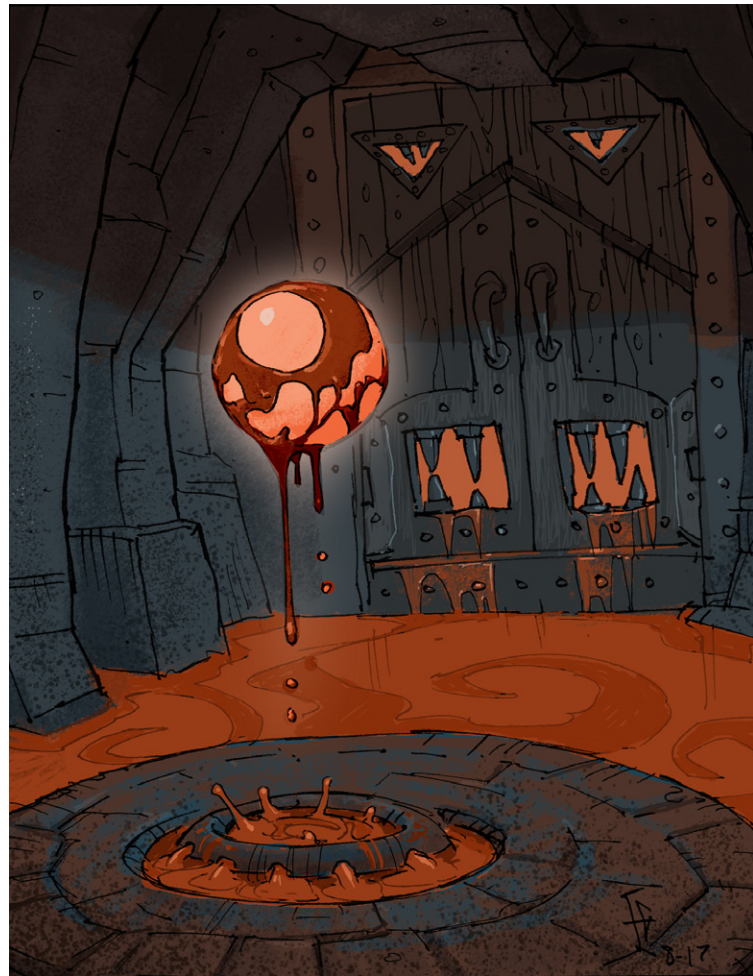


EN OBSCURUS

Bloodkeepers' Barricade

THE FOLLOWING IS PART of *En Obscurus*, a series focusing on clandestine organizations that can be dropped into a campaign with minimal preparation. Much like its sister series *Brute Forces* and *Collegia Magia*, each article in the series offers benefits to member PCs, and tools for the GM to incorporate the faction into the campaign. This installment features the Bloodkeepers, a guild of assassins whose murders keep evil at bay!



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INTRODUCTION

Whispers course through the streets of the city: vampires have struck again, making this the third bloodletting in a month. However, observers close to the case note that the practically mummified victims don't have puncture wounds about the neck, nor any indication of how they were bled dry. The well-informed know the truth: this is the work of the Bloodkeepers. These assassins absorb the blood of their contracted victims into their magical glass orbs. When Bloodkeepers return to their secret underground bunker known as the Barricade, they release the blood onto in the largest wall in the guildhall. They do so diligently—religiously—ensuring that not a single patch of blood on the wall dry, lest the archfiend sealed within break free.

CLASS RELATIONSHIPS

- ▶ **Bard.** Misinformation is the Bloodkeeper bard's song. Wherever she may strike, she also spreads nightmarish tales and distracting gossip to keep the guild a secret.
- ▶ **Monk.** The Bloodkeepers value a monk's stealth and seeming harmlessness. Monks at the Barricade train to kill with their bare hands and keep every precious drop of blood in tact.
- ▶ **Ranger.** Pathfinders are indispensable for dispatching targets who escape to the wilderness. Many prefer to work alone, and trade off full Bloodkeeper crystals with other operatives instead of returning to headquarters.
- ▶ **Rogue.** The full array of espionage and wet work are available among the Bloodkeepers, and rogues among them may specialize even further than spymaster or assassin. Agents

usually choose an institution or region to infiltrate, and hitmen may be experts in poison, sniping, or “disappearing” victims.

- ▶ **Warlock.** The Bloodkeepers don't care how one obtains magical power; however, trafficking with the sealed archfiend is forbidden and punishable by death. Warlocks beholden to other fiends make sadistic killers, and those under the guidance of the Seducer* excel under cover.

BACKGROUND EXPANSION

Members of the Bloodkeepers can take the following trait options, replacing the normal trait from your background. Additionally, you can replace one your background's proficiencies with an optional proficiency below.

Optional Proficiencies: Deception, Stealth, thieves' tools, poisoner's kit, disguise kit, glassblower's tools

OPTIONAL IDEALS AND BONDS

d6 Ideal

- 1 **Anonymity.** All effective actions require misdirection and elusiveness. (Chaotic)
- 2 **Bounty.** If it pays, I'll take any target. (Neutral)
- 3 **Honor.** My word is my oath, and I follow my contracts to the letter. (Lawful)
- 4 **Necessity.** I make hard decisions others would not dare. (Neutral)
- 5 **Resistance.** The fiends must be stopped at any price. (Any)
- 6 **Strength.** Anybody I can kill deserves it. (Evil)

* Josh Gentry, “Friends Close, Enemies Closer,” EN World ENsider, <https://www.patreon.com/posts/friends-close-3880329>

Open Game Content

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d6 Bond

- 1 I like to leave my signature on each of my victims—such as a rose, a kiss on the forehead, or a cigar burn.
- 2 I like to take a trophy from each of my victims—such as a lock of hair, a finger, or their last kiss.
- 3 That I am a Bloodkeeper is a technicality. I am first and foremost promised to an elite and secret order of my religion assigned to this vile work.
- 4 As I stare into the Barricade's blood wall, sometimes I think I see claws and faces behind the blood. Did I just hear a voice?
- 5 As a child, Father Drischol took me off the streets and into the Bloodkeepers. My feelings of indebtedness to him are as deep as my resentment.
- 6 I've finally recovered from an injury dealt to me by Maiiana ... a wound I survived the same day she killed many of my guildmates and my spouse.

NEW MAGIC ITEM

Bloodkeeper Crystal

Wondrous item, uncommon

This fist-sized tempered glass orb is a translucent gray with a rust-colored impurity at its center. As the orb absorbs blood, this impurity at the center grows in equal proportion.

As an action, a creature can speak this item's first command word to touch a recently deceased humanoid and absorb 1 gallon of blood. The humanoid must have died within the past hour, and most Medium-sized humanoid bodies contain 1 gallon of blood. Each *Bloodkeeper crystal* can store 5 gallons of blood, through high-quality orbs may hold more.

As an action, a creature can speak this item's second command word to release the blood. This is a ranged weapon attack with a range of 30 feet that deals no damage, but drenches a target in blood. Each use expends 1 gallon of blood, which cannot be re-absorbed.

The Bloodkeeper's quartermaster sells *Bloodkeeper crystals* for 75 gp each.

NEW FEAT

Bloodkeeper Arts

With your *Bloodkeeper crystal* in hand, and the essence of a victim trapped inside, you can unleash the guild's secret arts. You gain the following benefits:

- ▶ You gain proficiency with Deception and Stealth, if you are not already proficient.
- ▶ So long as you have on your person a *Bloodkeeper crystal* that contains at least 2 gallons of blood, your proficiency bonus on Deception and Stealth checks are doubled.
- ▶ Whenever you regain hit points, such as through magical healing or expending hit dice, you regain additional hit points. The number of additional hit points you gain is equal to the number of gallons of blood in the fullest *Bloodkeeper crystal* on your person.

SIGNIFICANT NPCs

Father Drischol, the Book Keeper (Lawful Neutral)

A balding dwarf in gray friar's clothes with dark bags under his eyes, and who seems out of place at his office in the Barricade. He is the liaison between the Bloodkeepers and a major religious order, and he oversees the guild's operation in their name, particularly the management of contracts. The Bloodkeepers' methods disgust him, but he can think of no other way to keep the demon sealed.

- ▶ **Trait:** His weary eyes gaze slowly about. He speaks almost at a mumble.
- ▶ **Ideal:** Resignation. "You can't handle the smell? Don't worry, you never will."
- ▶ **Bond:** As a youth, his political missteps placed him at this outpost ... under a *geas* spell. As the spell wore off, he came to respect the role.
- ▶ **Flaw:** For Father Drischol, restful sleep is rare and ridden by nightmares.

Rumors

1. These wounds are the telltale work of vampires! (False; one of many cover stories)
2. If you spill what we do, what we're about, you'll be the next to go. (True)
3. You know, Father Drischol is an accomplished assassin himself. (False)
4. I'm not your buddy, pal. If you're at the Barricade, one way or another, you're here for the job. (True)
5. The adults fend for themselves. But the kids... we take care of the kids. (True and false; youths undergo brutal training)
6. The blood wall is secure, so long as it is wet with blood. The archfiend is silent. (First statement true; second statement false)
7. The Barricade is impregnable. Nobody from the outside knows its location. (False)
8. Well, there was Maiiana, but she's dead. Right? (False; she is alive)

Maiiana, the Barricade Breaker (Chaotic Evil)

An elf blademaker who trained at the Mahala Imperial Academy[†] and wields a profane blade blessed by the archfiend. She is among the most significant threats against the Bloodkeepers, and a few years ago led an infamous raid against the Barricade. Her appearance is unknown and changes from telling to telling.

- ▶ **Trait:** She maintains a pleasant demeanor to maintain her social contacts... and keeps her war with the Bloodkeepers a secret.
- ▶ **Ideal:** Vengeance. "Come, thy Shadow beyond the Wall, crack my virtue and fill me from crown to toe with direst cruelty."
- ▶ **Bond:** The Bloodkeepers took her husband... now she courts their archfiend.
- ▶ **Flaw:** Maiiana's sadistic fantasies distract her both in conversation and battle.

QUEST HOOKS

The Bloodkeepers are a dark bunch, but it is great guild for a party with one or more hired killers. When the Barricade is used as the center of a campaign, what begins with basic hit contracts at low-level may end with a grisly jaunt across the planes. In any case, GMs can also use the following prompts to connect the party, the Bloodkeepers, and the larger campaign world.

Low-Level: Maiiana's Minions

When the PC's become well acquainted with the Bloodkeepers, Father Drischol or another member may tell them their concerns about Maiiana. She is dangerously well connected, especially in Mahala, and the party can help by tracking and dispatching her contacts. They are the merchant Iolando, the burglar Kriket, and the foreign dignitary Kava Stormclaw. Dispatching them leads the party to conclude that Maiiana is planning something big... But letting these targets live (for now) may uncover even deeper secrets.

Mid-Level: Against Maiiana

The Bloodkeepers discover and assign the party to dispatch Maiiana's three top advisors: the banker Galdrok, the high cultist Akordia, and her apprentice Jalaya. If the party waits too long to dispatch all these targets, Maiiana will fulfill her plan and unleash a full assault against the Barricade to destroy the Bloodkeepers—and unleash the archfiend. If the targets are eliminated quickly, Maiiana cannot assault the Barricade... and she becomes their next target.

High-Level: A God Undone

A party of high enough level may begin to wonder whether they can take on the archfiend themselves, and solve the guild's problems forever. If the players let the blood dry and fight the archfiend themselves, he should have power comparable to a god. Even if the party defeats him, he will spiritually dissipate and return to his extraplanar home to plot vengeance. If the party wishes to destroy the archfiend while he

[†] Josh Gentry, "Collegia Magia: Mahala Imperial Academy," EN World EN5ider, <https://www.patreon.com/posts/collegia-magia-8783152>

is still sealed, they must obtain the most sacred weapons of seven different gods to use against the archfiend—and the gods’ blessings to do so.

A BRIEF HISTORY

In days of yore, war waged across the land and tore at the very fabric of the planes. The earliest versions of what might one now recognize as the modern religious orders struck at each other, and some even dared to summon their idols to the Material Plane.

During such an incident, a cult to the above mentioned archfiend nearly succeeded in bringing their dark lord to the earth, but a holy order in opposition appeared in the nick of time. In the middle of the ritual, the holy warriors felled each cultist, and their blood spread across the summoning circle which caused it to malfunction. The archfiend was sealed, but to their horror the holy warriors realized the imprisonment would only last until the blood dried. Asking the forgiveness of their deity, they called for volunteers to martyr themselves to the cause of keeping the demon at bay.

This strategy did not last long, and the people grew angry with the holy order. A sudden earthquake drove the ritual site deep underground (which ruined the cultist’s vile temple and turned rooms on their sides) the holy order used it as an excuse to announce that their fears were in the past. Secretly, the holy order knew the ritual site—now a bleeding wall—was

Who Is the Archfiend?

The “archfiend” mentioned throughout this article may be any who the GM wishes to include in the story. It does not strictly need to be a fiend—any evil and powerful spirit might do, so long as the fear and power they invoke is on a similar level. Besides this, consider what sealing away this mighty force of evil has done of the cosmos, and what the consequences would be if it were ever to break free.

Similarly, the religious organization Father Drischol serves should be one whose prerogative it is to resist supernatural evil. While it may make sense for a Neutral or Chaotic god to preside over a secret assassin’s guild, it would be more shocking and complex if the patron god of the Barricade were Lawful Good.

still active. They’ve been killing in secret and stealing blood ever since.

Three decades ago, the Bloodkeepers fulfilled a contract against Maiiana’s husband Umbero Falone. As Maiiana’s rage stewed, the Barricade’s archfiend reached out to her in her dreams. She amassed her power until three years ago, when she and a band of mercenaries raided the Barricade. After a massacre, Maiiana made it to the center chamber and gently rested her hand on the blood wall. Out from the wall erupted a cursed blade fit for the archfiend’s servant in her vendetta against his captors. The Bloodkeepers rallied, and Maiiana escaped with blade in hand to plot their doom.