen. Mal Arundak is a great tragedy; Alusiel's dream is broken and she spreads her madness to the whole city".

"Now, I know why I was sent here. Rothakon and Ithla-Sathlo are certainly great villains, but they are not my concern now. I'm staying here. I need more time to heal my mind, and then I will help White in his project. I cannot see a trumpet archon fall to Evil and say that I have more important business to do. I'll think about leaving the Abyss afterwards".

"As for you, I can provide you with some information. Rothakon really was here. He stayed for a few days, and left just hours before we arrived. This city is part of the path to his home layer Infestant; Lianne told this to us. I don't know what's happened to the tiefling, but I wouldn't be surprised if she's safe somewhere in town. She has already been here other times, and she knows how to survive. It isn't too hard, if you know what's happening to you and your will is strong. Whenever

you see something you want, doubt it or flat-out ignore it. If you start seeing things that others don't, then stop, ignore them, and wait until they go away. The citizens here get by for years by suppressing their desires. An unusual cruelty, a form of madness in itself, but White and I will make sure that it stops".

Both Joseph and White know that the paladin's ardent desire to save Alusiel is a danger in itself, and that's another reason for which Joseph is unwilling to leave the barracks or do anything at all. If the PCs want to know the full path to Infestant, Joseph can't help much. He wasn't present at Lianne's questioning. Coriolis did tell him that, should Rothakon escape them, they would have to pursue him through the layer of Sulphanorum, but that's all.

If the party does decide to help toppling Alusiel, both White and Coriolis are very excited. With the party's help, they may succeed in their task even without having to convince the other archons. White doesn't yet know how to get Alusiel subdued. The trumpet archon has been seen in city less and less often, and whenever the hounds meet her always in a different place, she is shrouded in illusion. Rumors abound that she is already half-tanar'ri, with powers beyond those of most archons.

- **Thieves Quarter.** This area, built around Copper Road, is far from both the Slums and Philosophers' Row. Several small hills force the road to wind around; the area is composed of small gardens and medium-sized houses of average quality. The place doesn't look much different from a middle-class Prime burg. Surprisingly, this is actually where most of the city's criminal elements dwell. Since criminals are almost by definition purveyors of material wealth, how do they manage to prosper in a place such as Mal Arundak?

The dark is, a few decades ago a powerful priest of a power of theft and chaos (**Thomas Zarandos/male human cleric 14th/Prime Material/Chaotic Neutral**) came to town and, for a quite ridiculous sum, he used several *unhallow* spells to create permanent protections in various underground areas of the city. At first, the gangs pooled their money to get a single small protected area. Then, as "business" picked up, each gang wanted their own safe spot where its dreamcursed members could recuperate. Then, the archons started finding these places and occasionally dispelling them. As a result, Thomas Zarandos has quite a good business in Mal Arundak; he comes once or twice a year and nets several thousand gold by casting *unhallow* for anyone who requires it.

Obviously, Alusiel is extremely hostile to this practice; all the safe spots are well hidden and only known to the members of the gang which owns it. Rumors abound that there are several outside the Thieves Quarter, maybe paid for by the rich philosophers, but so far it seems that the idea hasn't been applied outside the criminal underground, probably for fear of a retaliation in force by the trumpet archon if it became too widespread.

There is no strong leadership among the city underground, but the two most powerful gangs are led by Earless Fred, a ruthless tiefling, and Gaanth Soran, a human who has attracted many subjects by promising wealth safe from Alusiel's web. They each command about fifty men, most of them rogues and fighters. Both have recently learned from a passing sage – in truth, a tanar'ri in disguise, seeking to pass control of Mal Arundak on someone even more wicked than Alusiel – that the source of the trumpet's power over the city is an artefact, an ebony stone which reflects light like glass. If this is true, the gangs would do anything to put their hands on it. Whoever controls the web is king of Mal Arundak. But even finding Alusiel is too difficult, and even if they could meet her, what knight of the crosstrade is good enough to mug a deranged trumpet archon?

If the PCs get to know these gangs, they may find out that Lianne has worked for several of them every now and then, years earlier, making friends and establishing contacts. Shortly after escaping from the Mercykillers, she turned up and started asking repayment for some old favors. As is usual in the Abyss, most of the people she went to refused to help her. Gaanth Soran, however, gave her a place to stay until she could gain or steal enough money to leave. As thanks, Lianne stole about a thousand gold from him in a masterful hit, and promptly vanished. Gaanth is furious, but he has no lead on the tiefling. Some people say that she's fled down into the tunnels which run deep below the city, even below the cellars and dungeons where the thieves dwell. But everyone in town knows that *noone* goes there; if half the tales about the Mal Arundak underground are true, the tiefling would be crazy to go there.

- **Tower of Light.** This 250 meters tall building, the tallest one in Mal Arundak by far, can be seen from anywhere in the city by day or night. It is basically a big lighthouse, built as a symbol of what Mal Arundak was supposed to be – a beacon of light in the darkness of the Abyss. Today, it is unmanned and never lit as Alusiel has decreed that all archons deal with security and law enforcement instead. The area around it is rocky and sparsely inhabited.

Unknown to everyone else in town, a chasme tanar'ri has managed to reach the tower undetected from outside town, and has made a lair for itself at the top. The fiend has been able to keep his presence a secret by killing everyone who has come nearby, using them as food, but the disappearings have already been noticed by the criminal gangs and are starting to worry the hound archon militia as well.

Currently, the hounds think that the problem is some kind of internal struggle between the gangs of the Thieves Quarter, while the gangs themselves think that the hounds are killing them off one at a time. As of now, neither group has yet realized that all the victims vanished near the Tower of Light, but it is only a matter of time. Chances are that either party will offer the PCs a reward if they scout around the Tower and find what's going on.

If the truth is revealed to the archons, they will quickly report it to Alusiel. If there's something that can bring Alusiel out of hiding, that's a tanar'ri in her town. She'll show up at the tower to kill the chasme herself. If the party has any plans on the trumpet, this could be a good occasion to enact them.

More of the Dark

Currently, Lianne is hurrying towards Infestant, though the reasons for this may vary. If somehow she knows that the PCs went to spill the dark to Demogorgon, then she is running as fast as she can to warn her grandfather Ithla-Sathlo. She hopes that this crucial information, if wrapped the right way, may win her survival. Otherwise, Lianne is going there because she has heard, like the Mercykillers, that Rothakon was in Mal Arundak just hours before she arrived. This means that he hasn't arrived in Infestant yet – in the worst case, he hasn't even completed half of the journey.

It is very likely that the half-fiend has already contacted Ithla-Sathlo through magic, but if he hasn't, and if Lianne reaches Infestant first, then she might win her grandfather's favor by recounting the events and placing the blame on her father.

Chasme		Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Outsider (Chaotic, Evil) (Abyss)	CR: 14
Str: 18 (+4)	HP: 13d8+52 (110)	Speed: 6, climb 6, fly 12 (good)		
Dex: 16 (+3)	AC: 23 (-1 size, +3 dex, +11 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 18 (+4)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 12 (+1)	Ref: +11 (+8 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +13 Grapple: +21		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +12 (+8 base, +4 con)	Melee: +17 (+13 base, +4 strength, -1 size)		
Cha: 12 (+1)	Will: +9 (+8 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +16 (+13 base, +3 dexterity, -1 size)		
Attacks				Skills
2 claws, +17 melee, damage 2d4+4+wound, and bite +15 melee, damage 1d8+2				Climb +20 (+16 ranks, +4 str)
Feats and special abilities				Concentration +20 (+16 ranks, +4 con)
Feats: Multiattack, Power attack				Hide +15 (+16 ranks, +3 dex, -4 size)
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.				Listen +25 (+16 ranks, +1 wis, +8 racial)
Damage reduction 10/cold iron and good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 19, telepathy (can communicate with any creature within 30 meters that has a language).				Move silently +19 (+16 ranks, +3 dex)
Wounding (ex): a successful claw attack opens a wound that bleeds for 1 point of damage per round, in addition to normal damage, until stopped by application of the Heal skill (DC 15) or any magical healing. Multiple wounds are cumulative.				Search +17 (+16 ranks, +1 int)
Sleep drone (su): a chasme can buzz and drone as a free action. All creatures within 9 meters that hear it must succeed at a Will save (DC 17) or fall asleep for 2d4 hours. A sleeping creature can be awakened by vigorous stimuli. A creature that makes its save is immune to the drone of that chasme for one day. The DC is based on Charisma.				Sense motive +17 (+16 ranks, +1 wis)
Fear aura (su): anyone within 9 meters that is viewing the chasme must succeed at a Will save (DC 17) or be affected as by a <i>fear</i> spell, caster level 8 th . A creature that makes its save is immune to the aura of that chasme for one day. The DC is based on Charisma. Tanar'ri are immune.				Spot +25 (+16 ranks, +1 wis, +8 racial)
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>darkness</i> , <i>desecrate</i> , <i>detect good</i> , <i>detect magic</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>telekinesis</i> and <i>greater teleport</i> (self plus 22,5 kg of objects only). Caster level 7 th . DCs are Charisma-based.				Spellcraft +17 (+16 ranks, +1 int)
Summon 2-16 dretches or another chasme 1/day with 35% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.				

The chasme will stay hidden on the tower's top. The roof is wide enough that the fiend can't really be seen from below; when it senses intruders, it will fly in view and try to knock them off one by one using *telekinesis*, while using its free action abilities to hamper them. Characters that fall from the top of the tower take 20d6 damage.

• **The Palaces of Temptation.** These places, scattered around Mal Arundak, are a business peculiar to this city. Located in the thickest parts of the enchantment web, the Palaces of Temptation are where the citizens try to learn to survive in their town without going mad. Despite the name, they are not all palaces and they don't all deal with temptation. They are all places where a man's resolve is put to the test.

In these places, a body is put before all things he may want – real stuff, not illusions – and he must resist and refuse them. Each of the places is specialized in one thing or another; for example, a big one is the Temple of Pleasure, dedicated to sex. Another very popular one is the Charnelhouse, home of all food, especially whatever is most tasty, fattening and generally unhealthy. Others include the Aquasphere, a great spa where people can – could – enjoy a relaxing bath and sauna; or the Slave Market, for those who dream of control and domination. Technically, many fine inns and alehouses may count as Palaces of Temptation as well. Even Alusiel recognizes the need to eat and sleep. But eating *good food* and sleeping on a *fine mattress* – well, that's another thing entirely. Or not – the precise boundaries of her laws are as shifting as anything else in the Abyss. This perverted self-torture is what the fallen celestial thinks of as purification.

Alusiel established the first ones as part of her contrived testing of the mortal soul, but it turned out that people were willing to pay to use their "services". After that, the proliferation of the Palaces was just a matter of time. Some of Mal Arundak's inhabitants aren't really interested in using these places to fortify their resolve against earthly desires as much as to satisfy them. They go to the Temple of Pleasure knowing that the prostitutes there are real and that they won't go insane. But in

truth, everyone else knows that this is a dangerous game. Those who start indulging in these habits are usually seen as dreamcursed in a matter of weeks.

- **Other places.** Mal Arundak can be broadly divided into two areas. Around the Silver Bridge and the Iron Way, it has a very urban look. Areas such as the Slums, Philosophers' Row, and the Grand Market look like part of a great city or even Sigil itself. Around Copper Road, instead, Mal Arundak is a lot less densely inhabited. The reason is probably in the terrain; the Copper Road area is very irregular, featuring hills, rocky ground and many verdant areas, with houses interspersed between them and only really dense on the main road's edges. Besides the residential buildings, there isn't much else of interest for adventurers. Most of the city's services are located in the Market. They say that you can find anything you want somewhere in the city, but smart cutters don't trust these rumors.

A Seemingly Endless Time

While the PCs deal with their own problems, Graz'zt's plan keep moving. The abyssal lord sent a team of githyanki, guided by a secret agent of his named Dhakalor, to steal the Selthian Orb as it passed through the portal to Maldithar. Currently, the Orb is safe in his possession, within an anti-magic field, but Graz'zt still has a job for Dhakalor and his unwitting githyanki underlings (who believe Dhakalor acts under orders from the Lich Queen Vlaakith).

Dhakalor is supposed to meet the PCs in Mal Arundak and keep an eye on them. This is just common sense for Graz'zt, who wants to keep everything under control until the whole plot has succeeded. Ideally, Dhakalor should keep the PCs busy until Demogorgon has killed Ithla-Sathlo, and to this end the githyanki has been given information which he may leak to the PCs to keep them in town, either by telling them directly when they ask around, or by having someone else do it. He knows that Rothakon has recently been in Mal Arundak, and he may say this hoping that the party stays here to investigate. He knows how the city creates its illusions and how to avoid them, and he may let the PCs know this if it seems that they are scared enough to leave the town. From his point of view, however, it would be better if the party just got dreamcursed, thus staying nice and quiet.

Dhakalor has descriptions of all the members of the party as they were before they left Broken Reach to go to Demozg. He'll use his underlings to spy on any new member, using the githyanki's innate power of *clairaudience/clairvoyance* and charming people the PCs have talked to. If Jamixena is with the party and she lets out that she is bossing the PCs around or working for Demogorgon, Dhakalor will become rather worried. Given the circumstances, any new member of the party which seems to give orders must be an agent of Demogorgon, and almost certainly a fiend in disguise. The traitorous githyanki certainly cannot ask his wizard to use a *sending* on Graz'zt, so he has to take a decision by himself. Not knowing what Demogorgon's plans are, he'll do the one thing that is sure to have an impact, killing the marilith.

More of the Dark

The githyanki pirates that helped Graz'zt gain the Selthian Orb have arrived here recently. Their leader is Dhakalor, a githyanki knight who has secretly pledged alliance to the Abyssal lord, has been tasked with making sure that Demogorgon is unable to use the Mercykillers or the PCs to damage Ithla-Sathlo during the forthcoming battle. Graz'zt wants the match to be as even as possible to cause the two other lords to waste as much of their forces as possible. Obviously, the match will never be truly even; Demogorgon is simply too powerful to worry about losing to Ithla-Sathlo. Still, Graz'zt figures, no reason to make things more unbalanced than they already are.

This is much, much easier said than done. Mariliths are among the most powerful tanar'ri in the Abyss. Engaging her in melee is a very bad idea. A weapon needs to be both made in cold iron *and* good aligned to bypass Jamixena's DR, and her AC is enough to prevent the use of lots of power attack (especially after using *unholy aura*, which may also deal STR damage to the attacker). After attacking, the character needs to somehow get away before her round comes – if Jamixena gets a full attack on someone, he's dead meat. She has *true sight* and illusions will be useless; the only things that may make someone survive are heavy DR, massive HPs, or lots of luck. And after the swords, she'll grapple and constrict with her tail – Fortitude save or be removed from the fight for

several rounds. Her arcane defenses are equally formidable. SR 25 means that most spells that the PCs can cast will fail to affect her, and after SR she still has her impressive saving throws (boosted by *unholy aura*) and elemental resistances. She can try to summon another tanar'ri to her help as well (she'll pick a nalfeshnee, for its dispelling capabilities).

Dhakalor is used to picking on targets weaker than himself, and this situation is unknown to him, so he considers what forces he could bring against the fiend. The party is the first choice. After all, Graz'zt didn't say kill them, but he didn't say look out for them, either. Between them and his githyankis, they may be able to kill the fiend, even if it will be a dangerous battle.

With the right plan, the hound archons could be brought in the fray as well. But this means alerting Alusiel too. The fallen trumpet is probably a match for the marilith by herself and with all the other allies the tanar'ri can't win, but there's no telling what Alusiel may do afterwards. She may be pissed enough at the PCs for having brought a fiend into Mal Arundak that she'd kill them too.

The PCs, on the other hand, have all the interest in getting rid of Jamixena. The marilith wants them to capture the Mercykillers and bring them to Demogorgon. Regardless of the morality of this action, any berk can figure out that the demon lord isn't going to let them go after he has all the prisoners he needs in one place. Fact is, the party *has* to get rid of the marilith one way or another if they want to survive the week. No matter how long they stall, in the end Jamixena will knock them unconscious and drag them back to her master rather than return empty-handed. And if she can't do that, she'll kill them. Either way, they're dead.

Luckily, Jamixena has a major weak point too. If the party has fought the chasme on the top of the Tower of Light, they may have had occasion to notice it. She's not nearly as dangerous against airborne opponents. The best she can do is throwing *blade barriers* on top of opponents; that's 22d6 damage (it's empowered by the Abyss) but a Reflex save negates them and flying characters can get around the barrier easily. Jamixena may also try to use *telekinesis* against single opponents, but again that's not nearly as bad as getting in melee with her.

Whatever the PCs do, they must time their attack very carefully and, if possible, prevent the marilith from getting away by *teleporting* as soon as the combat is going bad for her. If Jamixena can get back to Demogorgon, she'll be back with reinforcements in a matter of minutes. The best strategy would be to attack her while Demogorgon is still on his way to Infestant so that she doesn't know his exact location, and trying to place a *dimensional anchor* on her (hard, but it would greatly reduce her chances of getting away). This way, even if she escapes, without Demogorgon around she will only be able to quickly muster relatively weak tanar'ri as help, and it will take her more time anyway. As the baatezu would gladly notice, the lack of a definite command structure is a serious liability.

Still, like most powerful demons, Jamixena is perfectly capable of carefully planning in advance. And, like all tanar'ri, she is paranoid. While she is with the party, she will make sure that at least one of the other PCs is within sight at any moment. She'll never leave them all alone – and she doesn't sleep, doesn't eat, doesn't go to the bathroom, and indeed doesn't blink. When the party and her go around gathering information, she'll make sure to find out how the city works, what a tanar'ri has to look out for, which places are more dangerous, and anything else she might need to make a future combat easier. With her telepathic powers, she may even be able to question the dreamcursed, or to ask NPCs without telling the party exactly what she has learnt. Jamixena can't be reliably defeated by somehow getting her to become dreamcursed, either. It will incapacitate her for a while, but eventually she'll teleport away for one reason or another, and the city can't prevent that.

The Mal Arundak Underground

As already described, Mal Arundak has a surprisingly extensive organized crime element, despite all that is going against those types. But it also has a more literal underground, a network of cellars and caves which runs deep under the less urbanized part of the city. Like the city itself, the under-

ground has a roughly triangular shape, extending downwards. The tallest point of the triangle is located in the Thieves Quarter area of the town proper. Many buildings there have a cellar, and most cellars are linked by tunnels. This small undercity is where the criminals live and prosper, away from the eyes of the hounds but mindful of their own sanity. But a few of those diggings revealed natural caves more ancient than the city itself. The rogues never enter them, but like everyone else in the city they often fantasize about going there and finding untold riches or precious secrets. The result is that there are at least as many rumors as there are thieves, and they are all false.

The second point of the triangle connects the tunnels to the Stench, the rift which lies to Mal Arundak's side and constantly belches sulphuric fumes into the air. Several tunnels pop out in a cluster in the canyon's side, at about two hundred meters of depth. The third vertex is midway between the other two, but at almost one full kilometer of depth. There, the caves reach so deep that they pierce into another layer entirely: Sulphanorum, the noxious 303rd layer. This is where the chasme who lairs in the Tower of Light came from, bypassing the city walls and the triangular portal, both well guarded by the archons. It is also where Rothakon and Lianne have gone, following the path to Infestant.

There are several reasons for which the PCs may want to visit this place. First, they may be chasing after Lianne or Rothakon. Second, Dhakalor may find some excuse to get them to explore the caves as a waste of time. Third, if Jamixena knows about the caves and begins to think that the PCs want to cross her, she will try to make use of them, either by luring the party in and attacking them or by trying to stay near the tunnel entrances so that she can quickly flee there in case she gets *dimensional anchored*. Finally, Alusiel's web only reaches about a hundred meters or so deep, though practically no one in town knows this.

The underground is composed of natural caves of varying sizes, and its most interesting feature is the multitude of rivers of fine sand that flow downwards from the desert, disappearing into the depths of the layer. These streams behave much like water; characters can swim in them (with a +5 circumstance bonus) although visibility is obviously zero. However, doing so can be dangerous. If something interrupts or disrupts the flow of a sand river, it may halt and trap the character, forcing him to dig his way out before suffocation. It takes a Strength, Dexterity or Escape Artist check with a DC of 20 to break free of still sand.

The largest caves tend to go down vertically or almost so, for up to a hundred meters, with ledges running along the walls and smaller caves connecting the big ones. A creature can move up or down the complex very quickly by flying (or jumping, of course), while horizontal movement requires navigation of twisting and relatively narrow tunnels. Due to the lack of water, there are no stalactites, stalagmites, nor any other similar formations. Most of the surfaces are in fact quite polished from the sand's abrasive action.

The last of the underground's natural dangers is the sulphuric smoke coming in from Sulfanorum and the Stench. Large pockets of gas fill entire caves, acting as a poison which deals 1d6 nonlethal damage every minute unless a Fortitude save is made (DC 19). In the areas closest to the Stench and in the depths leading to Sulfanorum itself, there are small pockets where the fumes are so thick from having accumulated over the centuries that they require a check every round. Tanar'ri are immune, of course.

Mal Arundak's underground is mostly uninhabited. Occasionally, a fiend may come in from Sulfanorum, but that's about it. The superstitions of the folk living in the city are wrong, but as with everything else, they don't dare hope that there is a place where they can escape Alusiel's rule, because with hope comes desire, and with desire comes insanity.

More Work?

Six days after the party has left Demozg, the Demogorgon reaches Infestant, the 329th layer of the Abyss, home layer of Ithla-Sathlo, with a massive army of tanar'ri. Neither Rothakon nor Lianne have managed to warn him of what was coming, caught as they were in their schemes to gain his

favor, but even if they did it wouldn't have made a real difference. In a fierce battle, Rothakon's father sees his realm devastated and his servants decimated. The plant fiends are burned down by Demogorgon's balor-led battalions and the dark druids are killed by the dozen. Eventually, Demogorgon faces Ithla-Sathlo, screaming rage and casting spells, burning hotter than the sun itself. Ithla-Sathlo is slain, any remaining dreams of becoming a recognized Abyssal power finally shattered.

But his soul is not free. Infiltrated in Demogorgon's horde, a powerful necromancer, a servant of Graz'zt posing as a regular wizard cultist, was able to snatch Ithla-Sathlo's soul as it fled the archfiend's body, using a variant *trap the soul* spell. At the first occasion, the gem containing Ithla-Sathlo's soul was sent to the Triple Realm of Graz'zt. From there, it still powers the spell binding the PCs to the Abyss, and is now unable to break it even if it wanted to. Demogorgon senses that something is amiss, and orders his troops to march back to the Gaping Maw.

In his throne room in Azzagrat, Graz'zt receives the soul of Ithla-Sathlo and puts it near the Selthian Orb. Only one element remains. The spell which Ithla-Sathlo intended to use to corrupt the Orb and absorb its power. Graz'zt waits for the return of the spies he sent to steal that secret during the battle. And waits. And waits. And gets nervous. And enraged...

Meanwhile, back in Mal Arundak, as news trickle in that Demogorgon has triumphed over a minor abyssal lord that challenged him, the heroes realize with horror that they still can't leave the plane. Though they can't know it yet, Ithla-Sathlo's soul is still powering the curse from within its crystal prison, but the archfiend is now unable to end the spell. Hopefully the party has already got rid of Jamixena if she was with them; otherwise, a fight is now inevitable as Demogorgon has no more use for the PCs or the Mercykillers.

At about this time, Dhakalor receives orders from his lord Graz'zt. He must bring the PCs to the Triple Realm, because the Abyssal Lord has a job for them. See, Graz'zt sent two covert agents to the battle on Infestant – a necromancer who stole Ithla-Sathlo's soul, and another wizard who was supposed to steal the secret to siphoning away the power of the Selthian Orb. Only the first spellcaster succeeded in his mission. Demogorgon uncovered and killed the other, and now Graz'zt has the Orb but doesn't know what to do with it. So, he has quickly assembled a new scheme – sending the PCs to recover the spell.

The heroes are a good choice for several reasons. First, they are already neck-deep into the whole conflict, so Graz'zt doesn't need to make the whole thing more complex by involving another party. Second, if they fail and get killed, they will be so many less variables to worry about, so it's a win-win situation. Third, and this is the real reason, they are reliable: Graz'zt can give them several good reasons, besides the usual death threats, to *want* to do the job. A promise to release Ithla-Sathlo's soul, thus freeing them from the curse once and for all, is only the most obvious argument. The fiend is devious enough to find ways to plant suggestions without looking like he was the one who did it – for example, he may let the PCs know, through Dhakalor or another unknown minion, or even by dropping clues on their road, that there may be a way to break the curse on Infestant, or to recover the Selthian Orb, or to get revenge on Rothakon. Graz'zt doesn't think that any of that is true, but he is among the smartest lords and one of the few that enjoy using guile more than brute strength. He will cover his plans in as many layers as are needed to make sure that the party has no choice but doing what he wants. A servant that is reliable and powerful at the same time is one of the few things that even an Abyssal Lord is hard-pressed to find.

But Dhakalor doesn't know anything about this. The only thing he knows is that he has to get the PCs to the Triple Realm as soon as possible. If he hasn't already, he will meet the PCs and try to get on their good side. He'll pose as an envoy of the lich-queen Vlaakith, sent to spy on the political situation of the Abyss. He'll say that he has heard of powerful factions in the Abyss getting interested in the party, and that he is willing to share information in exchange for help in traveling through the plane. Dhakalor is going to share as little chant as possible, and initially he will only say that he has heard that the PCs are involved in the recent, quick war between Demogorgon and Ithla-Sathlo. The githyanki will say that he offers the PCs to travel with him to the Triple Realm of

Graz'zt, because it is the only place where they will be safe from retaliation by Demogorgon. If the PCs make mention of their curse, Dhakalor suggests that Graz'zt is known to be a powerful sorcerer and an enemy of Demogorgon. Evidently, Demogorgon did something to kill Ithla-Sathlo without releasing the PCs, and only Graz'zt may be interested in thwarting his plans and powerful enough to do so. Regardless of the PCs' reactions, Dhakalor will not reveal that Graz'zt has explicitly asked for them (since he couldn't explain how he knows this), except as the very last resort.

How do the PCs go to the Triple Realm? Dhakalor knows the way; he'll say that he has been preparing for the trip and that he has gathered information. First, they need to get back on the Plains of Infinite Portals, and this is easy enough. Next, they need to use a portal there, which is protected by the fortress of Abtax. Hurriedly, Dhakalor will explain that this isn't nearly as hard as it sounds.

Getting back to the Plains is trivial. From there, the portal in Abtax leads to Zrintor, the Viper Forest on the 45th layer, not far from Graz'zt's capital. Azzagrat, Graz'zt's realm which spans three layers, is a major center of Abyssal commerce and chances are that the fiends in the fortress will let the party through without too much hassle.

The only hard bit is getting from Gallowsgate to Abtax, but "luckily" Dhakalor happens to know the road. It's a week or so of travel, and between the PCs and the githyanki, they need to avoid the molydei and any large mob of fiends, but they can handle everything else on the topmost layer.

Abtax

Abtax is a fortress of medium size, bigger than Gedmazzar but smaller than Mithrengo, even though it looks a lot bigger than it really is (most of the space is taken up by large courtyards). Abtax consists of three concentric rings. The outmost one is the fortress' walls: a two hundred meters wide iron circle, twenty meters tall and two meters thick. Enormous spikes point upwards at irregular points of the wall, reaching as tall as forty meters, and making Abtax look like a titanic iron crown from a distance.

The middle ring is the fortress proper. It is thirty meters thick, and the diameter of its inner and outer walls is 80 and 110 meters respectively. This leaves almost 90 meters of circular courtyard between the walls and itself. The final ring is a smaller circular wall, fifteen meters in diameter and six meters tall, which surrounds the center of Abtax. At the center, a 10 meters wide circular slab of iron, a half meter thick, rests on the ground like a well cover. In fact, that's what it is – the pit which leads to Azzagrat is a bottomless well, covered by the slab of iron. A strong levitation enchantment allows it to be raised at will by the master of the fortress.

Abtax is currently governed by a marilith in the service of Graz'zt, but she doesn't show herself to visitors. Abtax's garrison is pretty strong for a fortress this size: the marilith commands five vrock, ten babaus, four hezrous, five bulezau, a pack of armanites strong of fifty fiends, a couple rutterkins and two hundreds between manes and dretches, most of which are kept in cramped underground cells. There is also a goristro guarding the portal, but currently this is more a nuisance than an asset, as the party is going to find out.

Despite this mighty defenses, Abtax is in fact much more open than most places the PCs have visited in the Abyss. This doesn't make it any less wicked, though. The doors are wide open, but several fiends are guarding them. One babau, three armanites and a dozen between manes and dretches are on the walls above the gate, wailing, laughing, occasionally hitting each other, and generally making a lot of noise. On the ground, there are two succubi. One of them is squatting near the corpse of a human, searching him for valuables, while the other leans on the gate. The man, a brown-haired warrior about twenty years old, looks pale and withered, having died from energy drain from the succubus.

Though the fiends take pleasure in tricking and killing anyone that comes near and looks like an easy prey, they won't attack the PCs unless provoked. The babau will talk to them, asking what they want, and laughing when they ask to use the portal. Rather than explaining his hilarity, he'll get an armanite to accompany the party inside Abtax and towards the center.

As they walk, the heroes can see a dozen or so large tents, scattered around the outmost courtyard. If they ask, the fiend explains that they belong to slave merchants, waiting with their load of mortals for the portal to be accessible. The two succubi at the gate are with them. The armanite leads them through the middle ring and tells them to climb a ladder up onto the inner walls (the centaur fiend just teleports on them). There are a whole bunch of the centaur fiends on these walls. From there, the party sees the largest tanar'ri they've seen this far – the goristro, sitting on the iron slab which covers the portal. The armanite explains that the stupid beast refuses to get away, and they can't lift the iron while it's there. The merchants have asked the tanar'ri to get rid of it, but the fiends either don't care about the portal being blocked, or they are afraid to attack the goristro.

The armanite tells the party that the portal is under the iron slab, and that the iron slab can't be raised with the extra tons of the goristro on it. If the party wants to kill the beast, they're welcome to try. The monster certainly looks intimidating; it looks like an oversized, fiendish monster half-way between a bipedal bull and a bear, close to eight meters tall, with bulging muscles that look like they could tear the iron wall apart and multiple horns pointing downwards. It has huge hands and feet, but no claws – not that it needs them.

If the PCs wander the merchants' camp, they see that their primary trading good are slaves. The merchants are carrying a total of a hundred men. About half of them are humans and tieflings, the rest are a mix of all common Prime races and a few bariaur and aasimar. If the party talks to the merchants, they learn that the fiend has been there for more than a week. The slaver who has been here the longest is Ssariss, a member of the serpent-like Tso race. Ssariss can tell the PCs that the goristro is the offspring of Owantz, a fiend of the same species but bigger and far smarter. Owantz is charged with guarding the borders of Azzagrat, and merchants strike deals with him for safe passage. Apparently, the deal isn't working now. Ssariss and the rest would gladly just kill the goristro in Abtax, if only they could. They might even offer a reward for the PCs if they did the deed for them.

The party should take care not to anger the tanar'ri and not to start a fuss with the slavers. If the fiends see big trouble, they will teleport away and call Owantz in a matter of a few rounds, and *he* makes his son look like a diseased manes by comparison.

Azzagrat

Azzagrat comprises the layers from the 45th to the 47th. Each of the layers is very big – well, they are spatially infinite just like most of the others actually, but Graz'zt's realm is greater in complexity. Each layer features different climates, numerous geographical areas, several cities, mountains and plains, swamps and forests, rivers and seas, almost like a dark, evil world in its own right. The vastness of Azzagrat is a testimony to Graz'zt's power. Not even most gods rule over so much. Hopefully, the PCs won't stray far from the capital city Zelatar. Details of the locations they'll certainly visit are given here; the 2E adventure *For Duty and Deity* provides descriptions of more locations on Azzagrat.

The topmost layer, the 45th, is a place of subdued sounds and light, vaguely reminiscent of the Gray Waste. The light from the sun is bright enough to see clearly, but it washes everything in shades of gray. Similarly, there is a constant background noise of screams of horrible pain coming from everywhere – but all sounds seem to come from far, far away. Even faces are easier to forget here, and people tend to go unnoticed. Every being here receives a +5 bonus to Hide and Move Silently checks.

The 46th layer is very different, and it looks very weird to first-time visitors. There is no sun in the sky, because light comes from the ground. The soil of the layer shines with light, which reaches upwards towards the dark sky. People light their houses by removing a tile from the floor. Objects on the ground seem to project great columns of darkness. During the “night”, the ground is dark, and the sky looks gray (some suppose that the 46th layer is actually the sun of the 45th, which in turn is the sky of the 46th. So far, noone has been able to fly from one to the other). The scream of tor-

tured petitioners can be heard everywhere. The mystical nature of the layer makes it easier to reverse truth and makes lies sound convincing; everyone here gains a +5 bonus to Bluff checks.

The 47th layer is bathed in light from a blue sun, and, like the others, in the howls of tortured souls. Cold and heat are reversed here. All flames burn blue and deal cold damage, and ice is hot to the touch. [Cold] spells deal fire damage, and [Fire] spells deal cold damage. The blue light is rather confusing; it makes it difficult to recognize faces, so every creature here gains a +5 bonus to Disguise checks.

Azzagrat is more connected than most Abyssal layers. There are a great many gates between the three layers, taking the form of natural pits of flames, ovens, or columns of fire. No key is required; all one has to do is to jump into the flames, and he'll pop out on another layer. Take care, though: the flames are definitely real and hot. Characters entering a fiery gate take 3d6 fire damage during the trip (on the 47th layer, that's cold damage). Unfortunately, Azzagrat has lots of natural pits of flames, ovens, and columns of fire that *aren't* gates, and there is no way of telling the difference short of walking in. Only about one in three of those is a real gate. Don't bother asking the fiends; they take great fun in getting people to walk into fire for nothing.

These three layers are also permanently connected by the city Zelatar, Graz'zt's capital which exists in all three layers simultaneously, and by the River of Salt. This river is a flowing crystalline mass; anything that falls into it takes 8d6 damage per round as the crystals grind him into a fine red paste. Even just putting a hand in means taking 3d6 damage. Anyone that takes damage from the River of Salt is wracked by horrible pain; a Fortitude save is required (DC 15 for just a hand, or 25 for total immersion), or the character will be dazed for one round.

The PCs arrive in the middle of the Viper Forest, which is about a hundred kilometers wide. The forest feels very quiet; there are no fiends and no animals, only odd-looking trees. Zrintor, as it is called, is a forest composed of the lethal viper trees. These creatures, half fiend and half plant, look like trees which have snakes in place of branches. The trees are intelligent, though they can't communicate except with other viper trees. They don't attack other tanar'ri, and they generally don't attack during the day, and they usually don't attack anyone who carries an open fire. When they aren't aroused, they seem to be inert; nothing more than strange scaly trees with branches that look like serpents, unsettling but not dangerous. The wind makes them rustle as any other tree. But when the wind dies down, the branches still rustle. And during the night, they suddenly come to life and attack.

Fire is the viper trees' weak point. They burn very well, and when they die from fire damage they explode, setting nearby trees on fire as well. Lighting up a viper tree will eventually kill it, but the fire has a good chance of spreading to a large portion of the forest, turning it into a wailing inferno. PCs that start a forest fire are in trouble; the fire front moves at a speed of 12 and unless they can run at least that fast, they will find themselves engulfed in it. The fire front will chase them, as if it had its own malicious intellect, until they are out of the forest.

Anyone who ends up in a fire will take 1d6 damage per minute from the flames, until he can find a clearing or some other relatively safe place. This requires a Search check, DC 30; the time it takes to find a safe place is one minute. If the characters fail the check, they will still eventually find a place, but it will take them one extra minute for every two points by which they failed the check. For every hour they stay in the burning forest, they have to make a Fortitude save (DC 17) every hour or take 1d3 Constitution damage from the toxic fumes which the trees release when burning.

After one day or so, a storm breaks out. The rains falls heavily on the burning forest – and on the PCs, if they are still outside. The water is salty and warm; though the PCs can stand it, exposed metal risks corrosion. All exposed metal items take 1d6 points of damage from the oxidizing rain (ignore hardness). When the storm is over, the fire has been put off, but a full third of the forest has been burnt down. The party should neither worry nor be glad for this; forest fires are common in Zrintor, but the forest always grows back in a matter of weeks.

There are several cities in Graz'zt's realm, but Zelatar is by far the largest. Portions of the city exist on each of the three layers, so that as a berk is wandering from a ward to another he may find himself on another layer entirely (luckily, as the lighting conditions vary so much between the layers, it is easy to notice when you've crossed a border). Usually, the changes are easier as one follows the River of Salt, which meanders through the whole town and is usually not far, wherever you are in Zelatar.

Fiends use magical boats and barges built from iron, bones, or even living petitioners to sail on the river and get from a layer to the next. But they won't let anyone on – visitors have to walk. And there are plenty of sites to visit and sights to see as you walk in Zelatar; the city is positively huge. If anyone was able to make an accurate counting, he would find out that Zelatar houses close to two hundred thousand creatures, most of them tanar'ri.

Graz'zt's capital is a major Abyssal trading center. Unlike Broken Reach, where most of the commerce between the Abyss and the rest of the multiverse takes place, Zelatar is where the fiends and those who serve them come to trade. The economy of the city is noticeably slanted towards the demons' offers and demands.

Many of the mortals who come here are slave merchants. They come to Zelatar from hundreds of Prime worlds, bringing prisoners of war or born slaves to be sold to the tanar'ri, who use them as anything from food to toys to Blood War conscripts. Slaves of every race are on sale in Zelatar – humans, tieflings, elves, dwarves, orcs, goblins and goblinoids, kobolds, halflings, gnomes, and even some rarer race. Aasimars are especially prized.

There aren't many mercenaries here; Graz'zt doesn't employ mortals as troops, and he only provides a token effort for the Blood War. Rumors insist that he'd like nothing more than seeing the Baatezu and Tanar'ri allied in the conquest of the whole multiverse.

The trade of spells and magic items is rather brisk in Zelatar. Most common and uncommon magical items can be found somewhere if the party takes some hours to look around the numerous marketplaces. Surprisingly, weapons and armor are somewhat less easy to find than items less suited to physical conflict. Graz'zt, more than any other tanar'ri, uses deceit and manipulation as his means, before brute strength (though he certainly doesn't lack that either), and this is reflected in his city's commerce. The main danger is getting handed cursed stuff. A full third of the items of power that change hands in Zelatar don't do exactly what it says on the box, and some are dangerous if not outright lethal. Simple stuff such as potions and low-level scrolls can be traded in relative safety, but above that it's buyer beware. The right contacts among the most powerful fiends in town may lead to finding genuine and rarer items of power, though most people wouldn't want to pay the price.

While money is good enough for the mortals and the lesser fiends, the movers and shakers of Zelatar aren't interested in mere gold. They deal in magical items, favors, and souls. It is not a coincidence that the soul-stealing shadow fiends are often found in Zelatar, selling their "wares" to the highest bidder.

Graz'zt himself has always use for more: the city itself has been built with the souls of all the mortals he has tricked into his service. The most shocking sight that awaits travelers is that if you stare at any wall, flagstone or door in Zelatar, you can see a face – a face screaming in tortured anguish. Supposedly, the city is where the screams that can be heard all around the realm come from. As far as the PCs can learn, nothing can be done to save these petitioners; breaking the stones only inflicts more suffering on them and can eventually destroy their souls. They have condemned themselves forever when they accepted Graz'zt's deals. Hopefully, the PCs will fare better.

Drugs and poisons are a major export of Azzagrat, and most of the trade is done here in Zelatar. Viper tree poison is harvested by fiends, liquid pain is distilled from the petitioners' anguish, and dozens if not hundreds more vile substances to induce pleasure or pain are produced everywhere in Graz'zt's realm. But not all of the intoxicants of Zelatar are of such a dark bent, though; some of the finest liquors and ales of the Abyss are produced here as well. They tend to be strong, if not outright toxic to mortals, but some of them are actually pretty good.

Food is in plentiful supply as well. While the fiends don't need it, they do feel hunger and enjoy eating a good meal every now and then. Characters looking for inns, taverns and restaurants can find plenty, and many of them will actually serve food that mortals can eat without feeling sick (either because the food is poisonous to them, or because eating it would qualify as cannibalism). Expect to pay for it, though. Zelatar is a city of the rich. Common services such as eating and lodging cost ten times the normal price. The best establishments can ask up to 50 gold for a meal, or more than a hundred for a night. Those are the places where they'll serve elven ears, fried with bytopian oil and served with spiced aasimon blood. They are the places where you sleep on a magical force-field instead of a mattress, and where you'll find two succubi in your room (guaranteed not to devour your soul, or at least not tonight), along with a fridge fully stocked with quality abyssal liquors and a fresh ice mephit chained to the wall. Make sure to keep the tab unless you want to find lots of extras charged which you didn't know about.

Zelatar is a city of pleasure. A stark contrast for those who have recently arrived from Mal Arundak, any vice can be satisfied here without any sort of penalty or guilt. As long as you can pay, you can have whatever strikes your fancy. The festhalls of Zelatar range from mundane brothels to places where visitors are allowed to inflict terrible tortures on unwilling slaves, willing prostitutes, or on each other, depending on taste. Magical healing is included, so patrons don't need to worry about catching diseases or ending up maimed; in Zelatar, evil has no consequences.

Graz'zt himself has a long list of wives, lovers and mistresses, and an even longer list of more or less official sons and grandsons. With his mastery of intrigue, keeping them from becoming a threat to him is just child's play. Many of these counts and barons have grandiose estates in Zelatar, though none is as magnificent as the palace of the lord himself.

Zelatar features numerous parks. Graz'zt seems to enjoy monothematic areas, and has built parks dedicated to single concepts all around the town. There is a park which is composed of wide tree-lined boulevards, featuring great statues of all sorts of vermins from the Prime Material. Then there is a park made of beautiful, petrified flowers and plants. And another where statues of devas and celestials are on display – except that their faces display expressions of pure evil. While most of these places are safe, some aren't; there is a park where sculptures of flame are on display which is a bit too hot for mortals to handle (1d6 fire damage per round while inside it), and another where metal structures are criss-crossed by lightning at all times (10% chance of being struck for 10d6 damage; Reflex save for half, DC 16). Another features fiendish musicians at all times, and another is a tanar'ri painting museum.

There is no police or similar force in Zelatar. Merchants hire bodyguards, and reputable inns (or what passes for reputable around here) have their own muscle to protect customers. If someone wants to mug another, he's free to do so. Surprisingly, despite this, the city isn't much more chaotic than the somewhat regulated Broken Reach. With the high fiendish population, and the city's slant towards deceit and disguise, thieves must be very careful. The successful ones deal with grand cons, rather than petty street theft. The risk of accidentally putting your hand in the pocket of a *polymorphed* marilith is too high.

The main feature of the city is of course Graz'zt's Argent Palace. It is a mansion of immense proportions, entirely built from shimmering white marble. It is said that Graz'zt deceived the archons of Mount Celestia into delivering it to his doorstep. The Argent Palace has a hundred mirrored halls, bathed in cold light, and 66 towers, built with the ivory from astral whales. Only the nobles of the town can visit the palace – as well as anyone that strikes Graz'zt's fancy. The palace guards, a team of elite babau tanar'ris, have received descriptions of the party and instructions to let them in.

However, now that the PCs have reached his town, Graz'zt isn't going to immediately pay them a visit, or let himself be found in his palace. He is not in a hurry, and he wants them to be impressed by his wealth and power before dealing with them. It's not like he needs more bargaining chips than he already has, but he wants to have fun with puny mortals as much as the next fiend lord.

While they wander the town, the PCs are going to meet lots of peculiar people. There's Mephisto, the town crier, a charming tiefling whose news are lies half the time. He'll announce whatever you want if your jink is good enough. There's the Guardian, a lich who sits over the arch leading into the mansion of one of Graz'zt's relatives, contemplating two perfect white roses he holds in each hand, and who kills whoever tries to get in. There are the parades which run around the town every few days, honoring some noble of Zelatar or another.

Zelatar is a city of surprises. As the party is walking around, the flagstones suddenly give way, causing them to fall into a dark pit for more than twenty meters. They land on hard granite, taking 6d6 damage – and immediately, four dark hooded clerics of Graz'zt jump on them.

You reach for your weapons, preparing to resist evil magic – and are surprised when the clerics actually cast healing spells on you! The pain and wounds from the fall quickly vanish. A large gargoyle-like fiend, draped in curious clothes cut from leather and silk, steps out of the shadows, clapping his hands with a fanged smile. “Welcome mortals! Welcome, to Nartez’s House of Terror! Are you ready for the thrill of your life? For just twenty gold, you will see wonders and know fear – all, of course, in perfect safety as you’ve already seen!”

The fiend produces a bunch of gold-foil rectangles. “So get a ticket, and jump on the ride!” He points towards another end of the room, where the shadows dissipate to reveal an iron carriage, pulled by four rutterkins, gagged and bound to the frame. “Twenty gold per head, only for you my friends. You’ve come all the way to the Abyss to look for top-quality terror, don’t pass a chance to see it done by a professional!”

Nartez is a nabassu, a fiend whose job is to spread terror. While most nabassu travel to the prime to wreak havoc, Nartez is a bit of a lateral thinker within his species. He thinks he's found a way to work from home, in a way, and to actually get paid. So Nartez pulled some favors from the Prime spellcasters which he corrupted during his career, and he dug a whole dungeon beneath a section of Zelatar, like a sort of fiendish fun ride. Then he hired clerics to make sure people don't die as they visit it. The clerics aren't always up to the task, but Nartez figures that the important thing is that noone comes back to complain. The nabassu picks up random “customers” from the streets through concealed trapdoors in the pavement, and then offers them “the ride” for whatever sum he feels he can get away with. If someone isn't interested, Nartez looks flustered but he won't stop them. It's not like he needs it anyway: the only way out of the pit is through the ride (or by blasting open the trapdoor twenty meters above, of course). Most people just pay up when they realize that they have to go through the damn place anyway.

The House of Terror is a linear ride, full of horrific sights. The iron cart is closed up so that it works like a cage, and room after room it is pulled through eviscerated people, hallways that crawl with spiders and scorpions, places where undead zombies bash at the iron bars, pits that spit rotten organs at the heroes, rooms full of dretches (each of them starts casting *scare* and *stinking cloud* as soon as the party enters), torture rooms with actual people being tortured, and more. Every time, the passage to go back is sealed. Worse, spells left around the dungeon are triggered to cast *fear* on the party every few minutes. The nabassu follows, sitting on top of the cage, readying actions to counter any attempt to cast *remove fear* (“we don't want you to waste your money, do we?”). Affected members can't flee, since they are trapped in an iron cage.

But this is only the beginning; the real fun begins when Nartez simulates an attack by “external” monsters. Suddenly, while the party is in a room where illusions of themselves are being slowly gutted by whirling blades, one of the walls seems to come crashing down. An enormous bebilith appears from the debris, and with a cry of rage runs towards the fiends, who immediately teleport away, leaving the PCs and the clerics to deal with the monster. The creature is massive even for its species; its legs are several meters long, and yet they seem small when compared to its enormous body. Nartez has kept the bebilith more than well-fed, and as a result the monster is bloated to the point where its spiderlike form is almost unrecognizable. Folds of fat can be seen pouring out of the few places where its body isn't covered by its exoskeleton. With every movement, small bits of rock fall from the ceiling.

In truth, the bebilith is under a *dominate monster* spell, not to mention a number of other spells to make it even more resilient. The bebilith is Nartez's greatest asset, and has been very hard to obtain, but when his casters have empowered it, it becomes powerful enough to kill a greater tanar'ri. Should something tamper with the *dominate monster* magic, Nartez would be in big trouble as a monstrous fiend-hunter looks for its revenge. But tanar'ri aren't known for overplanning.

Nartez's Bebilith		Al. Chaotic Evil	Gargantuan Outsider (Chaotic, Evil) (Abyss)	CR: 15
Str: 36 (+13)	HP: 20d8+260 (350)	Speed: 12, climb 6		
Dex: 14 (+2)	AC: 25 (-4 size, +2 dex, +17 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 36 (+13)	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 11 (+0)	Ref: +14 (+12 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +20 Grapple: +49		
Wis: 13 (+1)	For: +25 (+12 base, +13 con)	Melee: +29 (+20 base, +13 strength, -4 size)		
Cha: 13 (+1)	Will: +13 (+12 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +18 (+20 base, +2 dexterity, -4 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
Bite, +29 melee, damage 4d6+13+poison, and 2 claws, +24 melee, damage 2d6+6, or Web, +18 ranged		Climb +36 (+23 ranks, +13 str) Diplomacy +3 (+2 synergy, +1 cha) Hide +22 (+23 ranks, -12 size, +8 racial, +3 dex) Intimidate +5 (+1 cha, +2 deformity, +2 circumstance) Jump +36 (+23 ranks, +13 str) Listen +24 (+23 ranks, +1 wis) Move Silently +26 (+23 ranks, +3 dex) Search +23 ranks Sense Motive +24 (+23 ranks, +1 wis) Spot +24 (+23 ranks, +1 wis) Survival +3 (+1 wis, +2 synergy*)		
Feats and special abilities		* when following tracks		
Feats: Cleave, Improved Grapple, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Power Attack, Track, Willing Deformity (+2 to Intimidate), Deformity (obese; +2 to Constitution, -2 to Dexterity, +2 circumstance to Intimidate and saves vs. poison). All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned. Damage reduction 10/good, darkvision 18 mt, scent, telepathy (can communicate with any creature within 30 meters that has a language). Poison (ex): DC 30, damage 1d6 Con primary and 2d6 Con secondary. Rend armor (ex): if it hits with both claws, it deals 6d6+26 damage to the opponent's armor. Web (ex): 4/days. The web works as a net attack with a maximum range of 9 meters and a range increment of 3 meters. Targets are <i>entangled</i> and can escape with a Strength or Escape Artist check with a DC of 30. The web has 14 hit points and no hardness. It only burns 25% of times if set on fire (check every round). At will (sp): <i>Plane shift</i> on self only as the spell (CL 12). The bebilith is under the influence of <i>bear's endurance</i> and <i>cat's grace</i> .				

The monster's first action is to rend the iron cage apart. The bebilith will not attack the clerics, and it will avoid killing if it can, leaving severely injured adversaries for fresh ones, waiting for the next *fear* spell to go off. The aim is to terrorize the PCs, forcing them to flee further into the House of Terror.

The hall beyond the one with the bebilith is covered in a real carpet of living manes. As the bebilith enters it, it starts tearing them apart, making a big spectacle of throwing their entrails everywhere. The party has to wade through them as well; the best option is to kill loads of them with area effect spells (or the Great Cleave feat) to make room for moving.

The hall after that one is empty, but hundreds of eyes, big and small, are embedded into the walls, and they constantly turn to look at the PCs. Nartez stands in the middle of the room. He quickly says: "There is an emergency exit here! I'll show it to you - for five hundred gold". This is how Nartez makes the real money. He pulls this trick on rich merchants, pervert thrill-seekers, slavers and anyone else that has jink and is unlucky enough to end up in his trap.

If the PCs refuse, he disappears and the noise of the bebilith ripping through the manes grows closer and closer. If the party pushes onwards, they enter a long corridor. As soon as they set foot into it, dozens of stone hands pop out of the floor and grasp at their ankles. Anyone walking here is *entangled* – they move at half speed, can't run or charge, take a -2 to hit and -4 to dex, and must make a Concentration check, DC 15+spell level, to cast spells.

In the Argent Palace, the PCs will see dozens of greater fiends, discussing and plotting, with only limited outbursts of violence. Demonic butlers wander the mirrored halls, serving drinks strong enough to make mortal blood curdle. Dark secrets are whispered in the corners, but it's just a

coverup: the *real* chant is exchanged by telepathy. Most of the fiends around here may seem a bit surprised of seeing mortals in the palace, but everyone will assume that the PCs couldn't be here if Lord Graz'zt didn't allow it.

Wandering the palace is safe enough. The high-up fiends here know that Graz'zt doesn't like it when people fight within the Argent Palace. Of course, tanar'ri aren't exactly known for obeying rules, and the party should still be careful of what they say and to whom. On average, there are a half dozen balors in the Argent Palace, about ten mariliths, and proportionally more lesser fiends.

The party can gather information in the palace and find out lots of interesting darks, but a simple Gather Information check won't be enough. Whatever they want to know, they will not be able to find it for free or by eavesdropping on random conversations. Even offering a reward doesn't cut it; everyone here is waiting to see what plans Graz'zt has for these strangers. But if they do ask around, they'll attract the attention of someone who is willing to risk.

Coldflame is the only balor native of the 47th layer, where heat and cold are reversed. His physical aspect is that of a normal balor, except that a palpable aura of cold surrounds him, and a layer of frost always covers his wings. Coldflame's hatred towards the multiverse burns as hot as that of any balor – but instead of projecting his emotions in displays of fiery rage, Coldflame tends to become colder and more distant as he gets angry. When he starts calling people “sir”, lesser fiends start teleporting away. His power is matched only by few of Graz'zt's lieutenants.

Unbeknownst to everyone else, Coldflame is planning to overthrow his master. He isn't anywhere close to putting his plan into motion; at this stage, he's just picking up pawns here and there, acquiring safe contacts that he'll be able to use later – maybe, a hundred years from now, or a thousand. A fiend's schemes are long-term. Coldflame doesn't know all the details of the plot, but he is very smart and has put together parts and pieces of information into a rather close approximation of the truth. About the only thing he doesn't know is exactly what powers the artefact has, but this isn't very relevant for him now. What *is* relevant is that a group of mortals are going to be sent to retrieve a vital part of the puzzle. Coldflame knows that Graz'zt won't lift the party's curse once the task is complete, and in fact may decide to kill them. The balor would rather them live and be in debt to him instead, and he can do something towards this end.

For starters, he will meet them in the palace “by chance”, chat them up, and invite them to meet in the Hunt Park the following evening. The choice of location isn't just a matter of privacy; the park is dedicated to the tradition of the Hunt. It consists of a small grove of viper trees. Within the grove, ghostly figures of mortals run in panic, chased by translucent images of noble fiends. These are illusions which depict the Hunt, an event which occasionally happens when Graz'zt feels like toying with his victims. As the party is watching the figures, Coldflame appears, greets them, and casually explains the tradition. If Graz'zt so wishes, mortal prisoners or criminals may be given a chance to escape Azzagrat through the Hunt. The sods are released in the middle of Zrintor at dusk, magically stripped of all means of flying or teleporting, while all the nobles of Zelatar enter the forest from the borders, and hunt them down. If the mortals manage to leave the Viper Forest alive, then they are free to go. The exact rules change sometimes, and in the whole contest the fiends are obviously favored, but still someone manages it every now and then. The whole thing is highly ceremonial and while Graz'zt doesn't participate directly, he loves watching from his palace (via *scrying* spells) and comes down hard on fiends that cheat.

This is just a digression to Coldflame; coming to what he calls the real deal, he'll recount the situation. The balor can give the party a clear picture of what happened, in case they have missed some clue. He won't say what Graz'zt is going to ask them or why, and he won't say that the archfiend holds Ithla-Sathlo's soul, but he can summarize everything up until the point when Demogorgon killed Ithla-Sathlo (obviously though, if Dhakalor is with the party, the balor will not blow his cover). His aim here is to gain a bit of trust from the characters, so that he may work better with them in the future. In return for this information, he says, he wants to know what the item which Graz'zt stole from Ithla-Sathlo does exactly, and why did Demogorgon feel threatened enough to make a move.

Pleased To Meet You, Hope You Guessed My Name

When Graz'zt decides to meet the PCs, he doesn't mess around. As the heroes are walking around Zelatar, or in the Argent Palace, the doors of a magnificent mansion or those of a lavish banquet hall suddenly slam open.

Loud music and fiendish laughter pours out, along with a dozen dretches, wearing fake ears to look like fat, bloated elves, and even more manes, with fake beards stuck on them to make them resemble stunted, ghastly dwarves.

Then, a handsome humanoid enters the scene, clad in a masterwork armor made from some sort of strange chalk-white leather; his skin by contrast is jet black. A six-fingered hand holds a golden cup of a transparent, reddish liquid. Lord Graz'zt looks calm and cool – the only such being in the chaos that follows him. Right behind him, his court of demons gets in and starts turning the area you are in into some kind of fiendish party, having cruel fun at the expense of the dretches, manes, and anyone else they can grab. You can count one balor, two mariliths, a glabrezu, a host of alu-fiends and cambions, an assortment of babaus, vrock and hezrous, and a nalfeshnee, dragging his bloated bulk around and forcing everyone else to get off his way. Tiedfling waiters roll around, serving tens of different drinks and snacks, all equally loathsome. From the multitude of loud discussions you can hear in the cacophony, the trays support glasses of virgin's blood, roasted elf's fingers, and even vials of liquid pain for those who enjoy that sort of thing.

Graz'zt, stops in front of you and watches you for a few seconds. He smiles, but his brilliant green eyes are cold. The fiends surrounding him lower their tones somewhat, and seem to be listening carefully.

Graz'zt mentions the name of each PC, together with a brief comment about him or her, letting the party know that he has been interested in them for a while.

"I have heard much about you". He turns to look at his court, and says: "These mortals have given valuable information to the Demogorgon, thanks to which the two-headed one has been able to destroy a major threat to himself".

Immediately, a vrock screeches: "They helped the hated Demogorgon! I shall end their feeble lives for you, master!", and with a nerve-wracking shriek the vulture demon jumps at you!

Graz'zt, without changing his expression or in the slightest, says: "I think you are overreacting, little fiend. These mortals are my guests". As he says so, he makes a fluid gesture with the hand holding the cup. The vrock freezes for a moment, and then howls in pain as his left wing, arm and leg seem to wither simultaneously, shrinking, becoming gray, and turning to dust. As the fiend falls to the ground, the horde of manes and dretches reach it and start devouring it, still alive.

Graz'zt watches the scene thoughtfully, and then performs more magic, turning one of the dretches into a real elf, and one of the manes into an actual dwarf. The newly-transformed humanoids keep feeding, creating an even more horrible scene which the archfiend contemplates like an artist judging his work. "Mortals eating fiends. Isn't it paradoxical and yet beautiful? Oh, but this is just ephemeral art. Soon enough, the vrock will be over, or the spell will end. What you have done is much more grandiose. A great statement – one can do by cunning what he could not do by force".

"But sometimes, neither strength nor brains can help you. And this is where you stand now, in front of me. Let me take you to a place where I can better illustrate your position". Graz'zt extends a six-fingered black hand, beckoning you to take it. "And you all, my courtesans, keep the party alive, screaming and kicking".

Graz'zt will teleport himself and the party to another room in his vast Argent Palace. There are no windows and no other entrances. There are large mirrors on the walls, making the room seem even bigger than it is. The group appears in the middle of it. At one end, a white marble pedestal holds a velvet cushion, over which the PCs can see an inert wooden globe – the Selthian Orb. Though it isn't evident, the pedestal rests in the middle of an antimagic field. At the other end of the room,

there is another marble pedestal. There is no cushion over it; instead, a massive black sapphire, bigger than an ogre's fist, levitates some ten centimeters above the stone. Its value is inestimable, but it pales in comparison of its contents.

"Take a look at it". Graz'zt points at the black gem. "I'm sure you will find it rather interesting". Looking deep within the reflections of the crystal, you think you can see a vast, inconceivable space within it. Shimmering points of light dot the space, but there is a darker area. You look at it, and you can barely spot something moving, but then the image becomes clearer. It is a huge monstrous figure, much bigger than the gem, almost as large as the room you're in, and yet it is somehow contained within the sapphire. The figure is a mass of tendrils, each of which ends in a fanged mouth, surrounding a huge central eye which suddenly turns towards you. You instinctively jump back, and see Graz'zt smiling behind you.

"Ithla Sathlo is mine. One of my agents was there, when Demogorgon killed him, and he stole his soul from the shadows, as is my custom. As I'm sure you know, this means that I can now force him to perform a service for me, but this is not your problem. Your problem is that, from this globe, this so-called lord's soul still gives power to the curse locking you here. Luckily for you, I am planning on releasing this fiend, to demand my service. It is my opinion that the reincarnation of Ithla-Sathlo will cause the curse-bond to be broken, and even if it weren't so, I would kill him for good after the service was rendered".

"Before I can do it, however, there is one minor problem. You see, there were two agents, infiltrated in Demogorgon's army. One, as I said, has been successful. The other was discovered and destroyed. I reckon that the old two-headed barmy was satisfied with that. Anyway, that servant was supposed to steal from Infestant the ritual which Ithla-Sathlo devised to drain the powers of the Orb, putting them to his own use. Considering that Demogorgon left the layer in a hurry upon realizing that Ithla-Sathlo's soul was stolen, I think there are good chances that the spell is still there, recorded somewhere".

Graz'zt, with a cold smile, walks near the huge black gem and rests a hand on it, tapping it with six fingers. "So, after I have the ritual, you will be released. You may leave the Triple Realm whenever you want. If I may suggest, I think that Lianne, that adorable girl, knows how to reach Infestant. From the Plains of Infinite Portals, the path goes through Mal Arundak, then Sulphanorum, then Torremor, then the Plains of Gallenshu, then a few minor layers, then Durao, then the Demonweb Pits, and finally Infestant. I think that Rothakon knows a shorter way, but even he takes no less than a couple of months to get through".

"What? Don't be discouraged! I will help you. Obviously, it is not that hard to get on any one of those layer. The reason for the complex trip is that you need to go to specific places on the layers, close to where the next gate is. It is inefficient, but without teleportation magic it's the only way – unless you've got my connections. All I need to know is where exactly on Durao you need to go. Then, you can go to any point of that layer, and I should be able to pull a few strings and get you to the right spot quickly, thus bypassing most of the trip. I would send you directly to the Demonweb Pits, but Lolth is ... uncooperative. So pick up either Lianne or Rothakon, get either to tell you which point on Durao holds the portal you need to pass through, and then let me know. Use a sending spell or something; divination is safe on Durao so if you get there, you can even scry on me. I will use your spell to communicate. The fiends there are so focused on attacking the other planes that they can't even keep watch on their own. Clueless leatherheads. Anyway, Lianne is currently in the Plains of Gallenshu. She shouldn't be hard to find, since I heard that she's set herself up as a lover to the Konsul of Bloodstone. Rothakon has hid himself better. The only chant I have on his whereabouts is that he's somewhere on the path to Infestant".

Graz'zt is striving to present the task as something the PCs want to do, rather than something he wants them to do. He knows that the weakest point of his plan is that he has no idea of where on Infestant the ritual is, what it looks like, or even if it is still there, so he's trying to keep the focus of the conversation on the beginning of the task – finding the way to Infestant. He's sincerely willing

to help the PCs in getting there, since that works in his favor, and he may even provide them with equipment or escorts (as much as the DM thinks is appropriate).

Where he is lying is in the part concerning the PC's final liberation. The curse will not be broken by Ithla-Sathlo's reincarnation. As long as the archdemon's soul has not merged with the Abyss (the eventual destiny of the souls of all planar beings), it is bound to power the spell. The characters will not be able to discover this lie through a simple Sense Motive roll; Graz'zt is far too good at lying for that, and as a demon lord he's also immune to divination attempts. They *might* be able to force him into contradiction through clever dialogue, but the DM should do his best to play Graz'zt as the greatest master of intrigue possible.

The fiend lord says that he doesn't personally know how to reach Bloodstone on the Plains of Gallenshu, but that someone in his court certainly does (knowing Graz'zt, he probably does know but prefers the PCs to find out by themselves, possibly to see how they deal with his minions). He'll bring everyone back to the fest, where the bones of the vrock have been picked clean by now, and leave in a flash of teleport.

CHAPTER VII

In which the Heroes travel to a place where evil fought evil, and left only ruins behind it

Bloodstone

From the Plains of Infinite Portals, Bloodstone can be reached from, of all things, a breeding farm. Of course, the horses that are bred there are, to say the least, uncommon, and so are the farmers and the place itself. The main building is a single-floor, four meters tall house, built from black iron and red stone. It is low and irregular, and not very large or impressive. What *is* impressive is the fenced field where the best horses are kept. It is made not from wood, but from magical lightning, which crackles perpetually from an iron pole to another around the entire courtyard. Anyone touching it would take 12d6 electrical damage, and if the character wants to pass through, he has to give up his saving throw. The lightning doesn't bother tanar'ri, so Bluestreak can go in and out without fear. He's also the only one who knows how to deactivate it. There are several stone stables attached to the iron building, where the rest of the beasts are kept.

The farm is managed by an armanite named Bluestreak and his two cambion sons (unsurprisingly, they both have hooves in place of feet and, like armanites, they fly but without wings). All animals that are found on the Abyss are fiendish, but Bluestreak uses all manners of cruel methods to breed even better and tougher mounts. Whenever he has a surplus of animals, he makes the horses fight each other to death, ensuring that only the strongest survive. This isn't as difficult as it sounds, because the fiendish animals are aggressive omnivores. Possibly even worse, he himself mates with the best mares. While this wouldn't work with normal horses (the half-fiend template requires Intelligence at least 4), it does sometimes work with the fiendish animals (who have Intelligence at least 3, and a few of which may have 4). The others die during pregnancy – and not many of those that successfully give birth survive, either. When this works, the result is a half-fiend horse (the fiendish template is ignored).

While these rarities are highly prized, the very best of Bluestreak's mounts are the nightmares. Kept in the lightning fence and forced to wear magical bridles to prevent them from escaping through the Astral or the Ethereal, the farm usually only has no more than a half-dozen of them. Bluestreak sells them to mariliths, balors, powerful yugoloths, night hags, and anything else that can pay. The armanite will gladly accept favors as a payment, and this is the reason for which the mobs that roam the Plains of Infinite Portals don't attack the farm. It is well-known that Bluestreak could call several powerful fiends to help him repel attackers. When he does ask for money, he leaves the haggling to his sons.

The most important feature of the farm, or at least the one that matters the most to the heroes, is the portal to the Plains of Gallenshu. This portal leads to the stable-city of Bloodstone, which is led by a powerful armanite known as the Konsul, who has under his command ninety packs of armanites, each led by a Knecht. This is the common command structure on the Plains of Gallenshu. Bluestreak lets anyone use the portal, which is located inside the lightning fence, as long as they buy a horse from him. As he'll explain, this is all for the travelers' benefit, because the Konsul's rule in Bloodstone is that only slaves "walk" on the ground, with the word "walk" having a specific connotation in the armanite Abyssal dialect. What this means is that only armanites, bariours, centaurs or cen-

Bluestreak's mounts

Bluestreak has horses of every type and quality, as long as you don't mind a mount that eats meat, smells like sulphur, has burning eyes, and likes to *desecrate* its stable.

- Heavy fiendish horse: 600 gold.
- Light fiendish horse: 225 gold.
- Heavy fiendish warhorse: 1200 gold.
- Light fiendish warhorse: 450 gold.
- Heavy half-fiend horse: 4000 gold.
- Light half-fiend horse: 1500 gold.
- Heavy half-fiend warhorse: 8000 gold.
- Light half-fiend warhorse: 3000 gold.
- Nightmare: 30000 gold.

The brothers generally start from at least twice those sums, and haggle. Prices may vary for specimens with extra hit dice or especially high stats.

taur-like beings, horses and people who either fly or are mounted are considered to have any rights. Anyone else will be despised and probably enslaved or killed unless he has an “owner” who can protect him. A rider that falls from his mount is so ridiculed that killing him is considered normal. Visitors are allowed to dismount to sleep, but anyone Naturally, the talk about the travelers’ benefit doesn’t mean that Bluestreak won’t raise the standard prices by 50% for the occasion. Once the deal is done, he will let the party in the lightning fence, make sure that the demon steeds there don’t attack, and tell their mounts to jump into the pit at the center of the fence.

The Plains of Gallenshu are as horrible a layer as any other. The ground is entirely composed of body parts: limbs, heads and organs mashed together in an endless gory plain. The fumes of decomposition are so thick that a green-yellow haze permeates the entire layer. Visibility is restricted to 12 meters and a 20% miss chance is applied to all attacks beyond 1.5 meters. Even worse, the air works much like a *stinking cloud*. Every living creature on the Plains of Gallenshu must make a Fortitude save every round (DC 14) or become nauseated. Luckily, covering your nostrils with some cloth is enough to delay the save to “just” once per hour. If the characters do so, they are considered to have become used to the stench (provided they wear the cloth) after three successful saves in a row. Finally, every time anyone is injured here, they are exposed to filth fever (DC 12, incubation 1d3 days, damage 1d3 Dexterity and Constitution). Tanar’ri are immune to both the nausea and the disease. In fact, armanites rather like the place, since they can “graze” on the flesh of the ground whenever they feel like it.

The party arrives in the outskirts of Bloodstone. Like all armanite cities on the Plains, Bloodstone is mostly composed of leather tents and stables (built from imported stone, or from the wood of the rare trees growing on Gallenshu). About 3000 armanites live here, though only half of them are in town at any given time. The rest are out on the Plains, waging war on the other Konsuls. In addition to the armanites, Bloodstone is home to a few evil centaurs and bariaurs, and greater tanar’ris can often be found here, looking to hire a pack or two for their own purposes (they don’t always ride a mount, but few armanites would point this out to a molydeus). Finally, the slaves are recognizable because they are the only ones not on four hooves (except for the aforementioned recruiters). They are mostly tieflings.

Many armanites use lances, but various packs have specialized in the use of other weapons. About half of the armanites in Bloodstone use lances, the rest use a mixture of other weapons. Usually, all armanites that are encountered together will belong to the same pack and use the same weapon.

Armanite	Al. Chaotic Evil	Large Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 7
Str: 20 (+5) Dex: 11 (+0) Con: 17 (+3) Int: 8 (-1) Wis: 12 (+1) Cha: 13 (+1)	HP: 5d8+15 (37) AC: 25 (-1 size, +6 nat, +8 armor, +2 shield) Initiative: +0 Ref: +4 base For: +7 (+4 base, +3 con) Will: +5 (+4 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 12, fly 12 (poor) Armor: heavy % fail.: 50% BAB: +5 Melee: +9 (+5 base, +5 strength, -1 size) Ranged: +4 (+5 base, -1 size)	Check pen.: -8 Grapple: +7
Attacks Lance, +9 melee reach 3 mt, damage 2d6+5, crit x3, and Hooves, +4/+4 melee, damage 1d6+2			Skills Hide -4 (+8 ranks, -4 size, -8 armor) Intimidate +9 (+8 ranks, +1 cha) Jump +5 (+8 ranks, +5 str, -8 armor) Listen +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis) Spot +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis) Survival +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis) Swim -3 (+8 ranks, +5 str, -16 armor)
Feats and special abilities Feats: Ride-by Attack, Trample Darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, SR 18, DR 10/cold iron or good, resistance to fire, cold and acid 10. Immune to electricity and poison, telepathy within 30 mt. Armanites are considered mounted at all times, and they are considered as if having the Ride skill and the Mounted Combat feat for the purpose of meeting prerequisites. Summon (Su): 1/day summon 1d10 dretches or 1 armanite with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 3 rd level spell.			
Equipment Large lance (reach 3 mt, damage 2d6, crit x3) Full plate barding (+8 AC, +1 max dex, -6 check penalty, 35% arcane spell failure) Large heavy steel shield (+2 AC, -2 check penalty, 15% arcane spell failure)			

The armanites on Gallenshu are toughened up by their continual struggles with competing packs and clans. Many of them have class levels.

Armanite Warrior		Al. Chaotic Evil	Armanite Warrior 4 th	CR: 9
Str: 20 (+5) Dex: 11 (+0) Con: 18 (+4) Int: 8 (-1) Wis: 12 (+1) Cha: 13 (+1)	HP: 5d8+4d10+36 (80) AC: 25 (-1 size, +6 nat, +8 armor, +2 shield) Initiative: +0 Ref: +5 base For: +12 (+8 base, +4 con) Will: +6 (+5 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 12, fly 12 (poor) Armor: heavy % fail.: 50% Check pen.: -8 BAB: +9 Grapple: +11 Melee: +13 (+9 base, +5 strength, -1 size) Ranged: +8 (+9 base, -1 size)		
Attacks Lance, +14/+9 melee reach 3 mt, damage 2d6+5, crit x3, and Hooves, +8/+8 melee, damage 1d6+2, or Composite mighty longbow (+4 STR), +8/+3 range 33m, damage 2d6+4, crit x3		Skills Hide -4 (+8 ranks, -4 size, -8 armor) Intimidate +13 (+12 ranks, +1 cha) Jump +5 (+8 ranks, +5 str, -8 armor) Listen +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis) Spot +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis) Survival +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis) Swim -3 (+8 ranks, +5 str, -16 armor)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Ride-by Attack, Trample, Weapon focus (lance), Mounted archery Darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, SR 18, DR 10/cold iron or good, resistance to fire, cold and acid 10. Immune to electricity and poison, telepathy within 30 mt. Armanites are considered mounted at all times, and they are considered as if having the Ride skill and the Mounted Combat feat for the purpose of meeting prerequisites. Summon (Su): 1/day summon 1d10 dretches or 1 armanite with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 3 rd level spell.				
Equipment Large lance (reach 3 mt, damage 2d6, crit x3) Composite mighty longbow (+4 STR) (range 33m, damage 2d6, crit x3) 20 arrows Full plate barding (+8 AC, +1 max dex, -6 check penalty, 35% arcane spell failure) Large heavy steel shield (+2 AC, -2 check penalty, 15% arcane spell failure)				

The toughest armanites serve as personal guards to the Knechts, the pack leaders, or to the Konsul, who is the ruler of Bloodstone. In the outskirts, they aren't seen very often. The Knecht and the Konsul live in the center of Bloodstone, where they live a much more luxurious life when compared to the squalor of the periphery. The high-ups' guards are almost as well-treated, and as such they are less likely to accept a small bribe as most tanar'ri. If the party does need to garnish one, they should point on magical items. Like most fiends, they value magic above money.

Elite Armanite		Al. Chaotic Evil	Armanite Fighter 8 th	CR: 15
Str: 24 (+9) Dex: 12 (+1) Con: 23 (+6) Int: 10 (+0) Wis: 12 (+1) Cha: 14 (+2)	HP: 5d8+8d10+78 (144) AC: 28 (-1 siz, +6 nat, +9 arm, +3 shl, +1 dex) Initiative: +1 dex Ref: +7 (+6 base, +1 dex) For: +16 (+10 base, +6 con) Will: +7 (+6 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 12, fly 12 (poor) Armor: heavy % fail.: 50% Check pen.: -6 BAB: +13 Grapple: +26 Melee: +22 (+13 base, +9 strength, -1 size) Ranged: +14 (+13 base, +1 dex, -1 size)		
Attacks +1 Lance, +24/+19/+14 melee reach 3 mt, damage 2d6+12, crit 19-20/x3, and Hooves, +17/+17 melee, damage 1d6+4, or Composite mighty longbow (+4 STR), +15/+10/+5 range 33m, damage 2d6+4, crit x3		Skills Hide -2 (+8 ranks, -4 size, -6 armor) Intimidate +13 (+12 ranks, +1 cha) Jump +9 (+10 ranks, +5 str, -6 armor) Listen +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis) Spot +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis) Survival +9 (+8 ranks, +1 wis) Swim +3 (+10 ranks, +5 str, -12 armor)		
Feats and special abilities Feats: Ride-by Attack, Trample, Weapon Focus (lance), Weapon Focus (longbow), Weapon Specialization (lance), Improved Critical (lance), Mounted Archery, Power Attack, Ride-by Attack, Spirited Charge. Darkvision 60 ft, low-light vision, SR 18, DR 10/cold iron or good, resistance to fire, cold and acid 10. Immune to electricity and poison, telepathy within 30 mt. Armanites are considered mounted at all times, and they are considered as if having the Ride skill and the Mounted Combat feat for the purpose of meeting prerequisites. Summon (Su): 1/day summon 1d10 dretches or 1 armanite with a 35% chance of success. This ability is the equivalent of a 3 rd level spell.				
Equipment +1 Large lance (reach 3 mt, damage 2d6+1, crit x3) Composite mighty longbow (+4 STR) (range 33m, damage 2d6, crit x3) 20 arrows +1 Full plate barding (+9 AC, +1 max dex, -5 check penalty, 35% arcane spell failure) +1 Large heavy steel shield (+3 AC, -1 check penalty, 15% arcane spell failure)				

The outskirts of Bloodstone are the poorest part of town. They are mostly composed of tents, where roving packs of armanites live while waiting for their next raid. The few stables are simple buildings, made from wood and bones, which look like they could crumble at any moment. Most of the armanites encountered here are of the common variety. They don't often enter the city center, but they can give some information to the party, if the heroes are willing to buy them.

Armanites don't mingle with the females of the species, except while mating after a successful battle, and the sexes are kept strictly segregated in different parts of town. But some of the high-ups among them like to keep concubines and lovers of other species. Well, the chant is that the Konsul has a new favored concubine: a young tiefling that was captured while she was travelling the Plains, about a week ago. Noone in the poor quarter knows anything more, but if the PCs pay they'll be more than willing to make up some new tidbit to tell them.

In the Bloodstone periphery, there is just one inn that caters to humanoids – the *Lame Limb*. The innkeeper is an armanite who, during a fight with the baatezu, was injured beyond the reach of common magical healing. Armanites scorn him and won't come to the place, which makes it a good place for visitors. There are only a few patrons, most of them planewalkers of mixed races and alignments, on their way to somewhere else. Everyone, except for the innkeeper, is wearing cloth masks on his face. Like everywhere else in town, people are supposed to stay mounted at all times and the architecture reflects that. The *Lame Limb* has huge rooms and it's thoroughly filthy, but that's nothing compared to the "ground" outside, so noone complains.

The only person here who isn't a traveller is Jhil (*female elf wizard 11th/Prime Material/chaotic evil/tanar'ric*). She's an elf who would be rather good-looking if not for the general dirtiness and the silk mask on her face. She stays by herself in a corner of the room, but she'll approach the party when she sees they are new in town. Jhil belongs to an obscure sect called the tanar'ric, who believe that tanar'ri are the most perfect lifeform in the multiverse. They believe that unbridled emotions, embracing all temptation, and no repression of rage and anger is the natural state of the soul, the dark force from which all emotion and life springs. When you feel like doing anything, you should. What the society considers wrong or perverse is irrelevant and artificial. As such, tanar'ri are considered to be the only creatures that are behaving in a natural way. Tanar'rics can spend a feat to be considered a lesser tanar'ri for all social purposes by all fiends. As a result, tanar'ris consider Jhil as one of them and be somewhat more respectful. Similarly, baatezu will usually try to kill her on sight if they think they can get away with it. The fiends don't need to know about her affiliation; they instinctively feel her as a tanar'ri unless she is attempting to hide it (with a Bluff check).

Jhil is living here to study armanites on Gallenshu; she is fascinated by their social structure, wondering whether it is just another example of natural law or something more. All of this isn't terribly interesting for the PCs, but there is something that Jhil can offer them, and she'll approach the PCs as soon as possible with it.

The elf has created a magical item especially designed to ease her living in Bloodstone. The silk mask she's wearing makes her immune to *stinking cloud* spells, including the Plains' air, and gives a +5 competence bonus to Ride checks. She sells these *Armanite's masks* (faint abjuration, CL 5) to visitors for 8000 gold each. She doesn't carry them with her; they are stored in a room in a tanar'ri inn closer to the town center.

Eventually, the PCs will seek to reach the center of Bloodstone. The rich area of the town is protected by a 6-meters tall wall, with two entrances. The wall is built from stone, carved to resemble a mass of bodies – or at least, it looks like that. In truth, it was built with the body parts from the ground, which were then subjected to a *flesh to stone* spell. The entrances are guarded by two elite armanite fighters each, and they won't let anyone in without a permit. Since the PCs don't have one, they'll have to find another way – and a quick bribe is the best. For a garnish of a few hundred gold, the armanites will let the party in without problems.

The guts of Bloodstone are a rare sight. The town is built around a lake of blood, its shores coagulated, and the buildings are made with the same technique as the walls. The whole city seems to

have been created by a mad sculptor, possibly one who is also a serial killer. A mount of limbs and organs rises from the center of the lake, and a castle has been built on top of the mount. Presumably, it would be quite spectacular to behold, if not for the fact that reduced visibility on Gallenshu prevents it.

While the outskirts were home to a few evil centaurs and bariaurs, the only non-armanites here are the slaves, who walk on the putrid flesh. The fiends look oddly at the PCs, waiting for an excuse to attack. The most daring of the armanites may try to run towards the PCs and dismount them, just to start a fight.

Everyone here will treat the PCs with superiority, often even refusing to acknowledge them, and will become hostile rather quickly. Unless they've got a character with high Diplomacy, the party's best bet is to start distributing bribes if they want to learn anything at all. According to the chant they can gather here, the Konsul's new concubine is indeed Lianne. Despite having been dragged to Bloodstone by force, the Knechts say that she seems to be quite happy now. The Konsul wouldn't let her leave, obviously, but she doesn't seem to want to go either.

This is in fact the truth; when she was captured, Lianne repeatedly tried to escape because she wanted to get back to Infestant and somehow regain the favors of her grandfather. But while she was imprisoned in the Konsul's harem, she heard the news of Demogorgon killing Ithla-Sathlo, and quickly realize that there was nothing in Infestant for her now. Nothing anywhere on the Abyss, or elsewhere for that matter. On the other hand, she reasoned, she is quite safe here and as the leader's favorite lover, she would be treated remarkably well if she just stopped trying to escape and showed some appreciation, however faked, for the Konsul.

There is a bridge crossing the blood lake to the castle, which is where the Konsul lives. Six elite armanites guard the entrance; these tough warriors don't want to let anyone in who hasn't been invited, but this is nothing that a good-sized bribe can't fix.

The inside of the castle is built of petrified limbs like the outside, except for the floors which are paved. Some of the hands jutting out of the walls hold torches, making the place irregularly lit. Like all buildings in Bloodstone, the halls and corridors are oversized enough to be comfortable for armanites. Armored centaur-fiends are everywhere; they are the Knechts and other favorites of the Konsul, and their bodyguards.

The Konsul himself can usually be found in the castle's common room. This is a huge square room, its walls covered in expensive drapes and large chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. Clumps of cushions are scattered around, and noble armanites are lounging on them while tiefling slaves bring food and drinks. A couple of the centaur-fiends are training in a corner; the noise of the battle is somewhat muffled by the drapes and the strange walls, but it can still be heard above the chatter.

The Konsul is standing at one end of the room, talking with three Knechts. He's an imposing figure, a full head taller than the fiends surrounding him, wearing full ornate plate armor and a mighty halberd. As soon as the PCs enter, the discussion stops abruptly as everyone in the room turns to look at them. A few of the armanites will say, in Abyssal, "What are these doing here?" or sneer and mock the party. The PCs should move quickly to speak with the Konsul; if they stand and gawk for too long, some of the other armanites may decide that throwing them out in several pieces could be more fun than seeing what they want.

If the party has up to now only met dumb armanites, motivated by greed or bloodlust, they are in for a surprise when talking to the Konsul of Bloodstone. Not only he is the most powerful fiend in town where physical might is concerned, but he is also cunning and a shrewd politician.

When the party mentions that they want Lianne, he will have the girl brought to the room. The tiefling enters, riding a fiendish horse, and stares at the PCs for a moment of astonishment before yelling "You again! Will you ever leave me alone?" Then, the Konsul will let her and the heroes talk. He does this not because Lianne has any say in the matter, but because he wants to see what the

mortals have to offer, and gain insight into the situation as well. Listening to this conversation should give him an idea of the power level involved.

The Konsul is going to squeeze the best deal possible for himself from the PCs. Right now, what he desires more than anything else is a wizard retainer; Bloodstone is dangerously short on arcane might, while at least one neighbouring stable-city has a powerful sorcerer as Konsul. He is also interested in powerful magical items, especially those that protect from hostile magic.

This may be difficult or impossible for the party to provide, so they may try to con the armanite instead. Lianne is fairly well informed of the situation; she knows everything except for Graz'zt's involvement, and she will point to the Konsul any lie that the PCs invent. It may come to the word of Lianne against the PCs', and the Konsul knows how to deal with these situations.

The Shaman will be summoned. The Shaman is an old-looking, wrinkled armanite, clad in arcane paraphernalia such as carved bones, fur paintings, crystal decorations and more (most of it is just for show). The Konsul will call for the "Ordeal of Truth". Lianne has never heard about this, and will look worried. The Shaman, looking dubious, will wonder if it is justified and comment that the party's higher numbers may be a disadvantage. The Konsul will grin and confirm, and tell the other to go prepare the ritual.

The Ordeal of Truth, as the Konsul will explain, consists in a symmetrical series of rooms, built beneath the castle. The two contenders are placed at either end of the series of rooms, and have to reach the center. The rooms are full of traps and monsters. Thanks to the ritual, it is guaranteed that at most one group reaches the middle alive, and that is the party that says the truth. If both die, it means that both were lying. If a party is composed of more than one person, and just one of them dies, then the entire group is considered to be lying. Teleportation, flight, and similar means of bypassing the obstacles are considered a proof of being a deceiver.

All in all, the Konsul is shooting to make the Ordeal as scary and downright nonsensical as possible. Fairly often in the past, one of the contenders gave up his position at this point, and this is the real aim of the ritual. This is far from a bluff, though – the underground complex does exist and is indeed a dangerous dungeon. Lianne, hearing this, will look worried and lean toward accepting her fate – though this ultimately depends on what the PCs are offering and whether she is actually saying the truth or not (after all, she figures that there is a chance that the ritual does work as described). But if she does convince herself that she can't risk the Ordeal, she will tell the Konsul that, and the armanite will then send her back to the harem.

The Konsul is bargaining from a position of strength, and he knows this. He has all the time in the world. He has little to lose – Lianne isn't much important to him. He isn't even afraid of Graz'zt, because he knows that the archfiend has no interest in invading Gallenshu; if the party brings him up, the armanite will say angrily that Graz'zt has no business here. Overall, he *can* be convinced, but it is going to take a good bit of negotiating and the price won't be cheap.

So what is the best course of action? Well, you're in the Abyss, think chaotic evil. The best solution is to simply kidnap Lianne. Though the Konsul won't directly admit it, the fact that he requires a wizard servant means that he is low on arcane power. This in turn means that the party has an advantage – maybe not enough in a fight, but perhaps enough to infiltrate the castle and reach the tiefling. Passing through the walls as *gaseous form*, for example; even a good old *invisibility* could do the trick if the infiltrator moves fast enough, while using divination to find out Lianne's position in the big castle (there is no abyssal lord in Gallenshu, so divination is safe). Once the tiefling is found, she may be subdued or even simply forcefully teleported away.

This idea could work, but is still dangerous. Though Bloodstone lacks powerful wizards, there are armanite casters capable of at least casting *see invisibility* and *dispel magic*, and they have a few scrolls of higher level magic as well. If the party is discovered, the armanites will do everything to engage them in combat, and the PCs don't have much hopes against the Konsul, the Knechts, and their guards.

The safest bet is the *most* evil one, though it requires some serious on-the-fly thinking. Get Lianne to accept the Ordeal of Truth. Enter the dungeon. Defeat the traps and monsters while the tiefling gets killed. After reaching the middle room, don't exit – instead, proceed to Lianne's corpse, grab it, and teleport away. Raise the tiefling later.

Finally, the last option for the party is to simply leave Lianne there, and content themselves with demanding a detailed description of the path to Infestant, in particular of the sections on Durao and the Demonweb Pits.

Whatever they do, sooner or later they'll manage to acquire the information they need, whether or not they manage to carry the tiefling away or not. The portal to the Demonweb Pits lies in the swamps of Durao, at about fifty kilometers from the seldom-used gate to Durao that Lianne knows. As Graz'zt mentioned, the only known way to use that gate is to leave Gallenshu and travel through a half dozen minor layers.

Luckily, the PCs can (hopefully) count on the help of Graz'zt to reach that portal quickly from any point of Durao. They only need to get to Durao, and for once getting that information is easy. Most tanar'ri and all well-traveled mortals on the Abyss know that every day hundreds of fiends leave the barracks-city of Styros to reach Durao, sailing on the Styx. The party needs only to get back once again to the Plains of Infinite Portals, reach Styros, and then find a passage to Durao.

Styros

Styros lays in an area of the Plains of Infinite Portals that is composed of low, round hills, hiding the city until a traveler reaches the top of the last height. The place is called a barracks-city, and the reason is evident when the town becomes visible. Styros sits in a valley among the hills, on both sides of the River Styx which flows through it. At all times, no less than six or seven hordes of tanar'ris, each strong of several thousand fiends, are camped outside the town or near the river, waiting for their turn to be ferried to the battlefields or to other gathering points in the Abyss.

The city seems big enough to contain at least five thousand souls, and most of the buildings are barracks and dormitories for conscripts and mercenaries. These places are guarded by fiends as if they were prisons – which isn't far from the truth, since most of those that live in the barracks, fiends and mortals alike, have been forcefully dragged there by the molydei and their servants. Not all tanar'ri are so eager to get into the Blood War. Besides the barracks, the rest of the buildings are heavily guarded warehouses, containing supplies and food for the mortal mercenaries.

If this is the first time the party visits Styros, they may be in for some ugly surprises. For starters, there are no inns or taverns, nor any shop or service. One would think that a city full of soldiers would be an ideal place for such establishments, but the truth is that noone wants to set kip here. The molydei who scour the Plains looking for "volunteers" employ babaus on the promise that if they find someone doing service in place of them, they'll be exonerated. As a result, bands of babaus prowl the town and press into service everyone that isn't already part of an army. They don't care if you are a merchant, a mercenary, or an adventurer, and they will reject all but the most lavish bribes. They don't want to get sent to the front, and they know that molydei don't accept any bribes from fellow tanar'ris. The two-headed enforcers' only reason of existence is to get more fiends to the battlefields.

The only commodity that can be bought and sold here is cannon fodder. Manes, dretches and mortal slaves are bought and sold by the dozen in front of the largest barracks. More than half of any of the armies here is composed by least tanar'ri or by tieflings that have been abused so much that they will do whatever they are told. These sods wouldn't fetch a good prize on any real slave market, but the only thing the tanar'ri are interested in is their ability to take a hit in their place. Typically, manes can be bought for about 10 gold each; dretches for 30 gold, and mortals for 5 gold, assuming a bulk order.

Normally, a berk who wants to sail on the Styx only needs to sit near the river long enough, and eventually a Marrenoloth will notice him. Around Styros, however, the gaunt fiendish boatmen

have their hands full and don't take single passengers – they're busy ferrying armies. All of the Marraenoloths that travel to and from Styros pilot wide barges and expect hefty rewards. Unless the party is willing to pay in souls, they cannot hire a boatman and expect him to keep his word.

So, they'll need to board one of the barges headed to Durao. This is easier done than said – just find a mob headed there and say that you want to join up. Most fiends will demand newcomers to prove their worth in combat against a lesser tanar'ri of some sort, just to make sure that they could be able to carry their own weight in battle against a baatezu, but this shouldn't be a problem for the party. What they really should be thinking about is how to leave the mob after the trip.

The alternative is stowing away. Most everyone who had to deal with marraenoloths will tell you that trying this sort of stunt is a recipe for disaster. But in a large boat, crowded with wailing tanar'ris, it is actually possible. There is a limit to what even a yugoloth can pay attention to, after all. The party needs to choose a large craft, one where both fiends and mortals will be boarded. Then they need to find a way to sneak aboard without being seen by the marraenoloths, who can easily detect magic and invisibility and like to give a good look to everyone who comes on walking on the plank. If the PCs do manage this, the hard bit is behind them. The boat is way overcrowded and hardly anyone from the mob will be able to tell them from the other mercenaries. They should stay out of direct sight of the boatmen until they reach Durao, though.

The river trip to Durao only takes one day, during which about one fifth of the occupants end up falling overboard due to the overcrowding and general rowdiness. Among tanar'ri generals, this is considered acceptable.

Durao

Durao, the 274th layer of the Abyss, is a layer but it is also the name of the city which is the only interesting site it contains. The Styx flows through the layer as a slow river, wide enough that the other side can't be seen. In fact, there is no other side, not on Durao anyway, because the infernal river will carry away to other layers and planes anyone that travels it without the knowledge of the marraenoloth boatmen. The Styx here borders an endless, featureless swamp of sickly trees, treacherous sands, and deformed creatures.

Between the swamp and the river, the iron wharves of Durao have been built by the tanar'ri as an embarkation point for the Blood War. The city is stretched along many dozens of kilometers of the river, but is only a few hundred meters wide at the most. It is entirely built from iron, and rust is a common feature. The wharves themselves are enormous things, which seem to be made in equal parts of rust and iron. The tanar'ri use massive barges, led by marraenoloths, to ferry the Blood Warriors away to Gehenna. When the troops march, the entire city reverberates with their step, and to visitors it is like a small earthquake.

This layer has a day and night cycle of around 72 hours; daylight is provided by a huge orange "sun" which seems to rise and fall from the horizon the same way it does on most Prime worlds. The party arrives during the local night. Torches blaze everywhere along the town, carried by fiendish armies either arriving or on their way to their barges. The iron surfaces are filthy and rusty, and they don't seem to reflect much light. The dark alleys of Durao are *very* dark.

Disembarking is not an issue if the party has climbed on the boat legitimately. Even if they are stowaways, they *could* waltz in front of the marraenoloths as if they were part of the passengers. After all, the gaunt fiends can't do much now that they're arrived. However, the yugoloths *will* remember them, and they *will* spread the word to every single other boatman of the Styx. Unless the PCs are planning on never using the river again (and, after all they've been through, this may be a rather sensible proposition), they'd better sneak out the way they sneaked in.

Detaching from the mob isn't a breeze either. If the party has signed up, everyone else in the horde will be keeping an eye on them. If they were stowaways but they weren't exceptionally careful in staying hidden, they may have been unwittingly "recruited" as well, and find that the tanar'ri aren't keen on letting them leave before they've reached the battlefields on Gehenna.

The PCs can't fight the whole company, so they'll need to bribe the leader or run away fast enough to take them by surprise and hide quickly enough that the fiends can't just teleport in front of them.

Durao features dozens of fiendish weaponsmiths and armor makers, but the stuff they make is of shoddy quality. Most of the arms trade is done by tiefling merchants, yugoloths, night hags and the occasional arcane. They transport their wares here and sell them to whatever army happens to find itself lacking in weapons right on the eve of battle – and with the poor organizational skills of the tanar'ri, this happens way too often.

The swamps are largely unexplored. The main reason is that noone is much interested in what they contain, but they are also inhabited by dangerous fiends. A form of particularly tough and savage rutterkin have evolved here. Graybeards speculate that the Styx water which feeds the swamps, though harmless in the short term, eventually causes tanar'ris that get lost to forget their own identity. As this happens, they are slowly transformed into the misshapen rutterkin, explaining their dominance in this layer. Every now and then, someone makes an attempt to catch them and get them on the battlefields, but the deformed creatures can become very hard to find if they want to, and there aren't enough of them to make it worth the hassle.

As Lianne can relay, the portal the party wants to cross is far away in the deep swamps. A little known fact is that there are areas in the swamps of Durao, far from the river, where the population of rutterkins is substantially higher. Lianne knows of one village, where her gate to Durao lies. Fifty kilometers from that place, a massive mangrove contains the gate to the Demonweb Pits.

The party should now contact Graz'zt in some way; a *sending* spell is the most obvious way, but they can also cast a *scrying* at him. Like all Abyssal lords, Graz'zt can automatically detect divinations that target him, and use them as a channel back to the caster. Normally, the lords use this ability to attack or mislead diviners, but in this case Graz'zt will simply scry back at them, thus using the spell as an efficient mean of communication. If the party has no way to contact Graz'zt by magic, you may let them buy a scroll or two somewhere in Durao, or assume that the balor Cold-flame was waiting for them on the layer and that he'll contact them as soon as he figures that they've arrived.

Graz'zt will be brief since he has other business to attend to. He'll direct the party to the Knotted Rutterkin, a tanar'ri tavern which is located at about six kilometers along the riverside from their current location. Graz'zt will tell them to walk along the Styx, following its course, and that they'll find the tavern easily.

While they walk towards the Knotted Rutterkin, a robed figure pulls out of a dark alley as they are passing by, and stops in front of them. It is carrying a bundle of rags, which it drops at the PCs' feet. The bundle falls open, revealing a severed goat's head. Then, the figure attacks with fangs and claws!

Vampire Cultist of Orcus		Al. Chaotic Evil	Orc Vampire Barbarian 12 th (Abyss)	CR: 14
Str: 26 (+8)	HP: 12d12 (83)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 18 (+4)	AC: 27 (+3 dex, +6 nat, +6 armor, +2 shld)	Armor: medium		
Con: -	Initiative: +8 (+4 dex, +4 improved init)	% fail.: 30% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 8 (-1)	Ref: +10 (+4 base, +4 dex, +2 lit reflex)	BAB: +11 Grapple: +23		
Wis: 12 (+1)	For: +8 base	Melee: +19 (+11 base, +8 strength)		
Cha: 14 (+2)	Will: +5 (+4 base, +1 wis)	Ranged: +15 (+11 base, +4 dexterity)		
Attacks				Skills
Masterwork greatclub, +20/+15/+10 melee, damage 1d10+12, and Slam, +15 melee, damage 1d8+8 and energy drain				Bluff +10 (+8 racial, +2 cha)
Feats and special abilities				Hide +9 (+8 racial, +4 dex, -3 armor)
Feats: Weapon focus (slam), Weapon focus (greatclub), Power attack, Improved unarmed strike, Improved grapple, Alertness, Combat reflexes, Dodge, Improved initiative, Lightning reflexes.				Intimidate +17 (+15 ranks, +2 cha)
Blood drain (ex): drains 1d4 Constitution with a successful grapple check, gaining 5 temporary hit points.				Listen +26 (+15 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness, +8 racial)
Children of the night (su): can summon 1d6+1 fiendish rat swarms, 1d4+1 fiendish bat swarms, or 3d6 fiendish wolves as a standard action. They arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve for up to 1 hour.				Move silently +9 (+8 racial, +4 dex, -3 armor)
Dominate (su): as a standard action within 9 meters; CL 12, DC 17.				Search +7 (+8 racial, -1 int)
Create spawn (su): humanoids or monstrous humanoids killed by energy drain rise as vampire spawns (if less than 5 HD) or vampires (if 5 HD or more) after 1d4 days.				Sense motive +9 (+8 racial, +1 wis)
Energy drain (su): deal 1 negative level with a successful slam attack, and gain 5 temporary hit points.				Spot +11 (+8 racial, +1 wis, +2 alertness)
Alternate form (su): can polymorph to bat, dire bat, wolf or dire wolf as a standard action. CL 12.				Survival +16 (+15 ranks, +1 wis)
Gaseous form (su): as a standard action, with fly speed 6 and perfect maneuverability.				
Spider climb (su): always active.				
DR 10/silver and magic, DR 2/-, fast healing 5, resistance to cold and electricity 10, +4 turn resistance, darkvision 18m, improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +4; immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, disease, death effects and anything that requires a Fortitude saves unless it works on objects too or is harmless; not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability or energy drain, ability damage, fatigue or exhaustion.				
Rage (ex): 4/day, +6 Strength, +3 Will versus fear, -2 to AC. Lasts 3 rounds.				
Improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +4, DR 2/-.				
Equipment				
Masterwork greatclub (damage 1d10)				
+1 breastplate (AC +6, max dex +3, check penalty -3, spell failure 25%)				
+1 buckler (AC +2, spell failure 5%)				
200 gold				

After one or two rounds, depending on how bad the combat seems to be going, three vampire spawns which the cultist created while he was in *Durao* flow up from cracks in the iron floor in *gaseous form*, solidify and attack on the following round.

Vampire Spawn (3)		Al. Chaotic Evil	Medium Undead (Abyss)	CR: 4
Str: 16 (+3) Dex: 14 (+2) Con: - Int: 13 (+1) Wis: 13 (+1) Cha: 14 (+2)	HP: 4d12+3 (29) AC: 22 (+2 dex, +3 nat, +5 arm, +2 shield) Initiative: +6 (+2 dex, +4 improved init) Ref: +5 (+1 base, +2 dex, +2 lightning ref) For: +1 base Will: +5 (+4 base, +1 wis)	Speed: 6 Armor: medium % fail.: 40% BAB: +2 Melee: +5 (+2 base, +3 strength) Ranged: +4 (+2 base, +2 dexterity)	Check pen.: -6 Grapple: +5	
Attacks Slam +5 melee, damage 1d6+4+energy drain, or Longsword, +6 melee, damage 1d8+3, crit 19-20/x2			Skills Bluff +6 (+4 racial, +2 cha) Climb +2 (+5 ranks, +3 str, -6 armor) Diplomacy +4 (+2 synergy, +2 cha) Hide +4 (+4 ranks, +4 racial, +2 dex, -6 armor) Jump +2 (+5 ranks, +3 str, -6 armor) Listen +11 (+4 racial, +4 ranks, +1 wis, +2 alertness) Move Silently +4 (+4 racial, +4 ranks, +2 dex, -6 armor) Search +8 (+4 racial, +3 ranks, +1 int) Sense Motive +11 (+4 racial, +6 ranks, +1 wis) Spot +11 (+4 racial, +4 ranks, +2 alertness, +1 wis)	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (longsword), Toughness Blood Drain (Ex): the spawn can drain blood with a successful grapple check, dealing 1d4 Constitution drain and gaining 5 temporary hit points. Energy Drain (Su): the spawn can drain energy with a slam attack, dealing one negative level (DC 14 to remove) and gaining 5 temporary hit points. Domination (Su): as a standard action similar to a gaze attack, the spawn can reproduce the Dominate Person spell with a range of 9 meters (DC 14, CL 5). Fast Healing 2. These spawns do not yet have a coffin. If reduced to zero hit points, they are destroyed. Gaseous Form (Su). At will (CL 6), with speed 6 and perfect maneuverability. Spider Climb (Ex). As the spell.				
Equipment Masterwork breastplate (+5 AC, +3 max dex, -4 check penalty, 25% arcane spell failure) Longsword (damage 1d8, crit 19-20/x2) Heavy steel shield (+2 AC, -2 check penalty, 15% arcane spell failure)				

The vampire and his minions will attack relentlessly. Other tanar'ri passing by will take notice of the fight, but will not interfere (though they may watch for amusement, maybe take bets, and start a small riot when bets aren't honored). If slain, the vampire will vanish in *gaseous form* through cracks in the floor. This messenger is a servant of the demon lord Orcus – who by all accounts is supposed to be dead, killed by Kiaransalee and then finally destroyed in his undead form by a group of adventurers many years ago. Nevertheless, a portion of the clergy of the Demon Prince of the Undead is still active and is carrying on the timeless feud that Orcus had with Graz'zt and Demogorgon, giving raise to rumors that the archfiend is somehow still alive.

Orcus, or his clergy, has received news of the PCs' travels and actions through the Abyss and has taken an interest. The intent of the mission assigned to the vampire is to let the party know that Orcus is interested in them, to see their reactions, and to get first-hand information of their combat skill. The goat head is a well-known symbol of a bunch of abyssal lords including Orcus; coupled with the use of a vampire, anyone can make a check of Knowledge (the Planes) with DC 15 or Knowledge (the Abyss) with DC 10 to realize that the undead creature was a servant of Orcus. If the party asks anyone, they'll hear the common chant – Orcus is dead, but strange deeds are still sometimes committed in his name.

The Knotted Rutterkin is easy to find, once you are within a hundred meters or so, for the insane howl of pain that comes from the signpost. Tanar'ri signs are sometimes very literal. The inside of the tavern is lit by two huge bonfires which blaze in the room. The iron is so hot within 1.5 meters of them that unprotected skin will take 1 point of heat damage per round. The Knotted Rutterkin is a Tanar'ri tavern, and the patrons are all fiends. There are two armanites drinking at the bar, one hezrou sitting in a corner and gorging himself with pickled larvae, a table full of eight bar-lgura drinking, shouting, dancing and dangling from the rafters, and two babaus playing darts. The target is a big orc, chained to the wall and with circles tattooed on his torso. One of them is the owner, but he isn't doing much. The work is done by quasits, zipping around, serving drinks.

When the PCs enter, everyone stops their verbal conversations and those who can switch to telepathy. There isn't much silence, since the party can still hear the orc moaning, the rutterkin howling,

and one singing bar'lgura who is too drunk to notice them. After a second or two, the chatter resumes, but everyone is keeping an eye on the party and one of the quasits flies towards them and says: "Beat the road, berks. This is a tanar'ri hole".

The party's contact, who is none other than the balor Coldflame, isn't here yet. If the PCs don't want trouble, they can wait for him outside, but if they insist on entering the Knotted Rutterkin, a big brawl will develop rather quickly. At first it will seem to be everyone against the PCs, but after just one or two rounds it will develop into a sort of free-for-all when tanar'ri in the back rows get angry against those that are hogging the fun, or when the locale begins to take damage and the owner starts trying to kill the rowdiest customers.

Coldflame will come near the tavern a few minutes after the PCs have arrived, or during the fight. In the latter case, he will watch from outside but he won't intervene. He figures that if the PCs can't sort a tavern brawl out on their own, then they aren't useful to either him or Graz'zt. Until he talks to the party, he'll stay hidden in the shadows. He knows that his presence will get noticed, and while he doesn't particularly desire it to remain a secret, he doesn't want to stay sitting in public longer than needed either.

The mangrove is a huge beast of a tree, close to twenty meters in diameter, and it reaches taller than the tallest other trees of the swamp. Spiderwebs are woven between its branches, and dark shapes can be easily spotted scurrying among the heights. The gate lies at the top of the tree.

The Demonweb Pits

The Demonweb Pits belongs to the Queen of Spiders, Lolth, the goddess of the dark elves. It is an endless complex of giant caves, each tens or hundreds of kilometers across. Each of them is a bottomless pit, full of spiderwebs that cover it from side to side. Travelers can walk and climb on the spiderwebs, if they are very slow and careful, reaching any point of the realm.

The environment of the Demonweb Pits is unusual and frightening, but it isn't particularly dangerous. Travelers should look out for the locals, though. The realm crawls with petitioners in the forms of drow and drider, giant spiders of all kinds, and the unique brand of tanar'ri native to this place, the shapechanging yochlol.

A yochlol's natural form is that of an amorphous tower of slime, with eight tentacles and a single huge eye. But they can also assume the form of a huge giant spider, or the shape of a beautiful female human, dark elf or elf. Each portal into or out of the Demonweb Pits is guarded by a yochlol, and if the PCs ask Lianne they can find out how she used to pass through the layer undisturbed.

Ithla-Sathlo had an agreement with Lolth, gaining safe passage in return for some unknown favor. Both Lianne and Rothakon would pass through unharmed, together with anyone they wanted, and be guided through the mazelike webs. Smart PCs should suspect that the agreement must be void now that the archfiend is dead, and be ready to fight or negotiate.

The yochlol guarding the portal from Durao is in the form of a comely wood elf maiden. Lianne will ask for passage, but the fiend will deny it, saying that the death of her grandfather has voided any and all agreements Lolth had with her family. The yochlol can be bribed to let the PCs leave the portal site without a fight – but she will not guarantee safe passage nor guidance. The party has to get through the Demonweb Pits on their own.

Lianne is unable to guide the party to the next leg of their journey; she will explain that the path of webs is everchanging and that she doesn't know how to navigate it. They'll need to find a native and convince him to help, but chances are that they'll need to use force to that end.

Lolth is said to live in a fortress in the shape of an impossibly huge spider, which moves through the layer constantly. Besides that, however, there are a few petitioner settlements scattered throughout the layer. They resemble clusters spider nests, with big balls of web serving as houses, continual light spells as lighting, and giant spiders roaming freely. Each of these villages has at least one high

priestess as nominal ruler, and a yochlol who can override her at any moment, imparting the will of Lolth directly.

The drow encountered outside the nests are likely to be combat parties. These groups are extremely dangerous; the dark elves that compose them are all above level 5, and some of them can reach as high as level 10. A typical group is composed of a priestess, a wizard, and two or more fighters or rogues. All of these drows are granted a +10 competence bonus to Hide checks on the Demonweb Pits, and usually only the priestess and a single fighter are met by travelers. The other dark elves are hidden in the webs.

What's worse, the combat parties can boast impressive equipment. Their armor and weapons are no less than +2, and priestesses are typically equipped with +3 or +4 simple weapons and armor. Wizards wear bracers of armor +5 or +6, and some of the drow will have cloaks of protection +2 or +3. All of this equipment is crafted from a drow-made alloy that disintegrates immediately in natural sunlight, or when exposed to a *sunbeam* or *sunburst* spell. Unless the PCs can cast those powerful spells, this doesn't help them much here – but it does mean that they'll be unable to use the items themselves for long. Dark elf style is extravagant and readily recognizable, rich in spider-themed decoration, Lolth symbols and the symbols of the specific drow House that crafted the item. Given this, most merchants can tell drow material when they see it and they won't be fooled into purchasing it as if it were normal cloth and metal. These magical items can reasonably be sold for between a fifth and a tenth of the price listed in the DMG; buyers in layers of eternal night may be willing to shell out some more.

The parties also have minor magical items, made from normal materials. They are either stuff that can't be made in drow alloy, or that they have looted from former visitors to the Demonweb Pits.

Despite all of the hostility, the drow will not attack on sight, so the party can talk to them. If that doesn't work, there's always mind-influencing magic or, for evil parties, torture. The drow aren't used to being on the wrong end of pain and they aren't exactly loyal to their superiors either. The easy way out is really easy in the Abyss.

Otherwise, the PCs can try to make an exchange of favors. After one or two days of walking on the webs, the party will find the drow village of Tanich-drae. The village is currently at war with another region of the Demonweb Pits, which hangs in a different, neighbouring cavern. Two mile-long tunnels through the rock wall connect the huge vaults and allow raiding parties of both factions to get through and strike at their enemies. Tanich-drae is slowly losing the conflict and some drow in the village murmur that their high priestess Synidia has lost the favor of Lolth. So, she has devised a plan to stall the war and gain time to regain strength: collapse the tunnels and burn the webs near the far side, thus making repairs much more difficult.

However, Synidia would like nothing more than a group of outsiders to do the risky job. She will not have to put her own forces at risk, and her rivals will subsequently waste even more time looking for the culprit. As the PCs approach the village, they are likely to be attacked by a patrol. However, after the first fight, another patrol will approach them to invite them into Tanich-drae to speak with Synidia.

Once the party is headed towards the Infestant portal with a drow escort, the dark elves will stop attacking them outright unless the PCs do something to annoy or anger them.

Infestant

Finally, the party has arrived to the home of their enemy, even though he has already been dead for some time. Infestant was a jungle layer, similar to Demozg but even more rich in hostile plant life. The only humanoids here were the dark druids, servants of the archdemon. Today, Ithla-Sathlo's realm is very different.

Demogorgon has set fire to the entire layer. The destruction is total. Infestant is an apocalyptic plain, covered in deep ashes from which black tree stumps jut out. Patches of former jungle are still

burning; the powerful spells that Demogorgon used are not yet extinguished. Even the sky seems to be on fire: bright red and yellow clouds broil like lava and jets of liquid fire occasionally pour down. Strong winds chill them quickly, but they still sometimes reach just a few meters from the ground. There is no more night on Infestant, though the ashes in the air cloud visibility so that objects beyond 300 meters are fuzzy and indistinct.

The vast majority of Ithla-Sathlo's servants and creatures have been killed and their remains burnt to ashes. Except for a few locations, the party isn't going to encounter anyone or anything. It is impossible to summon animals with conjuration spells in the whole layer; whether this was done by Demogorgon somehow to hinder Ithla-Sathlo's dark druids, or it is a consequence of the thorough destruction of life that he brought, it is unknown. The main problem is the ash, which reaches up to a meter deep. Even on paths, much like deep snow, the ash reduces movement to half normal. If a character runs or charges, he will lift a cloud of ash which is slightly toxic. Everyone within 1.5 meters of his path, including himself, must make a Fortitude save (DC 14) or take 1d3 Strength damage unless they are protected somehow.

Sometimes, the winds are low enough that they lift up an ash storm. Ash storms can easily be seen a few minutes in advance, but travelers should waste no time in getting ready. They have all the usual annoyances of a sandstorm, granting partial concealment beyond 3 meters and total concealment beyond 15 meters, hindering arrow fire (-2 to hit), and on top of that everyone caught in an ash storm is exposed to a toxic dose of ash every ten minutes as detailed above. A wet tissue tied over the mouth and nostrils is enough to avoid the poison in the air.

The storms may have an additional problem. You see, Rothakon employed several bound elder air elementals in his service. With the destruction wrought by Demogorgon, the elementals have fled their magical bounds and are now roaming Infestant. They mostly stay within the ash storms, so whenever the party finds itself in a storm they might meet one or two elder air elementals. Like all summoned elementals on the Outer Plane, they have taken on the nature and alignment of the plain they've been conjured on, and they are chaotic evil. Chances are they'll attack without talking and flee when severely hurt.

Noone has any idea of what to look for. Even Lianne (assuming she's still with the party) is somewhat disoriented; the layer has changed to the point of being unrecognizable. The party is looking for the secret of draining the Selthian Orb, but noone can figure what that may actually be. A magic ritual? An artefact? Or something else that Ithla-Sathlo has carried with it to the grave?

There is a sort of a wide path in the ashes, leading away towards a direction which Lianne says probably leads to where Ithla-Sathlo used to dwell. There isn't much to do besides following it. The palace used to be a week or so away, but with the ash the party is going to take twice as much unless they fly. Flying characters must stay very close to the ground in order to avoid strong winds and fiery clouds at high altitudes.

The apparent desolation doesn't mean that there is noone at all on the layer. A power vacuum is still a vacuum: it attracts everything nearby.

The first group that notices the party's arrival is the cult of Orcus. One of the unique undead fiends called visages, created by Orcus before his fall, is not far from the portal from the Demonweb Pits. Among other things, visages have supreme powers of illusion; they can affect groups of people from a long range, creating arbitrary illusions for them, or *dominate* a single person. There aren't many visages left, and most people are thankful for that, but those that still live are the toughest and meanest of the original bunch.

The undead fiend knows that the baatezu are taking an interest in Infestant. The devils have sent one of their own, a hamatula spy named Maralsh, to scout the layer and find a way for the fiends to enter. Maralsh has managed to reach Infestant by striking a tenuous deal with Rothakon. Upon reaching the layer, however, the two quickly turned on each other. Maralsh was forced to escape. His mission now is to penetrate the ruins of Ithla-Sathlo's fortress, and discover the exact timing of the portal which leads here from Tenebra. The devils hope that they'll be able to re-enter Tenebra and

get to the portal just in time to get a force through. One big enough to hold Infestant until reinforcements can arrive.

The visage is going to try to get the PCs to meet with Maralsh. To this end, it will use illusions to draw the PCs away from the path and towards the point where the hamatula is hiding; if need be, the fiend will create illusionary monsters to discourage the PCs from going further along the path.

If the baatezu meets the PCs, he is quite willing to strike a deal. Help in finding the portal's schedule, in return for help in searching for the spell the PCs are looking for. Naturally, while he doesn't have any specific treachery in mind right now, Maralsh will strive to keep the deal as undetailed as possible, so that he has more room for "creative interpretations" later. He will not reveal the reason for which the baatezu need that portal, claiming instead that mapping the portals between the layers is part of their normal espionage operations.

If the party agrees, the hamatula will follow them and help, though he will take care not to put himself into unnecessary danger. He will also try to avoid using his supernatural abilities, and generally try to keep his capabilities a secret.

There are only two buildings of relevance on Infestant. The first and largest is Ithla-Sathlo's fortress, a 200 meters wide, 40 meters tall dome of now-blackened wood and stone which can be easily seen from a distance now that there is no more jungle to block sight. The other is Rothakon's own palace, which stands about a half kilometre from the fortress. The palace is built like a small keep, with its own moat and battlements. It is built from gray stone, roughly square, fifty meters on its side and thirty meters tall, with four forty-meters towers in the corners. It seems to have survived the fire rather well.

Rothakon's Palace

The palace, keep, or whatever it may be called, is a reflection of Rothakon's ties to his own father. It is imposing, defensible, and robust enough to withstand Demogorgon's fire, but it virtually lies in the shadow of Ithla-Sathlo's much more awesome fortress. At the same time, it seems to have fared better during the invasion, by virtue of not being important enough to be attacked first. Demogorgon would have razed it, if not for the fact that he sensed something wrong as he killed Ithla-Sathlo (its soul being imprisoned), and decided to return to his realm quickly.

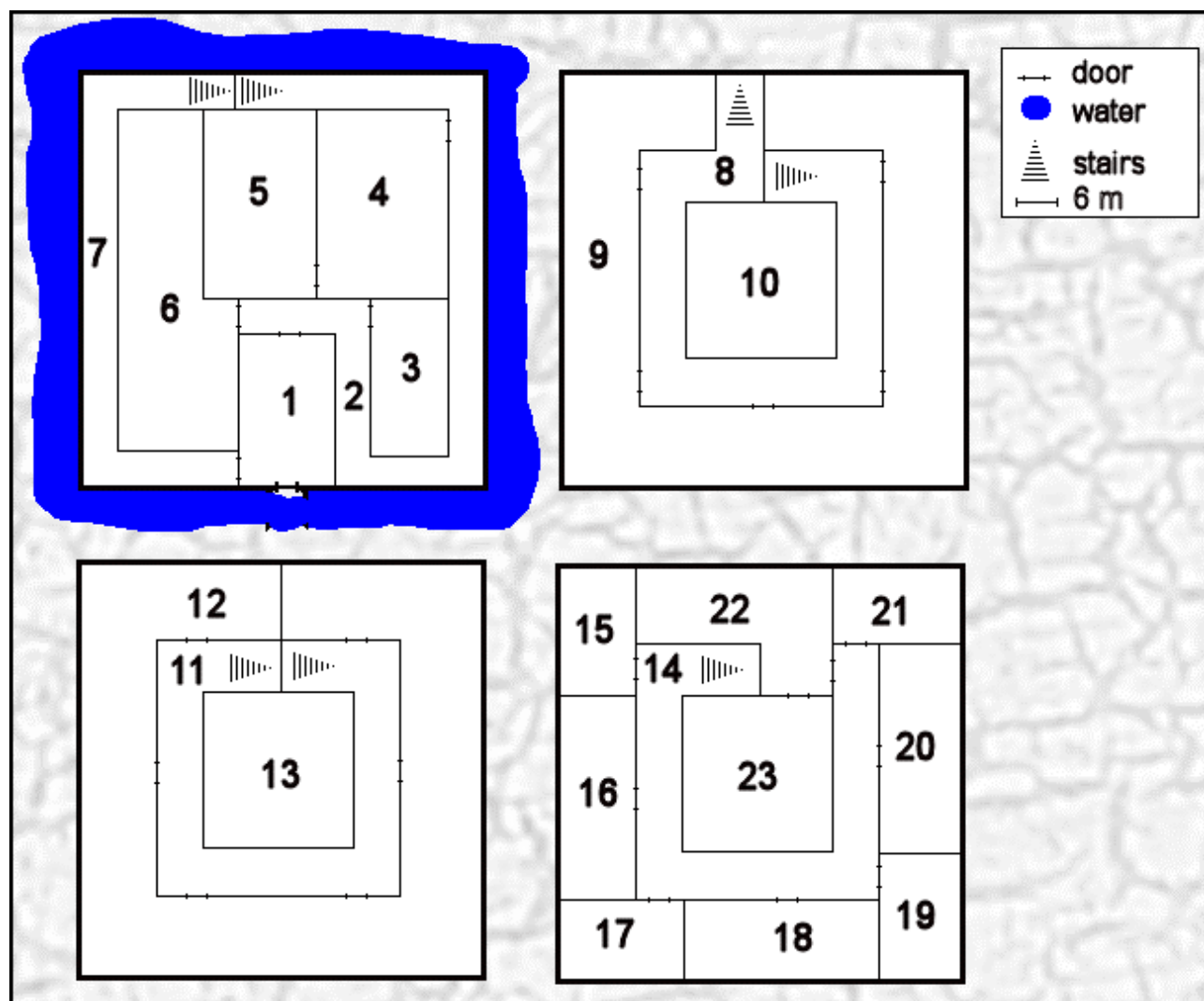
From up close, the fortress is unsettling. It doesn't seem to be divided in floors, because on any of its sides the party can see barred windows at all sorts of different heights, arranged as if spiraling around the building. If the party walks around the building and looks at it from the "northward" side, the one that looks towards Ithla-Sathlo's abode, they can see that there is a large balcony near the top of the palace, seemingly open to the outside. Observers can see room 22 through the opening. Attempts to climb or fly there will be frustrated though – the balcony is actually covered by a permanent *wall of force*, making it the safest part of the palace.

The building is surrounded by a six-meters-wide moat, but there is no water in it. A lot of it evaporated, the rest was absorbed by the ashes falling on it. The bottom of the moat is now a sort of mud of wet ashes. Not far from the bridge, there is the corpse of a black-robed druid, reduced to a desiccated husk. Smart PCs will deduce that he died after the battle, since everything else has been burnt to ashes.

The bridge was burnt down, so the PCs must find some way to cross. But there is something in the moat... and if the PCs are not extremely careful around it, it will wake up. See, Rothakon had forced a massive water elemental to guard his moat. During the combat, as the raging fires evaporated the moat, it should have died – instead, it was turned into something. Maybe so great was the massacre that a bit of fleeing life force got stuck into the creature, or maybe the Abyss corrupted the elemental. Either way, the monster is still there and it craves the water of any living being it senses.

Ashmud Elemental	Al. Chaotic Evil	Huge Elemental (Water)	CR: 15
Str: 34 (+12)	HP: 36d8+288 (450)	Speed: 9, swim 36 (average)	
Dex: 24 (+7)	AC: 24 (+7 dex, +9 nat, -2 size)	Armor: none	
Con: 26 (+8)	Initiative: +7 dex	% fail.: 0%	Check pen.: 0
Int: 10 (+0)	Ref: +21 (+12 base, +7 dex, +2 lit ref)	BAB: +27	Grapple: +47
Wis: 9 (-1)	For: +28 (+20 base, +8 con)	Melee: +37 (+27 base, +12 str, -2 size)	
Cha: 11 (+0)	Will: +13 (+12 base, -1 wis, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +32 (+27 base, +7 dex, -2 size)	
Attacks			Skills
2 slams, +38 melee reach 4.5 m, damage 3d8+12+poison, crit 19-20/x2			Listen +40 (+39 ranks, -1 wis, +2 alertness)
Feats and special abilities			Spot +40 (+39 ranks, -1 wis, +2 alertness)
Feats: Alertness, Awesome Blow, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (slam), Improved Bull Rush, Improved Natural Attack (slam) Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam).			
DR 10/-, darkvision 18m, elemental traits.			
Drench (ex): can quench fires and dispel magical fires.			
Poison (ex): DC 36, primary and secondary damage 1d4 STR.			
Drain (su): can deal 1d6 CON damage with a successful grapple check.			

The creature can move at its swim speed in the muddy water of the moat. It can't become a vortex in such a small space, though, and it has lost its water mastery as well. However, its touch has become poisonous and it can drain fluids from a grappled creature, making it very dangerous.



The general look of the inside of Rothakon's palace is that of a common keep, except that the architecture is a bit odd. It is not clearly divided in floors; rather, a very long stairway climbs from the ground floor up to the top, with doors leading to the various rooms at irregular intervals. Thus, each room is at its own height. The map shows four "floors" for reference, but remember that it is a sim-

plification. For example, while room **1** is actually at ground level, room **4** is at about six meters of height (the space under its floor is occupied by room **6**).

Rothakon still commands the dark druids of Infestant – those that remain, at least. The dark druids of Infestant used to be a curious bunch. While most of them were neutral evil, a sizable portion of these servants of Ithla-Sathlo were chaotic evil. Normally, this moral and ethical slant would have prevented them from attaining the level of communion with the neutrality of nature which is a requirement of the druid class. However, these druids were convinced that in the Abyss, chaos and evil *are* nature and Ithla-Sathlo is their incarnation. They worshipped the archfiend as the manifestation of the chaotic evil nature of the plane. Philosophically speaking, they were halfway between “druids of the Abyss” and “clerics of Ithla-Sathlo”, even though you can’t be a chaotic evil druid and Ithla-Sathlo could not grant spells. Belief is power, and theirs was so strong that they could cast druid spells while on the Abyss, maybe drawing them from the plane itself.

With the death of Ithla-Sathlo, however, all the chaotic evil druids immediately lost the focus of their bizarre faith – and lost druidic powers as a result. All of the higher level druids fell into this category. Those that survived the passage of Demogorgon’s army were killed by neutral evil underlings with an axe to grind. The dark druids that currently inhabit Infestant are all neutral evil and between the 6th and 9th level of experience. Most of them are tieflings.

Even these druids are subject to the restriction on summoning in Infestant.

Dark druid				Al. Neutral Evil		Tiefling Druid 9 th (Abyss)		CR: 9	
Str: 10 (+0)		HP: 9d8+18 (58)				Speed: 9			
Dex: 13 (+1)		AC: 15 (+1 dex, +4 armor)				Armor: none			
Con: 14 (+2)		Initiative: +1 dex				% fail.: 20%		Check pen.: 0	
Int: 12 (+1)		Ref: +6 (+3 base, +1 dex, +2 lit ref)				BAB: +6/+1		Grapple: +6	
Wis: 18 (+4)		For: +8 (+6 base, +2 con)				Melee: +6/+1 (+6 base)			
Cha: 9 (-1)		Will: +10 (+6 base, +4 wis)				Ranged: +7/+2 (+6 base, +1 dex)			
<u>Attacks</u>						<u>Skills</u>			
+1 <i>scimitar</i> , +7 melee, damage 1d6+1, crit 18-20/x2						Bluff +1 (+2 racial, -1 cha)			
<u>Feats and special abilities</u>						Concentration +14 (+12 ranks, +2 con)			
Feats: Lightning reflexes, Natural spell, Vile natural attack (all natural attacks deal 1 extra vile damage)						Hide +0 (+2 racial, +1 dex, -3 armor)			
Nature sense, wild empathy, trackless step, resist nature's lure, wild shape (small to large, 3/day), venom immunity.						Knowledge (nature) +12 ranks			
Darkvision 18 mt, resistance to fire, cold and electricity 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.						Listen +16 (+12 ranks, +4 wis)			
Druid spells/day: 6/5/5/4/2/1, caster level 9						Spellcraft +12 ranks			
<u>Equipment</u>						Spot +16 (+12 ranks, +4 wis)			
+1 <i>hide armor</i> (AC +4, max dex 4, check penalty -3, spell failure 20%)									
+1 <i>scimitar</i> (damage 1d6+1, crit 18-20/x2)									
Bag of spell components									

Prepared spells:

0th level: Create water, Detect magic, Detect magic, Guidance, Resistance, Virtue
1st level: Charm animal, Longstrider, Faerie fire, Obscuring mist, Cure light wounds
2nd level: Bear’s endurance, Bull’s strength, Heat metal, Warp wood, Animal messenger
3rd level: Greater magic fang, Dominate animal, Poison, Meld with stone
4th level: Cure serious wounds, Dispel magic
5th level: Animal growth

Dark druids of this level were trained to support Ithla-Sathlo’s tanar’ris and plant monsters with spells to enhance the troops and hinder the enemies, but most of those allies are now dead or have fled. If they are together with Rothakon, a dark druid’s priority will be to heal and empower the half-fiend.

If they are on their own, they’ll try to wild shape into a dangerous Large animal with 9 HD and cast *animal growth* and *greater magic fang* on themselves. Here are the stat blocks for the druids so prepared:

Dark druid (ape form)		Al. Neutral Evil	Tiefling Druid 9 th (Abyss)	CR: 9
Str: 30 (+10)	HP: 9d8+36 (76)	Speed: 9, climb 9		
Dex: 13 (+1)	AC: 14 (+1 dex, +5 nat, -2 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 18 (+4)	Initiative: +1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 12 (+1)	Ref: +10 (+3 base, +2 dex, +2 lit ref, +4 res)	BAB: +6/+1 Grapple: +20		
Wis: 18 (+4)	For: +12 (+6 base, +2 con, +4 res)	Melee: +14/+9 (+6 base, +10 str, -2 size)		
Cha: 9 (-1)	Will: +14 (+6 base, +4 wis, +4 res)	Ranged: +5/+0 (+6 base, +1 dex, -2 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, +17 melee reach 3m, damage 1d8+13		Bluff +1 (+2 racial, -1 cha)		
Feats and special abilities		Concentration +16 (+12 ranks, +4 con)		
Feats: Lightning reflexes, Natural spell, Vile natural attack (all natural attacks deal 1 extra vile damage)		Hide -5 (+2 racial, +1 dex, -8 size)		
Nature sense, wild empathy, trackless step, resist nature's lure, wild shape (small to large, 3/day), venom immunity, DR 10/magic.		Knowledge (nature) +12 ranks		
Darkvision 18 mt, resistance to fire, cold and electricity 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.		Listen +16 (+12 ranks, +4 wis)		
Druid spells/day: 6/5/5/4/2/1, caster level 9		Spellcraft +12 ranks		
<i>Animal growth</i> and <i>greater magic fang</i> in effect.		Spot +16 (+12 ranks, +4 wis)		

Dark druid (brown bear form)		Al. Neutral Evil	Tiefling Druid 9 th (Abyss)	CR: 9
Str: 35 (+12)	HP: 9d8+63 (103)	Speed: 12		
Dex: 11 (+0)	AC: 16 (+7 nat, -2 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 24 (+7)	Initiative: +0	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 12 (+1)	Ref: +9 (+3 base, +2 lit ref, +4 res)	BAB: +6/+1 Grapple: +22		
Wis: 18 (+4)	For: +17 (+6 base, +7 con, +4 res)	Melee: +16/+11 (+6 base, +12 str, -2 size)		
Cha: 9 (-1)	Will: +14 (+6 base, +4 wis, +4 res)	Ranged: +4/-1 (+6 base, -2 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
2 claws, +19 melee reach 3m, damage 2d6+15, and		Bluff +1 (+2 racial, -1 cha)		
Bite, +11 melee reach 3m, damage 3d6+6		Concentration +19 (+12 ranks, +7 con)		
Feats and special abilities		Hide -5 (+2 racial, +1 dex, -8 size)		
Feats: Lightning reflexes, Natural spell, Vile natural attack (all natural attacks deal 1 extra vile damage)		Knowledge (nature) +12 ranks		
Nature sense, wild empathy, trackless step, resist nature's lure, wild shape (small to large, 3/day), venom immunity, DR 10/magic, improved grab (both claws).		Listen +16 (+12 ranks, +4 wis)		
Darkvision 18 mt, resistance to fire, cold and electricity 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.		Spellcraft +12 ranks		
Druid spells/day: 6/5/5/4/2/1, caster level 9		Spot +16 (+12 ranks, +4 wis)		
<i>Animal growth</i> and <i>greater magic fang</i> in effect.				

Dark druid (rhinoceros form)		Al. Neutral Evil	Tiefling Druid 9 th (Abyss)	CR: 9
Str: 34 (+12)	HP: 9d8+63 (103)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 8 (-1)	AC: 16 (+9 nat, -2 size, -1 dex)	Armor: none		
Con: 25 (+7)	Initiative: -1 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 12 (+1)	Ref: +4 (+3 base, +2 lit ref, -1 dex)	BAB: +6/+1 Grapple: +22		
Wis: 18 (+4)	For: +13 (+6 base, +7 con)	Melee: +16/+11 (+6 base, +12 str, -2 size)		
Cha: 9 (-1)	Will: +10 (+6 base, +4 wis)	Ranged: +3/-2 (+6 base, -1 dex, -2 size)		
Attacks		Skills		
Gore, +19 melee reach 3m, damage 2d6+21		Bluff +1 (+2 racial, -1 cha)		
Feats and special abilities		Concentration +19 (+12 ranks, +7 con)		
Feats: Lightning reflexes, Natural spell, Vile natural attack (all natural attacks deal 1 extra vile damage)		Hide -5 (+2 racial, +1 dex, -8 size)		
Nature sense, wild empathy, trackless step, resist nature's lure, wild shape (small to large, 3/day), venom immunity, DR 10/magic, powerful charge (double damage on a charge).		Knowledge (nature) +12 ranks		
Darkvision 18 mt, resistance to fire, cold and electricity 5, <i>darkness</i> 1/day.		Listen +16 (+12 ranks, +4 wis)		
Druid spells/day: 6/5/5/4/2/1, caster level 9		Spellcraft +12 ranks		
<i>Animal growth</i> and <i>greater magic fang</i> in effect.		Spot +16 (+12 ranks, +4 wis)		

If they can't get the time to cast *greater magic fang*, their attack and damage are 3 points lower. They will try to get at least *animal growth* on, though; remember that one spell can target four creatures, so a group of druids will usually not need multiple castings.

1. Whether the party defeats or eludes the ash mud elemental, entering the fortress shouldn't pose a problem; the main gate has been destroyed. The entrance room's floor is filthy, covered in ashes blown in from the outside and dried, black blood from the rotten corpses of several tanar'ris. A babau, a rutterkin, an armanite and two bar'lguras lie on the floor, killed by Demogorgon's horde. The smell of putrefaction saturates the room. A persistent creaking noise can be heard from upwards: a crystal chandelier hangs from a chain and is oscillating in the wind coming from outside. It used to be magnificent, but it is severely damaged.

The dead fiends still have their equipment: the babau has an ornate *+1 cold iron scimitar* (faint evocation, CL 3; damage 1d6+1, crit 18-20/x2) and the armanite has a full plate barding and a masterwork heavy mace. The rutterkin has a snap-tong, an exotic two handed weapon which deals 2d6 piercing damage, threatens a critical on 20/x2, and grants improved grab and constrict for 2d6 damage. Despite the shoddy, spikes-and-rust look, the weapon is perfectly balanced and counts as masterwork.

There is a large, wide open iron door opposing the entrance, and a smaller wooden door on the left side. The wooden door is locked – it can be bashed in (break DC 18, hardness 5, 15 HP) or the lock may be picked (DC 30).

2. This is where the long stairway which leads throughout the palace begins. It is six meters wide, ensuring ample room for big fiends to walk through. The walls facing the outside have no windows at this height, but they do have torches (they are all either burnt out or unlit, though). Every few meters, the party can see the corpse of a fiend or a tiefling; those that haven't been looted only have common equipment and a few gold coins.

The stairs features a complex system of pit traps, which can be enabled or disabled from room **10**. It is usually disabled, and has remained such during the assault because Rothakon was absent, but the half-fiend has activated it upon returning to Infestant. There are a total of four spiked and poisoned pits at irregular points throughout the stair; they all have Search DC 25 and are six meters wide by six meters long. They can be disabled, but the DC is 30. The bottoms of the pits are all dug into the ground at the same level, and since the stairs climb upwards this means that the higher-up pits are more dangerous.

The pits trigger when at least two Medium or one Large creature step on them. Characters that trigger a trap must make a Reflex save, DC 20, or fall down. The traps are 12, 15, 18 and 21 meters deep, dealing 4d6, 5d6, 6d6 and 7d6 damage respectively from the fall. The spikes hit as if they were attacking at +14 to hit; every character is attacked by 1d4 spikes that each deal 1d4+5 damage plus poison. The poison is purple worm poison (DC 24, primary damage 1d6 Strength, secondary damage 2d6 Strength).

3. This room seems to be a living room of sorts. The floor is covered with a filthy carpet, and there are five cheap-looking couches – three for Medium-sized creatures, and two for Large-sized creatures. There is a fireplace, but it seems to have been exposed to hostile magical fire much hotter than what it was designed to handle. Its right side is half-melted, and the wood which should have been used as fuel has been reduced to ashes. A humanoid corpse lies nearby, but it is half-vaporized, half-melted and basically unrecognizable.

A cupboard on the “southern” wall used to hold snacks and beverages, but it has been smashed and looted. A careful search (DC 30), however, will reveal a switch hidden near the hinges of one of its panels. Flicking the switch will cause a lethal trap to activate, one that Rothakon used to get rid of annoying guests.

The floor of this room is about one meter from the ground. Underneath, there is a vat of green slime. The trap causes steel bars to block the door (DC 28 to break), and the floor to quickly recede except for a small (thirty centimetres wide) patch in front of the switch. When the switch is activated, all characters within 3 meters of the center of the room must make a Reflex save (DC 20) or fall into the slime. One round after that, the floor has fully retracted and all characters save for one standing near the switch will fall into the slime. They can try to grab onto the walls (Climb DC 25),

or the fireplace (easy enough for Small creatures, but larger creatures must make a Climb check, DC 15).

Flicking the switch again causes the floor to return to its original position just as quickly (a pity for the furniture, and for anyone still in the slime). The slime itself dissolves anything but stone, and it deals 1d6 Constitution damage per round. It can be scraped off in the first round (destroying the item being used), but after that it must be destroyed with fire, cold, or by cutting it away. All of these methods deal damage to the victim. Or, it can be killed by sunlight or a *remove disease* spell.

4. This room is completely smashed; the furniture, both wood and metal, has been shattered into small pieces or burnt by magic. A sizable fight took place here; there are at least two dozen dead fiends belonging to both factions, strewn on the floor (which is six meters from ground level; this room is on top of part of room 6). Part of these corpses have been reanimated by Rothakon as zombies, after the battle. If anyone tries to search them, or generally disturbs them, no less than ten reanimated fiend bodies will rise and attack. They still have their equipment, including magical items.

When the party finally manages to loot the bodies, they can find a +2 *spiked half-plate* (moderate abjuration, CL 6; AC +8, max dex +0, check penalty -6, spell failure 40%) and a +1 *thundering warhammer* (faint necromancy, CL 5; damage 1d8+1, crit 20/x3), belonging to one of Rothakon's lieutenants; a *ring of protection* +1 (faint abjuration, CL 3); a Large +2 *scale mail* (moderate abjuration, CL 6; AC +6, max dex +3, check penalty -3, spell failure 25%); and a +1 *dagger* (faint evocation, CL 3). There are also several mundane weapons and suits of armor, and a bag of gems worth a total of 2800 gold.

5. This room used to be the kitchen. There are large fireplaces with big pots still full of stagnant, rancid water; a couple of rotting animal carcasses, surrounded by flies; and lots of kitchen instruments. On a first look, there doesn't seem to be anything interesting. Looking around, however, the party can notice that five of the big kitchen knives are made from cold iron, making them somewhat valuable. A large metal cylinder which on first glance looked like a stove has been filled with ice and was used as a refrigerator; it's still got enough ice inside but a lot of the food has gone bad anyway. It was mostly vegetables; turns out that Rothakon has better tastes than most tanar'ri.

6. This is a *huge* room; it is at ground level and it extends under rooms 4 and 5 in addition to the portion shown on the map. The "southernmost" part is clear and features a smooth wooden floor and 10-meters tall ceiling. The "northernmost" part has a stone floor and six-meters tall ceiling. The room has very little furniture except for crystal chandeliers, enchanted with *continual light* spells. The walls show remains of tapestries, but they have been almost destroyed during the fighting. It may have been a fairly good ball room.

The place has seen some fighting, and there are rotting bodies around of fiends and a few tiefling and human dark druids. But there is someone alive here. One of the dark druids is here, looting. He has stolen an *amulet of natural armor* +2 and a *type II necklace of fireballs* from the bodies. If the PCs make lots of noise nearby before entering this room, or if he can otherwise get a couple rounds to prepare for their arrival, he'll drop the necklace somewhere easy to find, and then hide among the corpses and hope not to get noticed (+2 circumstance modifier to Hide due to all the bodies). If a PC enters the room and picks up the string of beads, the druid will stand up and cast *flame strike*.

7. This is a long stairway which goes downwards, towards the basement or dungeon. It is not trapped, but it is very damp due to infiltrations from the moat, and yellow mold has grown on big patches of the outermost wall. If anyone touches it, it will release poisonous spores within 3 meters (DC 15, damage 1d6 Constitution primary and 2d6 Constitution secondary). It can be safely burnt away, and sunlight kills it as well. There is an iron door at the bottom of the stairs, reinforced with an *arcane lock* spell (break DC 38, hardness 10, 80 hit points), well locked (DC 35 to pick), and trapped (sonic blast deals 10d6 damage within 9 meters, Fortitude DC 16 halves; Search DC 29; Disable DC 29).

There is just one huge room on the other side of the door, nearly as wide as the whole fortress. Rothakon used it as a prison, but he never had that many prisoners. In fact, the only prisoner was

Lianne's mother – a poor human woman, born in a barbarian tribe on the Prime, captured more than twenty years ago and raped by the half-fiend. She went insane during pregnancy, and after giving birth to the tiefling, Rothakon threw her in prison. Surprisingly, she survived for twenty years of madness and imprisonment, at least until Demogorgon's attack. Then, noone was there to feed her, and even insane resilience doesn't let a human live without food or clean water for long. Now, the dark room only contains many old skeletons, and her corpse.

The body is still in relatively good conditions, at least when compared to the mess upstairs. Thanks to some filthy water leaking from the moat, she survived for quite a while after the attack (though the trickle eventually dried up). And the prison rats haven't eaten her body, due to her having eaten them first.

8. The stairway keeps climbing through the palace. There are fewer corpses here; the fight was just getting here when Demogorgon gave orders to retreat.

9. This wide, long room which follows the fortress' perimeter is divided in five floors, about 12 meters long on average, each 1.5 meters higher than the previous, with stairs to go from one to the next. The doors on the inner stairway take to each of these floors. Along the outer wall, there are many barred windows, suitable for shooting at invaders. The bodies of fiends and tieflings from both sides litter the room. They have been looted by the dark druids not long ago, so they don't have much of use. The druids did leave behind some magical arrows and bolts; characters that make a Search check can find a number of *+1 arrows* and *+1 bolts* equal to their check result (there are 40 bolts and 60 arrows total) in an hour of search.

10. This room contains a huge table with a large map of Infestant spread on it. The map depicts the layer as it was before the devastation, with the paths in the jungle, the groves of dangerous vegetation, the lairs of beasts, all clearly marked – but it isn't much use now. The only interesting thing is that the location of the portal to Tenebra is marked, as well as its period. It lies about a hundred kilometres from the fortresses, and will open again for one hour in thirty days' time. There aren't any other features of interest. Infestant is relatively small; technically, all layers are spatially infinite, but the less important ones are poor of features, simpler, and less prestigious to conquer.

If the hamatula, Maralsh, is with the PCs, he will be satisfied with this map. At this point, he has no interest in helping the PCs further. Unless the party was careful in wording their agreement, he will simply take the map, politely thank them, and teleport away, reasoning that the deal is fulfilled since he helped them get here. In any case, he will certainly no longer care much for the PCs' well-being and will leave them as soon as the deal is satisfied.

A wall has several dark robes hanging from hooks on it. Under each robe, an amulet of passage can be found; there are more than enough for each PC. The opposite wall has a lever in a corner (it activates or deactivates the floor traps in area **2**).

11. Unless the characters have been exceedingly stealthy or fast in exploring the lower rooms, by the time they arrive here Rothakon will have understood that there are intruders. The druids have set up an ambush. Three of them are hiding in room **12**, behind the first three doors, one behind each door. A bulezau tanar'ri is also waiting with them, and one of the druids has used a *fire seeds* scroll to load him with holly berry bombs (CL 11). The stupid monster doesn't know how the spell works.

Their plan is as follows. The bulezau will bash down the second door (meaning the second from downstairs on the map) as soon as a PC passes nearby, and attack. When as many PCs as possible are gathered around him, the druids will charge as well, and/or try to dispel the PCs' spells. As soon as conditions are good for it, or if things go bad, the druid that created the holly berry bombs will retreat and activate them, killing the bulezau and (chances are) anyone nearby that fails their Reflex save. Collectively, the bombs deal 8d8+88 damage in a 1.5 meters radius, and the DC is 19. The druids aren't much loyal to each other, so the leading one won't hesitate in killing a mate if it seems that he can take down a PC or two with him.

12. This area looks like room **9**, which is just below it, but there are no bodies in it. The fight never got this far; the invaders were climbing up the stairs when Demogorgon called for the retreat. The room is empty except for several ranged weapons hanging on the walls. Rothakon's defensive strategy included keeping weapons near the windows so that defenders could grab them and shoot outside (he knows that tanar'ri can't really be trusted to be given equipment and keep it with them and intact forever). There are six masterwork composite long bows and six masterwork heavy crossbows; not far from them, there are quivers of cold iron and silver ammunition, all enchanted. There are a total of 100 each of *+1 cold iron arrows*, *+1 cold iron bolts*, *+1 silver arrows* and *+1 silver bolts*. Further, there are three scrolls of *greater magic weapon* (CL 15) to be found on the bottom of one of the quivers if the PCs search the room (Search check, DC 20); if they take the quivers with them, they'll find them as soon as they take a good look at them.

There is also a fairly interesting magic item, hidden under a fake flagstone (Search check, DC 25; the cover is thick enough to block *detect magic*). It seems to be a quiver full of shimmering silvery light (moderate transmutation, CL 7). Any ammunition kept within it will magically assume the properties of alchemical silver. The quiver takes one full round to transform a single arrow or bolt; ammunition transformed this way retains the silver properties for up to one hour.

13. This room is lit by *continual light* spells. It is a well-equipped torture room, with a brazier full of coal, a stretching table, plenty of tongs and blades, and even an iron maiden. In a corner, there is a vat of acid, with a blackened skeleton inside it. The fumes from the acid fill the room; characters that come too close are affected as if by an inhaled poison (DC 13, primary damage 1 Constitution, secondary damage 1d4 Constitution). A trapdoor leads down to room **10**.

On the bottom of the acid vat, there is a gold ring; the last victim hid it on herself, and it wasn't found; chances are that the PCs won't find it either unless they use *detect magic* (and then they'll have to find a way to pull it out; even just immersing an arm to reach the bottom deals 5d6 damage for two rounds). The ring is a *spell storing ring* which contains the *sacrificial skill* spell from the Book of Vile Darkness.

14. The stairs here are clean and intact; there are no bodies. The iron door leading to room **22** is barred from the inside; knocking it down requires a DC 28 Strength check. It has 60 hit points and hardness 10. The door leading to room **18** is similar and locked; the lock is fairly simple (DC 20 to pick).

15. This room is empty, but it contains a spiral staircase leading upwards to a tower. The tower is open on all sides and has no roof. One of three huge vrock, survivors of the massacre and still serving Rothakon, is here; if any intruders come up, the fiend will fly outside the reach of PCs and telekinetically activate a hidden switch on the tower top (Search DC 30) which closes the trapdoor leading back down. By this time, the other two vrock will have seen what's going on from the other towers; together, they'll start a dance of ruin.

Vrock		Al. Chaotic Evil	Huge Exemplar (Abyss)	CR: 13
Str: 32 (+11)	HP: 16d8+144 (216)	Speed: 9, fly 15		
Dex: 14 (+2)	AC: 22 (-2 size, +2 dex, +14 natural)	Armor: none		
Con: 29 (+9)	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0%	Check pen.: 0	
Int: 14 (+2)	Ref: +12 (+10 base, +2 dex)	BAB: +16	Grapple: +35	
Wis: 16 (+3)	For: +19 (+10 base, +9 con)	Melee: +25 (+16 base, +11 strength, -2 size)		
Cha: 16 (+3)	Will: +13 (+10 base, +3 wis)	Ranged: +16 (+16 base, +2 dexterity, -2 size)		
Attacks			Skills	
2 claws, +26 melee reach 4.5mt, damage 4d6+11, and			Concentration +28 (+19 ranks, +9 con)	
Bite +23 melee reach 4.5mt, damage 2d6+5, and			Diplomacy +5 (+3 cha, +2 synergy)	
2 talons +23 melee reach 4.5mt, damage 1d8+5			Hide +13 (+19 ranks, +2 dex, -8 size)	
Feats and special abilities			Intimidate +22 (+19 ranks, +3 cha)	
Feats: Cleave, Combat reflexes, Improved natural attack (claws), Multiattack, Power attack, Weapon focus (claws)			Knowledge (abyss) +21 (+19 ranks, +2 int)	
All attacks are considered chaotic and evil aligned.			Listen +30 (+19 ranks, +8 racial, +3 wis)	
Damage reduction 10/cold iron or good, darkvision 18 mt, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance to acid, cold and fire 10, spell resistance 18, telepathy within 30 mt.			Move Silently +21 (+19 ranks, +2 dex)	
Dance of ruin (su): three or more vrocks can dance for three rounds, if they are not interrupted by stunning, paralyzing or killing one of them, a wave of energy deals 20d6 damage to every non-demon within 33 meters. Reflex half, DC 18.			Search +21 (+19 ranks, +2 int)	
Spell-like abilities: at will – <i>mirror image</i> , <i>telekinesis</i> (DC 18), <i>greater teleport</i> (self and 22.5 kg only); 1/day – <i>heroism</i> ; caster level 12 th .			Sense motive +21 (+19 ranks, +3 wis)	
Spores (ex): 1/3 rounds, free action, they deal 1d8 damage to every adjacent creature and 1d4 damage/round for 10 rounds; <i>bless</i> , <i>neutralize poison</i> , <i>remove disease</i> or holy water kills them.			Spellcraft +21 (+19 ranks, +2 int)	
Stunning screech (su): 1/hour, all non-demons within 10 meters must save on Fortitude, DC 27, or be stunned for 1 round.			Spot +30 (+19 ranks, + racial, +3 wis)	
Summon 2d10 dretches or 1 vrock 1/day with 40% success, equivalent to a 3 rd level spell.			Survival +7 (+3 wis, +2 synergy*, +2 synergy**)	
			* when following tracks	
			** in the Abyss	

16. The contents of this room have been smashed; it looks like there's been a fight. A naked human has been nailed to the wall, making for a gruesome sight. When a character approaches, he suddenly lifts his head and gurgles something. He's still alive!

If the party helps him, he'll reveal that his name is Sart Sames (male human druid 9th/Prime Material Plane/chaotic neutral). He used to be one of the druids serving Ithla-Sathlo, and if the PCs treat him with respect he's willing to recount what happened during the battle.

"I wasn't there to see the fight between the Demogorgon and Ithla-Sathlo. But when the master was killed, a lot of the elders suddenly lost all their powers. Only I and some of the others, less than half of the druids overall, and none of the most powerful ones, were still able to call upon Nature. We would have all been slaughtered, but then the Demogorgon decided to retreat, bless its addle-coved heads. It went out in the courtyard before the palace together with a bunch of his wizards and performed a short but complex ritual, setting the sky on fire. Shortly after that, his army marched out of Infestant, leaving us survivors here."

"We tried to quench the fires, but the skies simply rained down more, and without the elders there wasn't much we could do. Many of the other druids took this as a chance to settle some scores with the elders. There was another massacre. Then Rothakon returned; I wanted to just leave, maybe go back to the Prime, I don't know, but he intimidated the others into serving him. He wants to become the new lord of Infestant. Me, I think that going somewhere else would have been a better idea, maybe come back later, and I told him so. And he stuck me here, with nails that even a bear wouldn't be able to budge."

Sart Sames doesn't want to hinder or help the PCs; his greatest desire right now is to get away from Infestant, and then get away from the Abyss. He knows how things go in this plane; without a powerful patron, he'll have a hard time surviving. He may be persuaded to provide information about Rothakon's capabilities and strategies, in return for help getting away, but he won't directly fight him. Sart says that Rothakon is a real terror if given time to prepare, and that he's smart enough to

know all the tricks to get that time. He says that he once killed a balor that mocked him for being just a half-fiend. The druid doesn't want to face him, no matter what.

17. The room here is empty, except for a spiral staircase leading to the tower. The staircase is badly and obviously damaged; if the PCs try to use it, it will crumble midway, causing characters to fall and take 1d6 damage. A second vrock is on the tower top, and it will act in a manner similar to the first one described for room **15**. This trapdoor has a hidden closing switch as well.

18. As soon as the door is opened, the PCs can sense a thick smell of rot. A horse is lying on the ground here, dead and decomposing. Getting closer, the PCs can see that the animal is not a horse – it's a unicorn, whose horn has been sawed off. The unicorn was captured by Rothakon. The half-fiend had taken its horn for using in an alchemical experiment – which failed. The beast was locked here, and left to starve.

19. The trapdoor leading upwards here is closed and stuck. It can be broken with a Strength check (DC 28) or through damage (60 hit points, hardness 10). There is nothing upstairs, but chances are that the three vrock on the other towers will notice someone bursting out of the trapdoor. The switch that controls this trapdoor is broken.

20. This room served as a dormitory for Rothakon's mortal servants. There are twenty beds and two lockers. The first locker contains a couple dark robes, similar to those used by the druids.

The other is trapped (Search DC 29, Disable Device DC 29). If the locker is opened without its key, either by lockpicking (DC 25) or smashing it (Strength DC 24, hardness 10, 20 hit points), it casts a *damning darkness* spell on the thief's clothes. The spell lasts for 7 rounds and creates magical *darkness* as the spell, except that it also deals 2d6 damage per round to Good creatures and 1d6 damage to Neutral creatures in its area. The trapped locker contains 450 gold coins and an amulet of passage (faint divination, CL 5). The amulet is a round disk of bronze, with the image of an eye surrounded by tentacles etched into it. It allows the wearer to see normally within Ithla-Sathlo's palace.

21. The last tower is similar to the others; however, a loose spell has severely weakened its higher structure during the fight and now one of its sides is prone to crumbling if careless characters walk on it. The third vrock is here, perched on the safe side. If a PC runs or fights on the opposite side, everyone there must make a Reflex save, DC 16. Those that succeed manage to fall into the room, taking only 2d6 damage. Those that fail fall forty meters, taking 13d6 damage when they hit the ground outside.

22. Rothakon is alone inside this room, recovering part of his magical items. If the PCs start bashing down the door, he'll start casting defensive spells.

This room seems to be a library and office; the "western" wall is covered with bookshelves, while the "southern" one features an assortment of weapons hanging from the wall. A large and heavy wooden desk, covered in papers and alchemical devices, sits in the middle of the room; a big chair lies broken not far from it. The "northern" side is fully open to the outside, and it gazes directly on the black dome nearby.

An invisible *wall of force* prevents passage through the balcony, covering the whole "northern" opening. A command word, known to Rothakon alone, can activate or deactivate it.

You have no time to look at all the details, though: your gaze is drawn to the tall, dark winged figure standing near the shelves. As it turns quickly, holding a fistful of scrolls and vials in one hand and a greatsword in the other, you recognize the enemy who has chased and been chased by you for months. Rothakon the half-fiend is clad in a dark green wizard's robe, though you can spot glimmering mithril beneath it. He seems to be handling his weapon and magic with equal skill.

"There is nothing here for you. I make you a first and last offer. Leave Infestant now, and never come back, and I will not pursue. No negotiation; turn back this instant - or die!"

Rothakon really means that. If left alone, he would certainly seek revenge eventually, but right now he's got more pressing issues – gathering Ithla-Sathlo's remaining forces, securing Infestant, and

more. Still, what little patience he has has long been exhausted. If the PCs do anything except retreating as fast as they can, or if they try to parley further, he is going to attack them.

Rothakon is as good a spellcaster as he is a fighter. At any given moment, he is likely to have a *false life* spell up. In combat, his favorite tactic is to fly or *dimension door* away, cast *invisibility* followed by as many protection and enhancement spells as he thinks he can get away with (*unholy aura*, *shield*, *displacement*, *haste*, *mirror image*, *damning darkness*, *resonating resistance*). When he feels ready, he'll fly or *dimension door* in while invisible and start with full attacks (against a single foe), cast *glitterdust* (against multiple weak enemies), or use his *wand of dispel magic* (against magic-using foes). When facing spellcasters, he may cast *protection from good* to thwart domination attempts (if he wants to save up his *unholy aura*). Of course, whenever he feels a combat is imminent, he'll start casting his protection and enhancement spells before the combat if at all possible.

Right now, he doesn't want to kill the PCs at all costs, though he'll do his best. If it looks like he's in danger, he'll *dimension door* away and return to Ithla-Sathlo's fortress to prepare better. If he suffers a *dimensional anchor* or similar spell, he is going to flee immediately by flying through the *wall of force* with the command word, and close it behind him on the following round. The three vrocks on the towers will cover him. Further, Rothakon has a *contingency* up, set to *dimension door* him 250 meters away from immediate danger, should his hit points fall below 50.

Rothakon hasn't had time to pick up every useful item in this room, his personal study. The half-fiend has acquired a vast amount of lore in an attempt to increase his magical knowledge, but he never had much success, lacking the concentration and dedication required to become a wizard. The books are full of Abyssal lore, tales of dark pacts, histories of famous demons and descriptions of locations on the Lower Planes. A character using this library can get a +2 circumstance modifier to Knowledge (the Abyss) checks, but the books also contain lots of inaccuracies and outright lies; there is a 5% chance of receiving false information. The fiendish authors have also described many rituals and spells in these books. They contain the following spells from the Book of Vile Darkness: *extract drug*, *sadism*, *reality blind*, *resonating resistance*, *abyssal might*. Additionally, they contain the following spells: *dominate person*, *mirage arcana*, *lesser planar binding*, *crushing despair*, *repulsion*, *protection from energy*, *deep slumber*, *web*, *cause fear*, *chill touch*, *ray of enfeeblement*, *hold portal*, *wall of force*. The bookshelves also contain the following magical scrolls: *animal growth* (moderate transmutation, CL 9), *mage's faithful hound* (moderate conjuration, CL 9), *eye-bite* (moderate necromancy, CL 11), *haste* (faint transmutation, CL 5), *displacement* (faint illusion, CL 5). It'll take hours to find everything, since the spells are scattered around the library's books and even the scrolls are hidden among the pages.

The desk is covered in alchemical instruments, vials and bottles, mortars full of smelly herbs, everything without so much as a label. Characters that search carefully can find three festering bombs (6 meters burst, characters in the area are exposed to filth fever), five doses of the drug known as mordayn (from the Book of Vile Darkness), three doses of luhix (from the Book of Vile Darkness), twelve vials of acid, a bottle of holy water (in a well-sealed metal flask), a thunderstone, a *potion of bear's endurance* (faint transmutation, CL 5), a *potion of tongues* (faint divination, CL 5), a *potion of undetectable alignment* (faint illusion, CL 3) and gold powder and gems for a total worth of 1200 gold.

The weapons on the wall are all masterwork, some are magical, and quite powerful too; Rothakon gathered this treasure while serving Ithla-Sathlo. He kept the masterwork ones intending to learn how to enchant them eventually – but, again, he never had the dedication required to learn that art. There is a masterwork warhammer, a masterwork cold iron longsword, a +1 longsword, a +1 *masterslaying dagger* (see the Book of Vile Darkness), a +2 *ghost touch quarterstaff*, a masterwork composite longbow (Strength bonus +4), and a +1 *icy burst lance*.

Rothakon	Al. Chaotic Evil	Half-fiend Human Barbarian/Sorcerer/Eldritch Knight 2 nd /6 th /7 th (Abyss)	CR: 18
Str: 24 (+7) Dex: 15 (+2) Con: 18 (+4) Int: 16 (+3) Wis: 10 (+0) Cha: 21 (+5)	HP: 2d12+6d4+7d6+60 (117) AC: 24 (+2 dex, +1 nat, +7 arm, +2 def, +2 shl) Initiative: +2 dex Ref: +7 (+4 base, +2 dex, +1 res) For: +15 (+10 base, +4 con, +1 res) Will: +13 (+10 base, +2 iron will, +1 res)	Speed: 12, fly 12 (average) Armor: none % fail.: 10% BAB: +12/+7/+2 Grapple: +20 Melee: +18/+13/+8 (+12 base, +7 str, -1 size) Ranged: +13/+8/+3 (+12 base, +2 dex, -1 size) Check pen.: 0	
Attacks 2 claws, +18 melee reach 3m, damage 1d6+7, and bite, +16 melee reach 3m, damage 1d8+6, or White Render, +21/+16/+11 melee reach 3m, damage 3d6+13 + 1 point Con damage (+2d6 vs law, +2d6 vs good), crit 19-20/x2, and Bite, +16 melee reach 3m, damage 1d8+6		Skills Appraise +5 (+3 int, +2 synergy*) Concentration +21 (+17 ranks, +4 con) Craft (alchemy) +18 (+15 ranks, +3 int) Craft (armorsmith) +7 (+4 ranks, +3 int) Handle animal +7 (+4 ranks, +3 cha) Intimidate +15 (+12 ranks, +3 cha) Knowledge (abyss) +15 (+12 ranks, +3 int) Knowledge (arcana) +9 (+6 ranks, +3 int) Listen +4 ranks Sense motive +17 ranks Spellcraft +20 (+17 ranks, +3 int) Spot +2 ranks Survival +6 (+4 ranks, +2 synergy**)	
Feats and special abilities Feats: Iron will, Weapon focus: greatsword, Power attack, Improved sunder, Extra spell (contingency), Improved critical: greatsword, Violate spell-like ability (horrid wilting) (half of its damage is vile) Smite good (su): 1/day he can make a normal melee attack to deal 10 extra damage to a good creature. Darkness (DC 17) and poison (DC 19) 3/day; desecrate (DC 17), contagion (DC 18), blasphemy (DC 22), unhallow, horrid wilting (DC 23) unholy aura (DC 23) and unholy blight (DC 19) 1/day. CL 15. Darkvision 18 mt, immunity to poison, resistance to acid, fire, cold and electricity 10, DR 10/magic, his natural weapons are considered magic for the purpose of overcoming DR, SR 25. Barbarian rage 1/day. Sorcerer spells known (DC 13 + spell level): 0 th level: <i>dancing lights</i> , <i>touch of fatigue</i> , <i>prestidigitation</i> , <i>detect magic</i> , <i>read magic</i> , <i>daze</i> , <i>ray of frost</i> , <i>resistance</i> , <i>no light</i> *; 1 st level: <i>expeditious retreat</i> , <i>shield</i> , <i>magic missile</i> , <i>protection from good</i> , <i>fist of stone</i> **; 2 nd level: <i>glitterdust</i> , <i>invisibility</i> , <i>detect thoughts</i> , <i>mirror image</i> , <i>false life</i> ; 3 rd level: <i>displacement</i> , <i>haste</i> , <i>reality blind</i> *, <i>curse of the putrid husk</i> *; 4 th level: <i>dimension door</i> , <i>damning darkness</i> *, <i>abyssal might</i> *; 5 th level: <i>greater blink</i> **, <i>resonating resistance</i> *; 6 th level: <i>contingency</i> , <i>transformation</i> . * this spell is found in the Book of Vile Darkness ** this spell is found in Complete Arcane Sorcerer spells/day: 6/8/7/7/7/6/3, caster level 12 Rothakon has the following permanent spells on him: <i>resistance</i> , <i>see invisibility</i> , <i>tongues</i> , <i>enlarge person</i> , <i>greater magic fang</i> (CL 12, on the bite attack).		* +2 synergy with alchemical items and armors ** in the Abyss	
Equipment +3 <i>mithral chain shirt of light fortification</i> (AC +7, max dex +6, spell failure 10%) (strong abjuration, CL 13) +1 <i>mithral buckler</i> (AC +2) (faint abjuration, CL 3) <i>Belt of Balor fury</i> (moderate evocation, CL 10) (while the wearer is raging, he is wrapped in flames and deals 6d6 fire damage to anyone who is grappling him) 3 doses of <i>Silversheen</i> (faint transmutation, CL 5) <i>The White Render</i> (+3 <i>unholy anarchic greatsword of wounding</i>) (strong evocation [evil, chaos], CL 16) 3 <i>potions of cure critical wounds</i> (faint conjuration, CL 7) <i>Potion of heroism</i> (faint enchantment, CL 5) 3 <i>potions of bull's strength</i> (faint transmutation, CL 3) <i>Potions of barkskin</i> +5 (strong transmutation, CL 12) <i>Scroll of time stop</i> (strong transmutation, CL 17) <i>Scroll of permanency</i> (moderate universal, CL 9, can spend up to 2000 XP) <i>Ring of protection</i> +2 (moderate abjuration, CL 6) <i>Wand of dispel magic</i> (10 charges left, moderate abjuration, CL 10) <i>Bead of force</i> (moderate evocation, CL 10) <i>Feather token</i> , <i>whip</i> (moderate conjuration, CL 12) 8 human child eyes (using one of these as a spell components has a 20% chance of doubling the spell's duration) Several belt pouches holding spell components and the various potions, 150 gold, 3 tanglefoot bags, 2 smokesticks, sunrod, 3 thunderstones, 6 tindertwigs.			

23. This is Rothakon's bedroom. It contains a huge luxurious canopy bed, several tanar'ri paintings (worth a thousand gold if you can find a buyer), and a short table with an incense burner and a

pouch of specially treated angel wings. The fumes that rise from burning these wings are a poison that deals 1d6 Charisma damage as primary damage and 2d6 Charisma damage as secondary damage (DC 18). Rothakon (who is immune to poison) just liked the scent.

There is a trapdoor under the bed. It's fairly easy to spot, though moving the bed requires a Strength check (DC 15). The trapdoor opens on an iron ladder leading down into room 13.

The Archfiend's Mausoleum

From a distance, Ithla-Sathlo's palace looks like a small black hill. It seems to be halfway between built and grown: the bulk of its main wall is composed of sixteen enormous trees – now dead and blackened – that rise from the ground in a 200-meters-wide circular pattern and curve unnaturally towards a central point, at just forty meters of height. Their branches interlock so that they form the outer wall of the fortress; where they don't block passage entirely, stone walls have been erected between them. There is no apparent entrance; the palace's branches would let Ithla-Sathlo's servants through by magic. Now that the trees are dead and scorched, that magic is gone.

However, Demogorgon has damaged the wall enough that there are many points where passages have opened; in fact, on the other side from the direction from which the PCs arrive, a magical fire is still burning on the wall. PCs can make a Spot check to notice the smoke from the other side, but due to the ashes already in the air, the DC is 27.

That point is the biggest hole in the wall, but it is surrounded by flames and well-guarded by the remaining defenders. There are many more passages; a Search check, DC 20, is enough to reveal another one big enough to let a Medium creature through (DC 25 for a Large hole) to any of the outer sections of the fortress. Regardless, as soon as the PCs peer inside they can notice something strange. The inside of the palace is shrouded in magical darkness; no light at all seems to pierce it. Everything within the palace has total concealment, unless a body is wearing one of the amulets of passage. *Light* and even *daylight* are useless.

Once sight becomes possible, the fortress' interior has an unusual aspect. It is divided in two areas: an outer shell of wide spaces, and the inner sanctum where Ithla-Sathlo used to dwell. More than a building, it feels like a natural environment, although one that is twisted and corrupt. There are no stone walls; most of the spaces inside are huge and open, and separated by thick wall-like knots of blackened branches. Thick undergrowth covers almost everything, except for the areas where Demogorgon has passed through. Those seem to have been consumed by acid, which still lies in pits along the archfiend's path. Even where the plants are still standing, they are dried and dead – though they are still thick enough to reduce to one fourth the movement of characters that can't fly. Druids, with their trackless step ability, don't have this problem and can move through the whole fortress easily.

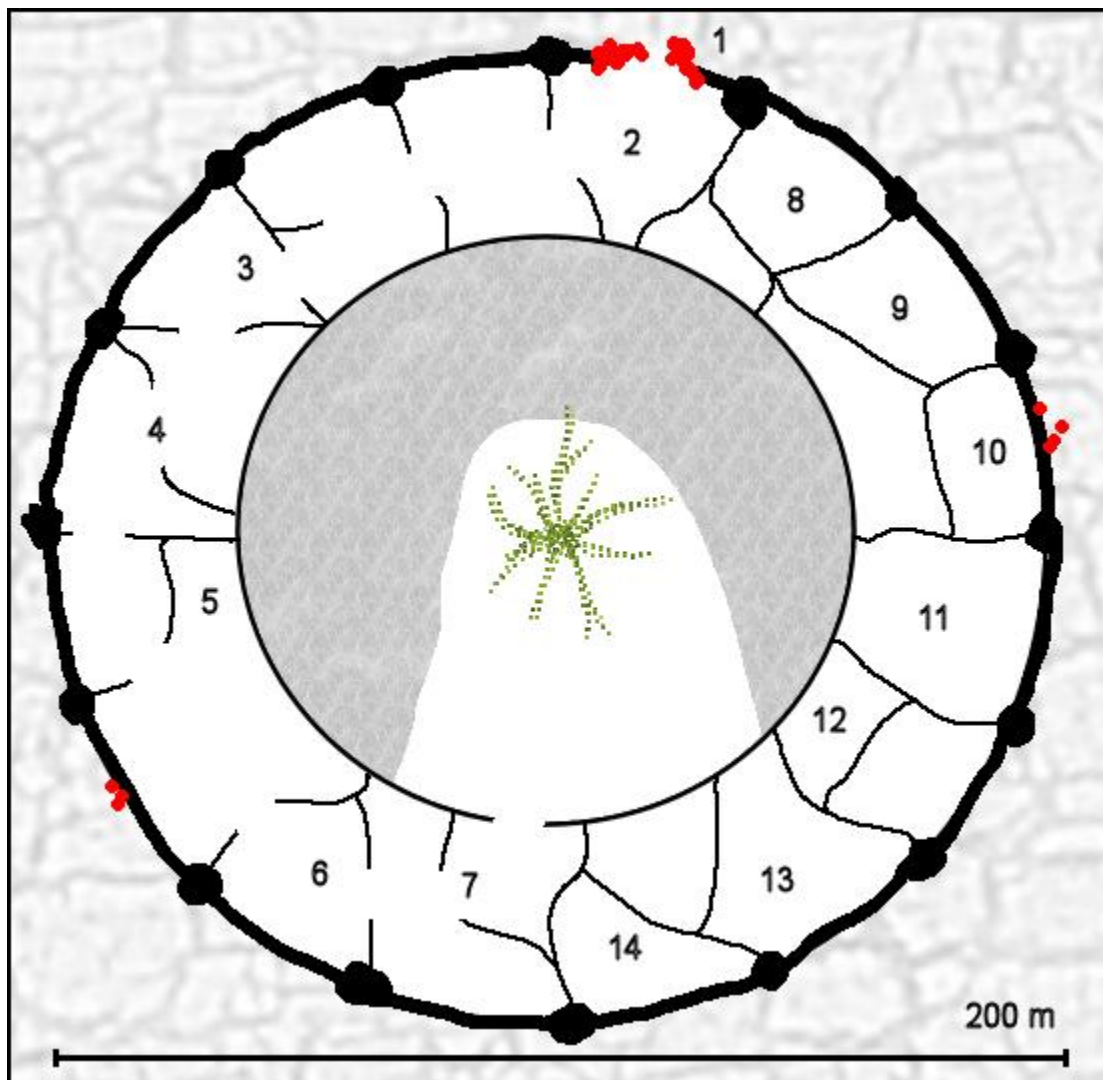
Rutheks		Al. Chaotic Evil	Huge Plant (Abyss)	CR: 12
Str: 29 (+9)	HP: 17d8+102 (178)	Speed: 9		
Dex: 15 (+2)	AC: 23 (+12 natural, +2 dex, -2 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 22 (+6)	Initiative: +2 dex	% fail.: 0%		
Int: 4 (-3)	Ref: +7 (+5 base, +2 dex)	Check pen.: 0		
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +16 (+10 base, +6 con)	BAB: +12		
Cha: 9 (-1)	Will: +7 (+5 base, +2 iron will)	Grapple: +29		
Melee: +19 (+12 base, +9 str, -2 size)		Ranged: +14 (+12 base, +2 dex, -2 size)		
Attacks				Skills
4 slams, +20 melee reach 4.5 mt, damage 4d6+9+1 vile, crit 19-20/x2				Hide +8 (+10 ranks, +4 racial, -8 size, +2 dex)
Feats and special abilities				Move Silently +16 (+10 ranks, +4 racial, +2 dex)
Feats: Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam), Improved natural weapon (slam), Improved critical (slam), Vile natural attack (all natural attacks deal 1 extra vile damage)				
Improved grab (slam); constrict 4d6+13.				
Immune to acid and electricity; cold resistance 10; blindsight 30 meters; fast healing 5.				
Breath weapon (ex): 1/hour; cone of acid, 15 meters long; deals 14d4 damage (Reflex DC 24 for half).				

Of all the vegetation in Infestant, only a few of the monsters survive. Rothakon and the druids have them firmly under control, and they are in the fortress, waiting for invaders. They are a dangerous force, though the plant army is only a shadow of what it would have been had Ithla-Sathlo been able to channel the power of the Orb to empower them.

The largest ones are called “rutheks”. Technically, the ruthek is a small parasite which can attach itself to certain types of vegetation, eventually infesting a small number of adjacent trees and bushes. During this time, its body becomes larger, turning into a sack of acid hidden below the ground or among the branches. The parasite remains dormant until awakened by a dark ritual; at this point, it causes all the plants it has infested to animate, lift their roots, and merge into a massive hulk. The acid sack migrates to a well-protected spot inside the knot of branches, and can be squeezed to emit a jet of powerful acid.

When Demogorgon passed through the palace, it opened its way with acid. The rutheks, immune to that particular attack, survived in good numbers; they were later decimated by the fires but the dark druids were able to keep several of them alive and in control. There are many more throughout the palace, at least a hundred, mostly hidden and undistinguishable from normal plants. The druids can only control a limited number, but if the PCs kill them they can easily awaken more to replenish their forces, given a few hours.

A few of the other horrors are considered as traps. The most dangerous ones are the vampiric roots; these things lie underground and are very difficult to spot (Search check DC 28); if a character steps on one of them, it will spring out and attempt to grapple (it has a +19 grapple check). With a successful grapple check, it drains blood for 1d4 points of Constitution drain. The root can be destroyed, but it has hardness 5 and 80 hit points.



1. This is the largest hole in the fortress' wall. The gaping passage is six meters wide and ten meters tall, and the wood surrounding it is burning. The flames are fierce, and yet the branches don't seem to be consumed as quickly as they should. Ithla-Sathlo's palace is exceedingly resilient, but the magic Demogorgon unleashed is even more powerful. As things stand now, the druids haven't yet got round to putting down this fire, an act which would take even them a long time.

The party can feel the heat from several meters of distance; anyone that passes through takes 1d4 fire damage (Reflex DC 14 negates).

2. One druid is inside the large area beyond the flames, well hidden in the bushes. It is nearly impossible to spot him through the flames and smoke. Especially because a much larger shape is probably going to attract the attention of anyone on the outside – one of the rutheks is just inside, moving slowly around but not doing much else. The hidden druid is controlling it; if attacked, it will retreat behind the wall to lure enemies inside the fortress.

Besides the ruthek, vampiric roots await a few meters from the flames; if they manage to grab party members, the druid will choose that moment to attack.

3. A large pool of acid occupies the center of this area. The noxious smoke it exhales forms a thick, dangerous cloud; characters that try to pass through must make a Fortitude save, DC 15, or take 1 point of Constitution damage (and another save one minute later, with the same effects). The pool is long and goes all the way to area 4, and it is wide enough to occupy the whole passage between the areas. Characters that touch the acid take 1d6 damage per round, and characters that somehow end inside the pool take 10d6 damage per round.

4. The acid pool ends in this area. A ruthek is hidden beneath the pool's surface; as the party passes through, it will emerge and attack them. The monster can gather the acid into its sack and spit it once every two rounds as if it was its own breath weapon; however, this acid is weaker than its own, inflicting only 7d4 damage in this way.

5. This corner is in relatively good shape, in comparison to the blackened trail that runs through the area. It even looks like some of the plants are still alive. Unfortunately, the living plants are large assassin vines, ready to attack anyone wandering nearby.

6. This area is scattered with short, thick grass-like growths that are tough and sharp as nails. The acid did kill them, but they are still standing and act as caltrops. If the party passes through here and makes noise, chances are that the druid in area 7 will hear them; in this case, he will come to attack them with his two rutheks.

7. A dark druid is guarding the broken entrance to the archfiend's sanctum, together with two rutheks.

8. This area seems to be occupied by a small hillock of knotted dead trees. In truth, the room is occupied by a massive tendriculous, an especially large and powerful specimen, the spawn of Ithla-Sathlo itself. Demogorgon's fiends attacked it savagely, but they didn't have enough attacks that could defeat its regeneration, and their lord had taken another route, so they knocked it out but it was eventually able to regenerate. Its dead appearance was caused by the acid and is only superficial, though a character can make a Spot check against DC xxx will allow a character to notice that there is something still green under the hillock.

Half-fiend Tendriculous		Al. Chaotic Evil	Gargantuan Outsider (Abyss)	CR: 13
Str: 45 (+17)	HP: 25d8+275 (387)	Speed: 6		
Dex: 16 (+3)	AC: 23 (+14 natural, +3 dex, -4 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 32 (+11)	Initiative: +3 dex	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 7 (-2)	Ref: +11 (+8 base, +3 dex)	BAB: +12 Grapple: +29		
Wis: 6 (-2)	For: +25 (+14 base, +11 con)	Melee: +19 (+12 base, +9 str, -2 size)		
Cha: 5 (-3)	Will: +8 (+8 base, -2 wis, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +14 (+12 base, +2 dex, -2 size)		
Attacks				Skills
2 claws, melee reach 6mt, damage 2d6+17, and				Climb +45 (+28 ranks, +17 str)
Bite, melee reach 6mt, damage 3d8+8, and				Hide +21 (+28 ranks, -12 size, +3 dex, +2 stealthy)
2 tendrils, melee reach 6mt, damage 1d8+8				Jump +45 (+28 ranks, +17 str)
Feats and special abilities				Listen +28 (+28 ranks, -2 wis, +2 alertness)
Feats: Alertness, Iron Will, Power Attack, Stealthy.				Move Silently +33 (+28 ranks, +3 dex, +2 stealthy)
Its attacks are considered magic for the purpose of overcoming DR.				Spot +28 (+28 ranks, -2 wis, +2 alertness)
Smite good (su) 1/day, +20 damage against a good foe.				
Improved grab (bite and tendrils); if it establishes a hold, it can swallow whole in the following round. Characters that are swallowed must make a Fortitude save (DC 33) or be paralyzed for 3d6 rounds and take 2d6 acid damage per round. A creature can free itself with a successful grapple check, returning to the maw, from which it can escape with another grapple check. It can also cut its way out with a light slashing or piercing weapon; the interior has AC 17 and the character must deal at least 25 damage.				
Immune to poison; acid, cold, fire and electricity resistance 10; DR 10/magic; regeneration 10 (bludgeoning and acid). Plant traits.				

The monster has devoured the corpses of the fiends it killed during the battle. Though the tendriculous doesn't gather treasure and doesn't use items, some of their equipment is still around (except for the stuff that was eaten, that is). The party can easily see various nonmagical weapons and bits of armor around; if they investigate, the tendriculous will likely attack them. But if they kill it or otherwise manage to examine the place carefully, they can find *bracers of armor* +3 (moderate abjuration), a *cloak of resistance* +1 (faint abjuration), a *scroll of mass charm monsters* (strong enchantment), a *heavy shield* +1 (faint abjuration), and a *spiked chain* +1 (faint evocation).

9. Some powerful spell was cast here. A huge circle in the ground, 12 meters in radius, encloses an area where everything has been burnt to the ground. The inside of the circle reveals the rock under the fortress, about a couple of meters below the level where the characters are walking on roots and branches, covered in a few inches of white ash. The party can see scattered, blackened bones inside.

10. A single druid is here; he's casting *quench* to stop a fire. He seems undefended, but he is standing in the middle of an area where the plants are animated and can grapple intruders. Anyone passing through will be grappled unless he's flying (no touch attack is needed since the character is walking on them); the plants have a +20 modifier and can deal 2d6+6 damage with a successful grapple check.

11. This area contains a small grove of huge mushrooms. Although they aren't animated, they can still be dangerous, since their spores are very infective. Characters that venture close to the grove, to examine the mushrooms or pick them up, must make a Fortitude save (DC 23) or contract a fungal parasite. The parasite works like a disease, except for its high save DC. The damage is 1 Strength. *Remove disease* kills it.

The mushrooms can be used to create a fairly powerful poison (that's the purpose for which Ithla-Sathlo's servants were growing them). The concentrated form only works by ingestion, but it does an initial damage of 1d4 Con and a secondary damage of 2d4 Con + 1d4 Str, with a save DC of 20.

12. No less than thirty dark druids are lying dead here, in a pool of blood and rotting fluid. They fled here, hoping for protection, but Demogorgon's fiendish troops simply teleported inside the area and massacred them. The demons have looted their magical items, but the corpses still have their non-magical equipment, including money totaling about 1500 gold coins.

13. Three druids are hiding here. Their names are Xamatar (male human druid 7th/Outlands/chaotic neutral), Kaatje (female human druid 6th/Outlands/chaotic neutral Sensate) and Harrigan (male tief-

ling ex-druid 16th/Abyss/chaotic evil). They have hidden from the attack, but now they are occasionally hiding from Rothakon, since they are less than faithful to the half-fiend.

The story of Xamatar and Kaatje is similar to those of the other dark druids that never were fully faithful to Ithla-Sathlo. They were recruited by Rothakon on the Outlands; Xamatar accepted because of the promise of power, while Kaatje wanted the chance to meet an archfiend in person. Neither of them was fully satisfied, but of course they weren't allowed to just leave.

Harrigan is different. He was born in the Abyss; his mother was a druid and both were slaves to a powerful and rich fiend. Harrigan's mother tried to teach him the ways of nature, but failed miserably because the only "nature" the boy had ever seen was the malevolence of the Abyss. He grew up chaotic evil, unsuccessfully trying to reconcile his own views with the druids' lore. When the fiendish master was killed by a rival, Harrigan's mother was long since dead. He fled and sought out Ithla-Sathlo, of which he had heard of as a new archfiend while a slave. The newly-risen demon lord "revealed" to him that the nature of the Abyss and the magic of the druids could be reunited – in Ithla-Sathlo itself. Harrigan bought this entirely, and like various other dark druids, was able to cast druidic magic by drawing on the corrupted concept of nature in the Abyss, mediated by Ithla-Sathlo.

When the archfiend died, Harrigan lost his powers; of all the dark druids in this situation, he alone managed to survive, mostly due to sheer luck. Harrigan is still insanely faithful to the memory of the archfiend, and he does not recognize Rothakon as his new master. The ex-druid has been contacted by the visage, who told him a mixture of truth and lies about what is happening outside the layer. Harrigan is smart enough to know that he can't trust the fiend, but nevertheless he feels that he should get the hell out of Infestant before it's too late; there is nothing here now, but maybe he can find some way to bring back his master outside the layer, or even outside the plane if need be. Otherwise, why was he spared?

Xamatar and Kaatje have teamed up with him, mostly because he's the only one who's planning on leaving Infestant. Rothakon doesn't know that he survived; the other two provide him with food and clean water while he meditates on how to leave. If the PCs stumble here, they can find a valuable ally. None of the three can do much in a fight against the likes of Rothakon or the rutheks, but Harrigan knows something of vital importance, and is willing to trade this information for the PCs' help in getting away before some other force comes to Infestant.

Harrigan, as a high-ranking member of Ithla-Sathlo's hierarchy, was allowed to enter the fortress even before the fall of the archfiend. And, as a better spellcaster than Rothakon, was able to pick up something about the immensely powerful spells that Ithla-Sathlo was readying at the cost of its own soul. If the PCs explain to him their situation, he will readily understand, and figure out an alternative way for them to escape. He will only agree to reveal it in return for safe passage out of Infestant, though.

"The Master owned a host of magical treasures. Now, most of them have been plundered by Demogorgon's troops; the rest has been taken by either Rothakon or, I suspect, yourselves – except for one thing. One object that the Master deemed precious enough to hide in a secret vault; only a few of the druids knew about this, and they are all dead except for me. Ithla-Sathlo didn't even tell his own son about this... he knew that Rothakon was untrustworthy!"

"There is a chamber, carved into the stone, right under the center of the fortress, and protected by a guardian. Don't ask me about the creature, for I know nothing of it. The chamber houses a *Staff of the Magi*. I can see that you've heard about it..."

"The *Staff* is powerful; I recall that the Master himself once said to my mind that even He could not make another. I don't know who or what created it, and I suspect that only some of the Powers may know, but I do know that the *Staff* can break the planar barriers, and that it can work within an anti-magic field."

“Find the artifact. Cast an anti-magic field, to suppress my Master’s spell. Then use the *Staff* and get out of the Abyss. It’s that simple! And I can even provide you with an item that I believe will keep the guardian at bay. All I ask in return is that you bring back me... and Xamatar and Kaatje... away with you. As a guarantee for you and ourselves, we will come with you to the chamber, and from there to another plane.”

The item that Harrigan is talking about is his own amulet of passage, which looks a bit different from the others, as it is cut in red stone and emeralds. Harrigan thinks that the monster will not attack if the amulet is shown to it.

14. If the PCs didn’t kill Rothakon in his fortress, but drove him away instead, this is the area where he’ll hide into after getting healed by the druids. He can see, although not very clearly, what goes on in the central room, and if he sees the PCs entering he’ll start casting his spells and getting ready to attack them (which he’d rather do while they are also facing the guardian).

The Inner Sanctum

This enormous circular room used to be the throne of Ithla-Sathlo’s power. It was a field of grasping, animated carnivorous grass, and the archfiend would sit in the center, his enormous tentacular mass towering over his minions. Demogorgon busted in from the south, and let loose a flurry of acid spells that burned away a huge area of the demon grass, and then proceeded to massacre Ithla-Sathlo himself.

The corpse of the archfiend is still in the middle of the room, where it’s always been, except that instead of a being of untold evil and chaos, it is now a huge green putrefacting corpse, which looks like a knot of tentacles, one to two meters thick and several tens of meters long, protruding from a central body. A single bloodshot eye, about ten centimeters wide, gazes dead at the sanctum summit.

The only thing that moves in this area is the rest of the demon grass. The whole area – except where Demogorgon burned it – is dangerous to tread on. Treat it as a *black tentacles* spell, except that any acid spell will clear off the area it covers of the demon grass. Fire spells don’t work as well, because this strand simply does not burn.

There is no apparent access to any underground chamber; if the PCs ask Harrigan, he’ll say that it’s right in the middle. Under a few tens of tons of archfiend corpse. It’s up to the players to find a way to clear off the mess in order to open the passage, and during that time Harrigan is going to try to steal Ithla-Sathlo’s eye. Harrigan can try a sleight of hand check (surprisingly, he’s got a total +8 modifier), but he knows that the PCs would probably notice him. He’d much rather find some way that doesn’t involve hiding his actions, or at least try to get it while the PCs are subject to a major distraction.

If he thinks the PCs are *really* gullible, he’ll try to persuade them to let him have it. He may, as an excuse, say that he knows someone who will pay handsomely for it, and that he’ll give a share to the PCs. More likely, though, he knows that the PCs won’t fall for this. If there is no way for him to try to steal the eye with a decent chance of success, he’ll wait until the heroes engage the guardian, and make his attempt while the PCs are in the chamber below.

Once the body is out of the way, the passage can be opened by pulling on a bronze ring embedded in the floor. A Strength check, DC 24, is required; it’s large enough for two characters to pull at, so another PC can use the “help another” action.

The underground chamber is relatively small (compared to the area above), being just fifteen meters wide. It’s also completely dark – this is not the magical darkness that envelops the rest of the fortress, it’s just that the place is underground and there’s no light. The amulets won’t help with this.

The walls are stone, except for a single column of twisted wood in the center of the room. The head of the *Staff of the Magi*. It’s going to take some work to pry it out – the column has been molded by

Ithla-Sathlo and it won't even respond to druid magic. It'll take 2d4+2 rounds of work with a sharp instrument to get the staff out safely.

A character *could* snap the column with a solid blow from an axe, but only a total addle-cove would try that, because there is a risk (well, a near-certainty) of breaking the *Staff*. This type of items are well-known for exploding with incredible violence when broken. Still, this particular staff is completely empty of charges, so if it breaks it won't explode (it would have a chance of sending a character to a random plane, but this won't work on the PCs anyway). The fact that the staff is empty also means that the PCs can't use it straight away – it needs to be recharged first. Harrigan has no idea of how to do that, and *identify* won't work on the artifact.

In any case, the PCs won't have time to get the staff out of the wood column, let alone figuring out how to use it. At first glance, the roof is made of plant matter like the rest of Ithla-Sathlo's fortress. Instead, however, the roof is stone as well, but the guardian is attached to it and it's waking up quickly!

Titan Ruthek		Al. Chaotic Evil	Gargantuan Plant (Abyss)	CR: 14
Str: 37 (+13)	HP: 25d8+200 (312)	Speed: 12		
Dex: 13 (+1)	AC: 22 (+15 natural, +1 dex, -4 size)	Armor: none		
Con: 26 (+8)	Initiative: +5 (+1 dex, +4 improved init)	% fail.: 0% Check pen.: 0		
Int: 4 (-3)	Ref: +11 (+8 base, +1 dex, +2 lit ref)	BAB: +18 Grapple: +43		
Wis: 10 (+0)	For: +18 (+14 base, +8 con)	Melee: +27 (+18 base, +13 str, -4 size)		
Cha: 9 (-1)	Will: +10 (+8 base, +2 iron will)	Ranged: +15 (+18 base, +1 dex, -4 size)		
Attacks				Skills
4 slams, +28 melee reach 6 mt, damage 6d6+13+1 vile, crit 19-20/x2				Hide +7 (+14 ranks, +4 racial, -12 size, +1 dex)
Feats and special abilities				Move Silently +19 (+14 ranks, +4 racial, +1 dex)
Feats: Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam), Improved natural weapon (slam), Improved critical (slam), Vile natural attack (all natural attacks deal 1 extra vile damage), Lightning Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Ability Focus (breath weapon)				
Improved grab (slam); constrict 6d6+19.				
Immune to acid and electricity; cold resistance 10; blindsight 45 meters; fast healing 10.				
Breath weapon (ex): 1/hour; cone of acid, 18 meters long; deals 20d4 damage (Reflex DC 32 for half).				

Fortunately for the PCs, Harrigan's amulet is effective. A character can display it to the monster, and it will stay at bay (though it won't actually obey orders, and this effect breaks if the characters attack it). A character can display the amulet and still wield a shield or weapon in that hand.

Unless the PCs killed him in the castle, this is a good moment for Rothakon to teleport back in, fully prepared for the fight. He will immediately see that the guardian is held by the amulet, and he'll attempt to sunder it from the hands of the character that's holding it. If this happens, the monster will roar and attack the PCs in the following round. It won't attack Rothakon, because it senses Ithla-Sathlo's blood in him.

Rothakon will cast *horrid wilting*, use his potions when needed, and try to get into melee, casting *transformation* as his last spell, and then raging and attacking. In an extreme case, he'll cast *time stop* from the scroll and use the extra time to drink potions or cast more defensive spells – but he'd rather avoid it, as he can't replace it now.

The characters don't have to actually kill Rothakon or the guardian. The half-fiend doesn't realize that the PCs can use the *Staff* to flee the Abyss entirely. If the characters cast *anti-magic field* and huddle together, he'll do the maths and do his best to stop them, but if the PCs use some tactics, by that time it'll be too late.

If the PCs manage to use the *Staff of the Magi*, they've done it. They can't go directly back to Sigil (if they try, they'll just have wasted a round and 2 charges from the *Staff*), but they can go on any other plane.

They've probably made lots of enemies, and several untrustworthy allies. They've gained a powerful artifact, but soon enough someone will figure out how they escaped, and will lust for the item. They may have let a few friendly druids escape with them, one of which may eventually try to bring

their nemesis back. Or they might have left him there – or killed him, he’s pretty much defenseless. That would solve the problem “for good”, wouldn’t it?

They are out of the Abyss, but will the Abyss ever get out of them?

THE END