

MAIN FEATURES:

MARCO BERTINI

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF THE SAGA, FOLLOWING *THE SECOND BLACK DAWN*

THE SECOND BLACK DAWN SAGA

PREFACE

Three years have passed since the release of *The Second Black Dawn*, the start of this saga, which precedes this adventure. Many people have asked me to continue the story. It was not easy to find the time, but I am happy and proud of the work done here and hope that you too enjoy the final result!

In *The War for the Throne*, you face new pitfalls: catapulted into the middle of a revolt on the streets of the capital, carrying out a frantic search for the secret base of the Black Hand, and cutting deals with assassins and infamous locals. Eventually, as you fight mutants and cultists devoted to the forces of chaos, you finally make an unexpected and shocking revelation. During this epic quest, will you be able to resist the call of evil and corruption? Or will you also fall victim to the wickedness that rages across the world?

Whether or not you have played *The Second Black Dawn*, you will only need the basic rules to face this new challenge. It will be difficult to survive the impending dangers. But it is from these challenges that heroes emerge, forged in the fire of battle! Have fun!

Marco Bertini
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Thanks to everyone who helped and encouraged me. A special thanks goes to my family, who supported me in the realization of this project.

CONTENT WARNING

This adventure includes allusions to violence, dark horror, corpses, war, murder, torture, lies, threat, and manipulation.

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

In addition to the different sources that inspired me, including numerous books, comics, video games, I want to highlight:

- [Realm Events](#)
- [Thieves' Guilds](#)

ON THE COVER

In this image, Daniele Comerci depicts His Majesty Belador the Courageous. In the background lies Hellenbrown, the capital of the kingdom, ablaze.

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PROLOGUE

Good men and good women that stand here before me, listen to the words of this poor and humble messenger, who came from afar to speak with you.

The wise men of this city love to talk about what is right and what is wrong, they like to tell you what you must do and what you must not do. They enjoy judging others, enacting laws, applying punishments. But has anyone ever judged them? From their palaces, these rich nobles love to discuss, to dabble in philosophy, while savoring an excellent vintage wine. Meanwhile, the people starve and break their backs for a meager loaf of bread. Is this the justice of the king?

But who are these people? Do not let their beautiful robes and their sweet words fool you. These are but smoke and mirrors. While they may seem wise, they are merely vile hypocrites! They act in bad faith and then cloak those acts with lies! What kindhearted person would watch a child starve while doing nothing?! In all these years these "upright and just" men have done nothing but fill their mouths with empty words and rich food, with their embroidered silk robes and plump limbs... But where were they when you needed help?

I'll reveal the truth to you: they were feeding on your misfortunes and toasting your miserable lives, that's where they were! They feed on your weakness. They have no interest in your suffering. The important thing is that you pay their taxes. Unfortunately, the powerful have always taken advantage of the humble for personal gain and it will always be like this. Unless you want to change things! Do you want to rebel and finally fight for your freedom?

Listen to me carefully, brothers and sisters, I am here to help you, to guide you in these dark hours. There is a deity ready to help us, unjustly accused of crimes he never committed: his name is Bane. Everyone says that Bane is evil, that he wants the destruction of the world..
THEY LIE!

He will break the chains that oppress you. He will free the world from these vile parasites, giving you an era of absolute freedom. He can guarantee you everything you have ever secretly wanted but never dared to admit publicly. Who, after all, would not want to have the power to decide their fate freely? Why condemn our most secret desires? Only a dirty hypocrite would do that!

Embrace Bane, worship him, and he will richly reward you for your services. He will give you the power and strength to overthrow this unjust and unclean kingdom!

I urge you: take up arms and take torches to set fire to this corrupt and blasphemous city. The time has come to raise your head, the time has come to adore Bane!

– Manifesto of the Black Hand

THE WAR FOR THE THRONE

The essence of a role-playing game is that it is a group, cooperative experience. There is no winning or losing, but rather the value is in the experience of imagining yourself as a character in whatever genre you're involved in, whether it's a fantasy game, the Wild West, secret agents or whatever else. You get to sort of vicariously experience those things.

– Gary Gygax, Interview in 2006

WELCOME!

This is *the War for the Throne*, an adventure estimated to last around 30 hours of gameplay, written and designed for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS 5th Edition. Characters are expected to start at 5th level and should reach 8th level by the end of the adventure. The adventure constitutes the second part of the saga and narrates the events following *The Second Black Dawn*, a campaign for characters from 1st to 5th level available here:

<https://www.dmsguild.com/product/280370>

While it is recommended that the characters have already played the previous chapter of the saga, it is not mandatory: *The War for the Throne* is a standalone story, which can be played independently. The ideal group is made up of four characters, but the adventure is easily adaptable to a greater or lesser number of players.

The campaign takes place in a generic region of the Forgotten Realms, but the story is adaptable to any other setting with a few tweaks.

INTRODUCTION

The document is divided into three parts.

In **Part 1** you will find all the preparatory material for the adventure, so the Dungeon Master should read this entire section before starting play. Specifically, you will find:

- a summary of *The Second Black Dawn*
- general advice on how to run the adventure
- an overview of the main enemies and allies of the campaign
- a summary of the plot
- some tips for players on how to enhance roleplaying for their characters in this adventure

In **Part 2**, on the other hand, you can find the bulk of the text: the adventure. It is divided into three episodes, through which the characters may progress until the final epilogue.

In the final part of this document there are three useful **Appendices**: a list of songs that you can use during the adventure, statistics for the new monsters, and two new spells.

SUMMARY

If the characters have not played through the events of *The Second Black Dawn*, the following text summarizes the events that occurred and can be used by the Dungeon Master to introduce players to *The War of the Throne*.

For some time now, inexplicable manifestations of undead have plagued the region. No one had any explanation as to why this phenomenon was occurring. In the cemeteries, numerous corpses were found unearthed, and people feared that their loved ones might come back to life. The king wished to shed light on the mystery and therefore decided to hire adventurers to investigate the matter.

The adventure began when the characters went to the king's court to accomplish this task. Once they arrived at court, they discovered a bitter truth: the king was gone. The curse of undead that had struck the kingdom occurred in conjunction with his disappearance. The purpose of the summons was actually to discover clues that could help find His Majesty, King Belador the Brave.

The first place the characters had to investigate was Edrahil's Wood. The king had gone there to meet the druid, Elu Edrahil. Since then, there has been no news from him. Before reaching the woods, the characters faced numerous pitfalls, including an invasion of undead in the abandoned village of Minartias. Once inside the wood, the adventurers searched for clues around Edrahil's camp, now completely destroyed. They subsequently spoke with the fairy creatures of the wood who, however, did not know where either the druid or the king were. However, they led them to the main culprit involved in the kidnapping: the Scarlet Fang Goblin Tribe. This tribe were a threat to the inhabitants of the kingdom and the forest, and the fairies begged for the help of the adventurers to destroy the goblins.

The characters managed to find the goblin lair and face their king: Slobad the Bloodthirsty. They discovered that the goblins were not the instigators of the kidnapping of Belador but only an instrument manipulated by sinister occult forces. A cult group known as the Black Hand now held the king in a cursed graveyard, near the abandoned village of Ornis.

Finally, in an old chapel, the climactic battle took place, which involved the characters in an epic struggle against the forces of evil. They triumphed and saved the king's life! The following adventure starts from this point: the players are leading King Belador to safety within the city, to receive their rewards, and rightful commendation for a great feat accomplished.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

To run this adventure, you only need rules from the *Player's Handbook* and the *Monster Manual*. The *Dungeon Master's Guide* is recommended, but not mandatory.

Text that appears in a box like this can be read aloud or paraphrased to players.

The *Monster Manual* contains stat blocks for most of the creatures used in this adventure. All the necessary stat blocks can be found in that book or in Appendix B.

Throughout the campaign, the names of monsters are presented in **bold**, which means that their stat blocks are listed in the *Monster Manual*. Some of them, however, are found in Appendix B. There is a note after the monster's name to indicate where this is the case.

The equipment and spells mentioned in the adventure are described in the *Player's Handbook*. Magical items are described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, unless the text refers to an item described in Episode 2, in which case it is described there.

ADVANCEMENT

The War for the Throne makes use of the milestone system for advancement. At the beginning of the adventure, the characters are 5th level. Instead of allocating specific individual rewards in experience points, the characters level up at the end of a significant episode in the adventure.

Characters level up after each episode listed below:

- Episode 1: Hellenbrown in Flames
- Episode 2: The City of Bybay
- Episode 3: The Base of the Black Hand

By leveling up using these milestones, characters should reach 8th level by the end of the adventure.

BACKGROUND

The Black Hand is an organization that has been active for many centuries, whose main purpose is to subvert existing power structures in order to establish an absolute dictatorship, headed by the evil Bane. Most of the time the sect has been solely concerned with devising insane plans and low-grade intrigues, but things have changed lately. The Black Hand arranged for King Belador to be kidnapped. This plan, in turn, was devised and ordered by a coven of necromancers headed by the evil necromancer Malekith, along with the help of the younger brother of the king, Prince Artex, who was

corrupted by evil.

The plan required that the king be sacrificed to launch a ritual that would open the Chaos Portal. Once opened, hordes of demons would invade the world, bringing a trail of death and destruction. This opening of the portal is also a necessary stage for the complete reincarnation of Bane.

The king was saved thanks to the intervention of the characters. However, Prince Artex decided to speed up his plans for the usurpation of the throne and carried out a coup d'état, sparking a revolt in the streets of the capital.

THE CHAOS PORTAL

The Chaos Portal is a stationary interplanar connection that links the Material Plane with the Abyss. Many legends circulate about the origin of this portal, but few really know its history. Some argue that this passage was created by Bane himself, many centuries ago, through enormous sacrifices of innocents.

Others argue that this portal has existed since the dawn of time, since the Material Plane was generated, and that it is the work of an exiled demon who wanted to return to his plane of origin. Still others deny its existence and think it is only the fruit of myths and legends.

During the First Black Dawn, when the evil deities descended on the Material Plane and the life of every living being found itself one step away from the Abyss, it is from this portal that the most powerful and ferocious demon lords emerged, followed by demonic hordes, bringing death and destruction to the Material Plane. After the evil deities were defeated, at the cost of huge sacrifice, the lords of the realm decided that the portal should be sealed and hidden, to prevent it from being reused in the future. Thus, some of the most powerful wizards, priests, and warriors in the world decided to use their powers to seal the portal permanently. But the difficult undertaking cost these heroes their very lives.

Some deities, moved by mercy and inspired by the deeds of mortals, decided to instill in some objects part of the soul of these heroes, so that the inhabitants of the entire world would remember their deeds forever: thus were born sacred artifacts, very powerful items with unique magical properties. Initially, many in the kingdom held these artifacts in high regard and they became relics of the lords of the most powerful and influential houses. But with the passage of time, the memory faded. Little by little, every relic was forgotten and abandoned, becoming a simple magical object coveted by adventurers, monsters, and merchants.

Until now...

Bane has learned that the portal can be opened again and that this can result in the Second Black Dawn. He will finally be able to return to the Material Plane in his true and fearful physical form. He intends to put an end to the hopes of those races peacefully inhabiting the world: there will be no room for any living soul unless it genuflects to the Dark Lord.

Having experienced a portentous dream of the danger looming over the world, Archdruid Edrahil had made an appointment with King Belador to talk about the terrible events that he believed were about to occur. But it was too late: before the druid had time to explain these facts to the king, they were attacked and the king was kidnapped, although the druid managed to escape and save himself. The king, in addition to being a possible obstacle to Bane's mad plan, possessed a fundamental element for the beginning of the evil ritual: royal blood. Sacrificing the king would serve as the first step in opening the Chaos Portal.

For this reason, the Dark Lord has decided to ally himself with a powerful and dangerous sect of necromancers and entered into a pact with demon lords. If he manages to open the portal again, he will receive their help to destroy all resistance in the world and thus be able to establish his ferocious dictatorship (for more information on the Astral Planes and the Abyss, see Chapter 2 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

Any hope for the forces of good lies in the sacred artifacts, since an ancient prophecy states that when reunited, they will function as keys and can block the portal from opening again.

VILLAINS

PRINCE ARTEX

In the first volume of this saga, Prince Artex conspired to kidnap the king, attempting to deceive the characters and the royal court. He issued orders to find the missing monarch, but since he was actually an agent in service to the Black Hand, he tried to mislead the heroes and other characters, giving partial information and hoping that all of them would fail or die in their attempt to find Belador.

Once the prince realized that the characters had returned with information about the king's whereabouts, the prince hired a hitman, a devil, to kill them, but even that attempt failed. As soon as it came to be known that the sacrifice of the king had failed, he decided to accelerate his plans for

usurpation of the throne: he immediately contacted all the followers of the sect under his command, and made contact with the coven of necromancers along with the worst scum of Hellenbrown, sparking a huge revolt that threatens to destroy the entire city and all its inhabitants. Also, if the king cannot now be sacrificed, Artex has decided that he will try to perform the ritual by sacrificing his son, Marcus, who is in the royal palaces.

In the final part of the adventure the characters will come face to face with the prince, for the final showdown!

In Appendix B ([on page 54](#)) you will find Artex's statistics and an insight into his history.

THE BLACK HAND

The Black Hand, a mysterious and powerful secret sect, takes its name directly from one of the most feared evil deities in history: Bane. He has many names: Black Lord, Lord of Darkness, or just simply the Black Hand (from a black gauntlet, his favorite weapon). His tyranny is known throughout the continent. His main aim remains to become the absolute lord of all known lands.

Bane desires his priests and worshipers to gain positions of power within society, through the use of both force and cunning, using this power to foment hatred, fear, and destruction. For this reason, the sect prefers that its members subvert governments and achieve their goals secretly, undercover and without being overly conspicuous.

The Black Hand is organized into various parallel groups, the size of which can range from a few members to several dozen. Within the sect there is a strict hierarchy: questioning or disobeying an order from a superior is an insult to Bane's own authority and is liable to result in torture, disfigurement, or death. Sect members are famous for their purple-black robes, although in public places they dress and behave like ordinary people.

The sect has no qualms about forging alliances or hiring mercenaries to conduct torture, beatings, and murders, which are commonplace in these operations. It is very rare that an initiate of the Lord of Darkness does not possess at least rudimentary knowledge in this type of practice.

In the previous chapter of the saga, the sect enacted the kidnapping of the king. Prince Artex had informed the sect that the king was going to visit Elu Edrahil in the woods of Edrahil, so a trap was set up to capture him. The goal of the Black Hand was to take out a powerful adversary and foe, so that it could more easily send the kingdom spiraling into chaos and deprive it of its authoritative leadership. Furthermore, the king's blood would have started the spell that would have allowed the opening of the Chaos Portal.

The sacrifice has failed, but the Black Hand is ready to do anything to get royal blood. In this chapter of the saga, the sect rages through the streets of Hellenbrown, creating chaos and unrest. The characters must face the sect's attempt at rebellion before investigating the existence of one of their secret bases.

QUEEN SYLENE

This ruthless and cold woman was none other than the beloved and powerful consort of the noble Oxar, one of the most brilliant and skilled strategists in the whole kingdom, as well as the lord of Indatium. Lord Oxar, however, died in a fierce battle fought in the name of the king in the Vast Marsh several years ago.

From that moment, the beautiful and authoritative lady with a gentle soul turned into a completely different woman. Sylene became cold and heartless, consumed with hatred for the man she believed had stolen her love: King Belador. She wanted nothing more than revenge. She began to rule the city with an iron fist and declared that she would no longer submit to the laws and the royal government, proclaiming herself the true ruler of the kingdom.

Despite being driven by hatred and yearning for the king's death, Sylene is a shrewd and intelligent woman and knows she can't start a civil war; her military forces are fewer in number than the king can deploy, and the allies of the crown are numerous and powerful.

However, the unexpected chaos of the sect's rebellion may play to the queen's benefit. She will do anything to try and use the situation to her advantage and her ferocious hatred of the king is as dangerous as it is explosive!

ALLIES

THE DRUID EDRAHIL

Archdruid Elu Edrahil is the druid who has ruled and watched over the forest of Edrahil for a long time. Despite his position of total neutrality towards feuds outside the forest, he is an ally of the king and has realized that a serious threat is about to assault the kingdom.

Although some believe he is dead, he managed to escape to distant lands. Realizing that the situation is even more serious than he feared, he is trying to gather allies and information necessary to defeat the enemy and could come to the aid of the adventurers when they least expect it.

THE DYNASTY OF THE SYLGERIOS, THE EVENING STARS

The king, Belador the Brave, belongs to the dynasty of the Sylgerios, the Evening Stars. This powerful and influential dynasty has ruled the kingdom for many years. An ancestor of this house is one of the five heroes who sacrificed their lives to close the Portal of Chaos and thus save the life of the kingdom.

To begin the ritual and open the Chaos Portal, the blood of a firstborn of a descendant of one of the five heroes who lost their lives that day is required, but while the other four lineages are no longer traceable, the fifth, the dynasty of Sylgerios, is still alive and well. In order to enact the ritual, the forces of evil cannot use the blood of Prince Artex. They can only use the blood of Belador, or his only son, Marcus.

Although the fate of the Sylgerios hangs in the balance due to the conspiracy against Belador, they have many influential and powerful allies, who can help the characters and the forces of good during the adventure.

THE HOUSE OF URLIK

Lord Margrave Harmund II, the Lord of Bybay, is the grandson of Count Lanxet and the son of Lord Harmund I. He belongs to the House of Urlík, one of the most prestigious and influential families in the realm. He will try in every way to help the king destroy his enemies.

becoming a member of the Zealots of Tyr.

Young apprentices must serve in a refectory that provides food to the poor and help those in need. They must also study and apply the strictures from the Holy Book of the Zealots of Tyr (a short excerpt is shown in the following sidebar) to their lives. They wear cyan tunics indicating their role.

Official members wear indigo tunics with a white band around the waist. They wear two different-colored gloves: a black one on the right hand and a white one on the left. This symbolizes the missing hand of Tyr and the determination needed to face any sacrifice in the name of virtue (the black glove works as a holy symbol for a cleric). Furthermore, followers' armor and weapons are usually decorated with the symbol of Tyr: a balance hanging on a warhammer.

Elder and authoritative members are distinguished by purple vests.

Members' activities include prayer and many other rituals, often carried out during their daily travails with the poor. Usually, Tyr's clerics report their actions in a book, called the Book of Law, which they always carry with them. The aim is to learn from their mistakes and to note crimes and identify criminals so that they may be punished according to the law. Some of the more fervent members even apply the principle of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" and mete out punishment themselves, even if this means losing impartiality.

THE ZEALOTS OF TYR

Tyr is a lawful good deity, bearer of such lofty ideals as justice, equity, knowledge, and legality.

He is known everywhere as the Just God and is represented in religious iconography as a proud, one-handed warrior wielding a long sword or warhammer. This is the origin of another appellation, the Maimed God (he lost his right hand whilst fighting Kezef, a fierce Chaos Hound). Furthermore, he is often depicted with a bloody blindfold covering his injured eyes. The myths tell that he was blinded as punishment for allowing the theft of the Tablets of Fate during the Era of Upheaval. Tyr's churchgoers see these injuries as metaphors for the blindness of justice and the price that must be paid to relentlessly defend law and virtue against the forces of evil. Even though his followers cannot live completely without sin, the aim of Tyr and his servants is to build a society as perfect as possible. Tyr's enemies are Bane, Cyric, Mask, Talona, and Talos.

Tyr is a very popular god and is worshiped by people with varying social backgrounds. Zealots of Tyr have been located in the south of Faerûn and in the city of Bybay for many centuries. They include priests, acolytes, clerics, and paladins fighting in Tyr's name, pursuing the ideals of virtue and justice.

Though most of Tyr's followers judge things in terms of morality – dividing the world into right and wrong – the Zealots of Tyr know that often good and evil are arrayed along an infinite scale of gray shadows and it is impossible to discern clearly what is right from what is wrong.

Many members are priests and clerics who live in an urban environment, among the poor. Thus, they are closer to the needs of the humble and are less dogmatic than other religious orders (such as the Holy Order of Inquisitors).

Each new novice has duties to accomplish and must complete an apprenticeship period before officially

THE HOLY BOOK OF THE ZEALOTS OF TYR

Each young novice in the Zealots of Tyr must know the precepts of the Holy Book and apply them in their daily lives. The apprenticeship period usually lasts one year. During this period, each of the novice's important moral decisions are written down by the elders or masters in a notebook. At the end of the apprenticeship, the novice is subject to judgment: if they are worthy, they become part of the Zealots of Tyr permanently and receive the indigo vest. If found unworthy, they are banished from the order forever.

1st Precept: Thou shalt not inflict wounds on any innocent.

2nd Precept: Thou shalt help and protect the humblest and the neediest.

3rd Precept: Thou shalt pray at least two hours in a day since only faith and meditation lead to inner peace.

4th Precept: Thou shalt punish and eradicate evil from any location and in any appearance.

5th Precept: Faith and knowledge shall be your weapon and shield.

6th Precept: Violence and destruction are a necessary evil when used to break down the impiety and corruption infesting the world. Thou shalt use them prudently, else they corrupt you in turn.

7th Precept: Thou shalt always be fair and just in all your actions and shall avenge those who cannot avenge themselves.

8th Precept: Thou shalt always speak the truth and may great Tyr show you the right path when you are unsure.

CURRENCY: METALLIC DRAGONS

The coins used in this region are called *Dragons*, since there is a dragon's head on the face of each coin, but correspond to the standard coinage of the D&D game if that's easier to use.

There are four kinds of dragon coins:

- The *copper dragon* (cd), which corresponds to the copper piece
- The *silver dragon* (sd), which corresponds to the silver piece
- The *gold dragon* (gd), which corresponds to the gold piece
- The *platinum dragon* (pd), which corresponds to the platinum piece

OVERVIEW

The adventure begins with the characters returning to the capital, Hellenbrown, in the company of the king, to participate in the great celebrations in their honor.

Unexpectedly, they are faced with an apocalyptic scenario: the city is on fire, riots snake through the streets, and numerous cultists, undead, and brigands are intent on destroying the capital.

The king asks the characters to be escorted to court, where he can organize a resistance and ascertain the condition of his son. With the help of Catelyn Sigrid, captain of the guards, the group must race against time to get to the castle as quickly as possible.

During the journey there will be tragic fights and moral dilemmas to face in order to avoid condemning numerous innocent people to a tragic fate. Once at the royal palace, the characters will find Marcus, the king's son, imprisoned. In reality, it is an illusion created by Artex to ensure attempts to save him fail; to this end there is also a chimera lurking nearby. When things seem to be taking a turn for the worse, the druid Elu Edrahil will arrive with numerous giant eagles to save the king and the group.

Later, the characters travel to Bybay, a city allied with the king and led by a close friend of Belador: Lord Margrave. After welcoming and offering refuge to the group, he will convene a war council with the main allies of the crown. The characters must then investigate the existence of a Black Hand base located near the city. Furthermore, the king informs them that they should look for adventurers at Tyr's temple to free the village of Rocca Fredda from a terrible monster.

The characters must deal with Lord Margrave's informant at a disreputable inn. The informant is a murderer occasionally hired by the Black Hand; he doesn't know where the sect's base is, but he knows the name of a woman who can give them information about it. This woman's name is Amberiu Xaltar. She has taken refuge in an abandoned tower, in the company of some cultists who fled from the sect with her.

Alternatively, characters can explore the village of Cold Keep, where there is a demon who kidnaps boys on behalf of the Black Hand and could reveal the location of the base to the group.

At this point, the king and Lord Margrave instruct them to find out more and kill the head of the base. After a short journey, the characters find themselves exploring a dungeon full of horrors, dangers, and mutant cultists, and there will be no shortage of surprises.

Finally, in the dark temple, the climactic finale takes place in an epic confrontation between the corrupt Prince Artex and the forces of good.

If the characters survive without giving in to the darkness, they will come to learn the plans of the Black Hand and the existence of the sacred artifacts, essential to close the Chaos Portal and stop the advance of evil!

MAP 1: THE KINGDOM
BY BRAD ROEGER

PLAYING THE ADVENTURE

The books I write because I want to read them, the games because I want to play them, and stories I tell because I find them exciting personally.

– Gary Gygax, 16 August 2004

This adventure was conceived and developed taking into account a very specific narrative line. However, the Dungeon Master can modify anything they want, adapting the story and the fights according to personal preferences and their own group of players.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS is an RPG and the players' interpretation of their characters is a fundamental aspect in the enjoyment and success of a game session. Don't just roll the dice and wait for the response from the Dungeon Master! You must try to live the life of your character firsthand as much as possible.

In this regard, this section provides some tips to help players better delineate their characters and enrich game sessions (thanks to the *Tana del Master* for the insights provided).

PLAYER ADVICE

1) PERSONALITY OF THE CHARACTER

Having a clear understanding of the personality of your character is the first step to interpreting them in the best possible way. During character creation, think carefully about what personality you want to give your character, taking into account their background, alignment, and what you would like to play in the game. The character can be humble or arrogant, or have different facets: think about their points of view, their ideals. Depending on what these are, the character may find some members of the group unpleasant or sympathetic, and the same with situations that occur during the adventure. You can also give your character particular habits or defects, such as some quirks, a particular way of speaking, or an idiosyncratic greeting

ROLEPLAY THE CHARACTER

To get deeper into your alter ego, you can train yourself to try to speak like your character in front of a mirror, also using body language. This helps to better communicate the character's emotions and thoughts to other people.

2) FEARS OR PHOBIAS

The world is a dangerous place, full of monsters and fickle gods. This is why your character is likely to have particular phobias or fears. They may have suffered a trauma in childhood, such as having witnessed the attack of some kobolds on their village and this made them fearful of these creatures in adulthood. Finding fears and superstitions in one's character makes them more truthful and multifaceted. A character who is not afraid of anything is usually much flatter and unrealistic.

3) PASSIONS AND PLEASURES

What does your character like? For example, they might love music or climb mountains. A particular drink? Having passions makes your character unique and more differentiated from other characters in the group.

4) LIMITS AND UNCERTAINTIES

What would your character never do? In extreme cases, would they be willing to commit evil deeds? And if so, at what cost? Moral doubts are one of the most interesting things in RPGs. No one always knows what to do and it is normal for your character to have them. The important thing is to take into account one's own ideals and morality in the choices to be made.

5) AWARENESS AND COMMUNICATION

Always have in mind what your character is like. Expressing the character's thoughts out loud, especially if they do something different than usual, can be a good idea. You don't always have to express everything that's in your character's head, just every now and then to help other players understand your character's motivations. Don't let the Dungeon Master always have to remind you: it's your character, not the Dungeon Master's.

6) EVOLUTION

There is a possibility that your character will not always remain the same, especially if you play long campaigns, and that the events experienced affect the character's personality. For example, your character could start with a love of elves, before learning during the campaign that elves caused the destruction of the character's hometown and thus turn their love into hate.

7) EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Represent your character with words and gestures. If the character is injured in the arm, you might hold onto your arm and moan, simulating the pain the character is feeling. If they're happy, you might make jokes and always be smiling. Do not be afraid of the judgment of others and do not be ashamed.

8) COMMIT YOURSELF, BUT DON'T OVERDO IT

A flaw or a mania must not become a burden on the group and if you see that it begins to annoy others, change something. If you see that another player is over-zealous in expressing one of these issues, you can point it out directly during the game, perhaps through your character's voice. Once you get good at playing your character, don't take up the whole scene, but try to help other players, especially the shyer ones, to roleplay their characters more.

CHARACTER CREATION

In this adventure all races and classes from the Player's Handbook and other official sourcebooks are suitable for use. If the players have played through *The Second Black*

Dawn, they can continue to use the characters already used in that campaign. As for the creation of new characters, however, please refer to the instructions in the *Player's Handbook*, taking into account that each character should start with an uncommon magical object of the player's choice.

The adventure has been optimized for a group of four players starting at 5th level. It is possible to adapt the campaign to a greater or lesser number of players: it will be necessary for the Dungeon Master to adjust the encounters, increasing or decreasing their difficulty according to the size of the group.

Session 0 is very important: exploring the tastes and expectations of the players, talking about the background to the adventure, and evaluating the various aspects of the relevant game rules, is a fundamental step for building a close-knit roleplaying group

EQUIPMENT AND MAPS

A tip for characters is to take into account the weight and allocation of all items in their equipment. Example: in the backpack (B) or in a secret pocket (SP) or worn (W).

I suggest doing it to enhance of realism and because it can be useful for the game.

In addition, it is useful to give a player (usually the scout of the group) the map of the Kingdom.

EPISODE 1: HELLENBROWN IN FLAMES

The *War for the Throne* begins immediately after *The Second Black Dawn* and assumes that the characters are returning to Hellenbrown to escort His Majesty Belador the Brave, safe and sound, to the kingdom's capital. The king is eager to be able to hug his son again and find out who hatched the plot that nearly cost him his life.

However, in the capital, a revolt led by Prince Artex, the king's brother, broke out. Artex learned of the failure of the Black Hand's plan to sacrifice the king and decided to speed up his audacious plan for usurping the throne. He contacted several groups of acolytes of the Black Hand and thanks to their help has instigated a riot in the streets of Hellenbrown that the characters must face.

IN THE BEGINNING

The characters departed from the cursed graveyard in the Vast Marsh, where they rescued the king, and are escorting His Majesty to the capital. The king is very weak due to the sacrilegious rites that he recently underwent: he uses the statistics of the **noble** (*Monster Manual*, p. 348), except he has 22 hit points.

It is late autumn. A strong wind blows from the northern mountains; so strong, indeed, that the Dungeon Master may decide that the wind imposes disadvantage on attack rolls with ranged weapons and on Wisdom (Perception) checks based on hearing. The wind also extinguishes open flames smaller than a torch. The roads leading into Hellenbrown are practically deserted: there is no trace of travelers or peasants, as the Black Hand presides over these approaches, attacking anyone who tries to reach the gates of the city.

The action begins when the characters are close to the capital:

You are marching in the company of His Majesty to the capital of the realm. You left the Sunset Plains behind you yesterday and are now on your way to Hellenbrown. The journey turned out to be quite quick, without any inconveniences.

After a few hours, you finally see the city walls in the distance. From inside the walls, you see trails of smoke rising into the sky. Is that something burning inside the city?

Characters are likely to become suspicious and begin to realize that something is wrong. If questioned, the king is clearly anxious about the trails of smoke and believes the city to be in danger; the road to the capital is also too quiet. He will advise the characters to follow him as he tries to enter the city through a minor gate.

Shortly after, at the edge of the road, the characters will notice a murder of crows flocking around something. They are feeding on the carcass of a peasant. If the players decide to approach, the crows take wing, cawing menacingly, and reveal the remains of a man. A search of the corpse, coupled with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, reveals that the now battered corpse belonged to a man in his forties, a farmer judging by the calluses on the fingers and the tan on his forearms and face. The man has a rictus of terror imprinted on his face, a symptom that he must have felt great fear in his last moments of life. Pinned by a dagger through the man's chest is the manifesto of the Black Hand (the DM can use the manifesto outlined in the prologue or on [page 62](#) as a player handout). This discovery should give a clue to the characters that those refusing the Black Hand are summarily executed, driving home their fanaticism and cruelty.

After witnessing this scene, the king wonders what happened to the guards who patrol the city perimeter, advising the characters to keep their eyes and ears open.

A REQUEST FOR HELP

As they continue along the road leading to the city gates, read the following to the players:

You are riding at full speed towards the city gates, when you suddenly hear screams coming from up ahead. Shortly thereafter, you see a woman in armor appear in front of you on the path, running in your direction. She looks extremely upset, as well as badly hurt.

The characters may decide not to stop and help the injured woman; being on horseback, they can continue on. In this case, the monsters will try to attack them but will probably not catch them as they are on foot (see the map of the route on [page 20](#)). In that case, ignore the next section and go directly to the next paragraph: *The North Entrance of the City*.

Otherwise, if the players decide to go to meet the woman to discover what is happening, read the following:

The woman is about thirty feet away and is stumbling towards you. She begs you to help her: "Please help me! I don't want to die!!! There are zombies chasing me, they're behind me!" She seems desperate to you.

The woman is a **Black Hand fanatic** (see Appendix B). She is armed with a rapier, and wears scale armor along with a shield. She has several bloodstains all over her body and looks completely distraught: tears streak down her face.

The woman is using this ruse to spring a potentially deadly ambush. She has already used this trick on others who tried to approach the city gates, pretending to be attacked

by zombies.

A few days earlier, a group of Black Hand cultists lured a patrol of soldiers from the capital into a trap and killed them. Then, black magic was used to turn them into zombies, ready to obey the woman's commands. Characters must make a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check to identify that the woman is lying.

If the **Black Hand fanatic** is captured, she tries to buy time by trying to convince the characters of her good faith; her goal is to wait for the undead to come and help her. If the characters instead attack her, she reacts angrily, attempting to escape, only to rejoin her allies and thus attempt to kill the adventurers later.

In any case, in the next round, six **zombies** (*Monster Manual*, p. 316) appear in front of the players wearing the clothes of city guards and slowly move towards the characters. Two **ghasts** (*Monster Manual*, p. 148) attempt to hide in the thick bushes nearby, waiting for the characters to move towards the zombies before attempting to take the characters by surprise and attack them from behind (see [map](#)). The ghasts make a Dexterity (Stealth) check with advantage and this is compared with the passive Perception of the characters. If the ghasts fail, the characters hear noises coming from the bushes, or glimpse shadows, sensing that there is something strange there. The fanatic will attack the characters from behind as soon as she gets the chance.

Once the characters have defeated the enemies, they can quickly proceed to the secondary entrance indicated by the king.

MAP 2: THE ROAD

BY MARCO BERNARDINI

EMPHASIZE THE GAME ATMOSPHERE

The Dungeon Master can describe some details to the players to try to convey to them the sense of repugnance caused by fighting against undead (after checking with your players that this level of detail is OK for them in session zero). Here are some examples:

- Zombies give off an unbearable stench of decay, with rotting limbs and human faces now disfigured and unrecognizable.
- The face of a zombie might remind a character of a dear relative who died during the invasion of the undead. Could it really be him?
- Whenever a zombie receives a wound, black blood mixed with pus gushes out, impregnating the characters' weapons and clothes with a terrible stench. Limbs can detach and internal organs spill out of their rotting corpses, disgusting and causing the most sensitive of heroes to vomit (perhaps requiring a DC 10 Constitution saving throw to avoid such ignominy).

THE NORTH ENTRANCE OF THE CITY

As you continue your journey, you finally see the city gates in the distance. You can hear the screams and the clash of a brutal fight echoing over the walls.

If the characters approach, they see ten **skeletons** (*Monster Manual*, p. 272) standing outside the city gates fighting three **guards** (*Monster Manual*, p. 347) and the guards' captain, **Catelyn Sigrid** (see Appendix B), pictured on [page 21](#).

Characters can step in to help the guards or stay on the sidelines, although the king will try to persuade them to fight because he fears the skeletons will overwhelm the guards. If the characters do not intervene, within a few rounds the soldiers manage to destroy the skeletons, but two guards die in the fight. If the characters have not intervened, Catelyn Sigrid will form a strong dislike towards the adventurers and the Dungeon Master must take this into account for any future interactions.

In any case, at the end of the fight the king meets with the guards.

Read the following to the characters:

At the end of the fight, a soldier takes off his helmet to breathe better. You can see that it is actually a beautiful woman with long blond hair and hazel eyes. Immediately she, suddenly recognizing the king, kneels in front of Belador: "Sire, but you are alive! The news fills me with joy: in the city there were rumors that you were killed in the swamps. I am Catelyn Sigrid, Captain of the Guards in command of the north gate of the city, at your service! Anyway, enough pleasantries! What are your orders? I will follow you until death, my lord! "

Belador asks Catelyn to give him a picture of what is happening inside Hellenbrown, saying that they have met other undead along the way and that so far, no abomination has come this close to the capital.

Catelyn will report that a riot has broken out in the city. Fanatics and troublemakers took to the streets and started stirring up the crowds; from the slums a mob gathered, made up of delinquents and other desperate people. As if that were not enough, when the soldiers intervened to disperse the crowd, a more powerful and even more dangerous attack came: a tide of undead and other hideous creatures, led by a group of evil cultists, began to storm through the city. The situation is now out of control and wandering the streets is very dangerous. At every corner there are clashes between soldiers and brigands, cultists and the undead, while most of the citizens have taken refuge in their homes.

The characters can intervene by asking questions of the commander, but she will answer laconically, since there is no time to waste. If the characters did not intervene in the previous fight to help the soldiers, Catelyn will ignore the characters' questions or answer them in a spiteful manner, harboring a strong dislike towards them for their previous behavior.

Since much of the rest of the city has fallen into enemy hands, Catelyn came here with a few loyal guards to defend this secondary entrance to the city. Catelyn realizes that there must be somebody behind what is happening, but she is unaware that the order of the riots comes directly from within the city, namely from Prince Artex, the king's younger brother.

As soon as the explanation from the commander of the guards is finished, Belador urges the adventurers to help him:

"Quick, you have to escort me to the royal palace! My son is there. Also, the garrison is there, and we may be able to organize a defense of the city. I know I am asking a lot, but please help me to save my son Marcus and I will be eternally grateful!"

In the royal quarters is the king's son (a child named Marcus) and Belador is willing to risk his life and that of his men to reach and save him. In addition, there is the king's garrison, with which Belador hopes to be able to reconquer the city.

For the characters, they face a race against time through the streets of the capital. The king will try to hide his true identity, wearing a cloak with the hood down.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE STREETS OF THE CITY IN FLAMES

The characters don't have much time to cross the streets and arrive at the royal square. The atmosphere is tense, danger is looming, and the Dungeon Master can try to convey this sense of uncertainty and tension by describing the concern on the faces of NPCs or by inserting elements such as explosions, clashes, and sudden screams coming from afar.

In addition to the three encounters that are presented below, the Dungeon Master can use the following table to create other combats. The meetings can take place in a square, in a wide street, or in a filthy alley. The Dungeon Master should feel free to add any further details: terrified **commoners** fleeing and being chased, a handful of **guards** trying to fight, many gutted corpses...

Note: *The DM can change the difficulty level of encounters simply by increasing or decreasing the number of monsters (see table). This can be a good option if the group of players is more or less than 4, or if you realize that the encounters are too simple or too difficult during play.*

ENCOUNTERS IN THE STREETS OF THE CITY IN FLAMES

1d6 Type of Encounter

- 1 2 **Black Hand fanatics** (see Appendix B), 1d4 **Black Hand cultists** (see Appendix B), and 2d4 **cultists** (*Monster Manual*, p. 345) about to kill **commoners** (*Monster Manual*, p. 345) who refused to convert to Bane
- 2 1 **bandit captain** (*Monster Manual*, p. 344), 2d4 **bandits** (*Monster Manual*, p. 343) and 2d4 **thugs** (*Monster Manual*, p. 350)
- 3 3 **manticores** (*Monster Manual*, p. 213) swooping down on the characters
- 4 2 **ghasts** (*Monster Manual*, p. 148) and 2d4 **ghouls** (*Monster Manual*, p. 148) surrounding a **noble** (*Monster Manual*, p. 348) defended by 4 **guards** (*Monster Manual*, p. 347)
- 5 2 **minotaur skeletons** (*Monster Manual*, p. 273) and 2d4 **warhorse skeletons** (*Monster Manual*, p. 273)
- 6 1 **zombie beholder** (*Monster Manual*, p. 316) and 2d4 **zombies** (*Monster Manual*, p. 316)

MAP 3: THE CITY OF HELLENBROWN
By DYSON LOGOS

A BAND OF CRIMINALS

As soon as you approach the threshold of the minor gate, you see on the ground, in the midst of some gaunt tufts of grass and charred ivy, what remains of the doors. The doors have been completely ripped from their joints, while the wood is blackened in several places, as if it had been on fire. Numerous gashes cross the wood from side to side. You see soldiers crushed beneath the heavy wooden and metal doors, but you can't see any siege weapons.

If the characters examine the scene more closely, among the corpses of guards, commoners, zombies, and skeletons, they will be able to recognize cultists who wear a tattoo on their wrists with the symbol of Bane. Characters making a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Religion) check recognize the symbol of the evil god. If they have already played the previous adventure and found the shield in the destroyed camp of Elu Edrahil in Edrahil's Wood, they will recognize the symbol as being the same as that on the shield.

Continue reading the following:

You notice that the streets of the city are deserted, while several corpses litter the ground. The air around you is full of smoke and death, while some buildings are burning. Numerous screams from various directions alarm you, but Catelyn's words catch your attention: "Hurry, follow me!"

Catelyn Sigrid leads the characters through the streets of the city, following the shortest path, the one that runs along the west wall (see map on [page 23](#)). The characters start at point 1 and must reach point 3.

WHO OR WHAT DESTROYED THE DOOR?

The battle raged against the walls of the capital, until a chimera flew to this gate and knocked it down, setting it on fire. Catelyn may have seen the monster, or she may have been engaged in a fight away from the gate - it's up to the Dungeon Master to decide what the Captain of the Guards knows.

As the characters pass through the streets of the city, there are numerous armed gangs that they can easily avoid and some fights they can observe from afar between guards and undead, fanatical cultists and brigands. The DM should describe these clashes as bloody and without quarter, in order to convey the dangerous atmosphere of the situation.

If the characters do not follow the path suggested by the captain of the guards and want to take a longer path, the Dungeon Master can add further encounters using the table on [page 22](#). The following encounters can be used as the characters make their way through the burning streets. In case the characters get too involved in street fights, Catelyn will remind them that the most important goal is to help the king and, sadly, they can't waste any more time.

After about five minutes, as they pass a crossroads, read this text to the players:

You are sneaking through some alleys when Catelyn tells you to stop and hide immediately, gesturing for you to be quiet. Soon after, you see a bunch of thugs coming from the opposite street in your direction. They are about 60 feet from you; they haven't seen you yet, but you have only a few seconds to act before they notice you.

The group of enemies comprises seven **thugs** (*Monster Manual*, p. 350) and a **bandit captain** (*Monster Manual*, p. 344). Characters have a full round before the thugs walk past their location and notice them; they therefore have little time to decide what to do! If the players start talking to each other, the Dungeon Master should rush them, pointing out that the cultists are on their way and there is no time to argue. The characters see several large boxes nearby and some tables at the edge of the alley that can be used to hide; alternatively, they can force open a window or door to enter a nearby building. If the characters try hiding in the middle of the road, they must make a Dexterity (Stealth) check: if the result of the check is higher than the passive Perception of the enemies (10), they pass without seeing them. Otherwise, the brigands attack the players.

During the fight, Catelyn and the surviving guards will defend the king, who will try to stay out of the fray.

Alternatively, characters can use the wooden tables and crates to clutter the road in front of them and flee in the opposite direction. In this case, the alley is considered *difficult terrain* for the brigands who have to cross it and the Dungeon Master can use the rules on *chases* (see *Dungeon Master's Guide*, p. 252), giving disadvantage on the brigands' checks during the chase.

Two more fights are presented below that will challenge the characters and allow them to earn rewards if they win. The Dungeon Master should present these scenes emphasizing the moral dilemma that might grip the characters, who will have to decide whether to help strangers. They are optional and in case the Dungeon Master does not want to use them, they can skip them and go directly to the final paragraph *The King's Square*, on [page 26](#).

THE MAGICIAN'S SHOP

You are crossing a street when you notice the corpse of a man in light armor and frugal clothes, missing his head. There are shreds of flesh and pieces of brain near his neck; it seems that his head has exploded. You do not have time to examine the situation in any detail because a nearby roar draws your attention: a few feet from you, you see magical lightning spring from the hands of a man and incinerate two zombies. He is defending the door of a magic shop and in front of him are eight hooded figures who threaten him. "Don't come any closer or you'll end up like those zombies!" the man shouts at the hooded figures. The hooded figures chuckle and seem ready to challenge him. You realize that the man is in danger of his life and needs help.

The characters are about 30 feet from the scene described: in a small square a **mage** (*Monster Manual*, p. 347) has in front of him four **thugs** (*Monster Manual*, p. 350) and four **cult fanatics** (*Monster Manual*, p. 345).

For the mage, you can use the characteristics in the *Monster Manual*, with these differences: he has half the hit points and one less slot for each spell level, since he has already used some of his magic in the fight against the zombies.

The wizard is called Cornelius Marradan and he is protecting his shop, inside which there are precious magical objects (the Dungeon Master can decide what is inside it: probably scrolls, magic potions, and some common magical objects), but not only magic. In fact, the magician is risking his life not to protect his material possessions, but because his daughter Christal is located upstairs. He will protect her at the cost of his own life. The king would like to intervene, while Catelyn is hesitant, as it seems unwise to her to show themselves.

The characters can decide not to intervene, continuing straight along their path, thus condemning the wizard and his family to a probable fatal destiny. Conversely, in the event that they decide to help the magician, a fight begins, and the characters can surprise the brigands from behind, as they are focused on the mage. Christal, a very small and frail child, will remain hidden upstairs in the store until the situation is safe.

If the characters win the fight, the wizard, if still alive, will prostrate himself at their feet, promising eternal gratitude and handing them a *potion of greater healing* each and a *magical scroll* with a 3rd-level spell of the characters' choice.

THE DRAGON INN

The Dragon Inn is not mentioned as it is off the road and is not located near the citadel. In the inn, the half-elf Oe and the surly and massive owner Omar (whom the characters met during *the Second Black Dawn*) barricaded themselves inside with the patrons, bolting doors and windows. The defenses seem to hold up, but the Dungeon Master can add detail to the scene if players decide to go there.

THE TEMPLE OF LATHANDER

You have been walking in the direction of the royal citadel for several minutes when Catelyn informs you that you will soon arrive at your destination. You see the inner walls of the citadel in the distance, when on your right you notice a huge pile of corpses on the ground spilling into a courtyard garden. A little farther on you notice a number of figures thronging towards the entrance of a temple. You immediately recognize the symbol: it is a temple of Lathander!

What appears to be a knight stands in front of the gate, slashing and knocking down anyone who approaches him, but he won't last much longer: you see he is wounded and surrounded by enemies.

Many innocent and helpless people have found refuge inside the remaining temples. For this reason, and for what they represent, temples have been a prime target of the rioters. Furthermore, gold or religious treasures are often hidden inside them. This also attracts many of the thieves and bandits that roam the streets. Some heroic and valiant warriors try to defend these places, but they can do little against the murderous fury that has been unleashed against the people of Hellenbrown.

If the characters stop for a moment to observe the scene, they will notice many corpses on the ground: bandits, cultists, undead, some faithful clerics and warriors. Only one knight remains standing and continues to fight: he is determined to sacrifice his life if necessary to defend what is a place of worship and sanctuary. Inside the temple there are many people unable to defend themselves, such as old people and children, who will die if the door is lost.

The **knight** (*Monster Manual*, p. 347) is fighting in front of the gate, surrounded by three **bandits** (*Monster Manual*, p. 343), a **bandit captain** (*Monster Manual*, p. 344) and three **cultists** (*Monster Manual*, p. 345). Also, as soon as the characters appear on the scene, four **zombies** (*Monster Manual*, p. 316) rise from the pile of corpses and start moving towards them.

For the knight, you can use the statistics from the *Monster Manual*, with the following differences: he has half the standard knight's hit points since he has already been in battle.

If the characters intervene, the bandits will flee as soon as

things go wrong, while the undead and the cultists will fight to the death; the knight will do the same.

In case the Dungeon Master wants to make the fight even more challenging and difficult, he can awaken an **ogre zombie** (*Monster Manual*, p. 316) from the pile of corpses after the characters have started fighting, but only if the fight proves too easy for the players.

If the characters manage to win the fight, the temple doors will open and all party members will receive the *cure wounds spell* (heals 2d8 + 2 hit points) from the priests who will also invite them to drink an *antitoxin* (see page 152 of the *Player's Handbook*) as a reward for saving the lives of innocent people.

If, on the other hand, the characters decide to flee, there will be a massacre of innocents.

The knight, if still alive after being treated by the priests, will thank the characters, and follow them until the fighting inside the city is over.

SIR RICHARD AGRAVAINE

The knight who is ready to give his life without hesitation to defend the temple of Lathander and the people barricaded within it is Richard Agravaire, heir to a minor noble house of Hellenbrown.

He is a pious and devoted follower of Lathander; trained to fight and pray in the temple from childhood, he will never back down and would rather die than see an innocent perish.

Sir Richard is a loyal, generous and authoritative person, but at the same time rather reserved. He will be happy to help the king and the characters on their quest to save little Marcus.

THE KING'S SQUARE

You finally reach the entrance to the King's Square.

You immediately notice the corpses of the citadel guards, spilled on the ground in pools of blood. A black mist with a terrible and unhealthy smell begins to rise around you; it obscures the view over the entire square. In front of you, from the center of the square, you see eight altars arranged to form a circle, illuminated by candles placed above them. Hooded figures, one located in front of each altar, are intoning a funeral song. In the center there is a boy, gagged and tied to a pole.

"My child!" Belador exclaims: "What's going on? Free him!"

A chilling laugh echoes in the square: "I was waiting for you Belador. I wanted to look you in the eye while you see your imprisoned son Marcus..."

Belador interrupts, "Show yourself! Who are you? Free him immediately or you will all die!" In response, you see that a hooded figure covered by a cloak, with a lighted torch in his right hand, turns and approaches you with a baleful look.

MAP 4: THE KING'S SQUARE
BY EMMANUELE GH OLD

The black mist that is spreading throughout the square causes the area to be *lightly obscured* (see p. 184 of the *Player's Handbook*) and those who come into contact with this essence suffer the effects of the poison *malice*: as soon as the characters set foot in the square, they must make a successful DC 10 Constitution saving throw, or become poisoned for 1 hour. Poisoned creatures are also blinded.

On the ground there are at least thirty corpses of guards, some torn to pieces, others burned alive. A chimera killed them and the characters can gain clues as to the creature's nature by approaching the corpses to examine them – a successful DC 15 Knowledge (Arcana or Religion) check identifies the likely attacker. The king's garrison is completely destroyed.

In the center of the square an eight-pointed star has been drawn (a regular octagon, as represented in the image of the square on [page 27](#)); at each end is a small altar with a candle on it that dimly illuminates the surrounding 10-foot area with a **Black Hand cultist** (see Appendix B) beside it. The nine cultists rush to attack the characters as soon as they enter the square.

In the center, tied to a pole above a pile of wood, is an illusion of Marcus, heir to the throne and son of the king. Prince Artex cast the *major image* spell with the features of the king's son to deceive him; characters will notice the illusion if they try to touch it or if, upon examining the image, they succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

As soon as the description is finished, Belador will run towards his son, to try to save him. The guards and Catelyn, if they still survive, will follow him, protecting the king even at the cost of their own lives.

Anyone who tries to approach the center of the square is attacked by a **chimera** (*Monster Manual*, p. 39) hidden by the black smoke that rises into the sky (characters with passive Perception of 20 or more will be able to notice a monster flying over the square, or by succeeding on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, with disadvantage due to the area being lightly obscured).

Marcus' illusion will beg to be released, giving the impression of being scared, but the screaming boy is but a fiction.

As soon as the fight begins, Belador will beg the characters to save his son. He does not know that in the meantime his real son is inside the throne room and has been handed over by Artex to a coven of necromancers.

At the discretion of the Dungeon Master, at the start of the second round of combat, two **knights** (*Monster Manual*, p. 347) may come to the aid of the king.

When the Dungeon Master deems it appropriate (for example, after having dealt the final blow to the chimera), the characters hear a chilling scream come from inside the royal palace; more precisely, from the throne room.

Read the following:

A very strong purple light illuminates the whole square; it appears to come from the throne room. Immediately the air around you becomes even darker and even more unhealthy, and powerful earthquakes start shaking the ground beneath your feet. The earth splits open, creating a huge chasm in front of you. In those alarming seconds, giant eagles appear right above your heads, drawing your attention with a clear cry, and a figure above them calls to you: "Get on the eagles quickly. I'm here to rescue the king! You can trust me, I'm the archdruid Elu Edrahil."

The Dungeon Master should make it clear that the characters must flee. During the battle in the King's Square, the ritual for the Second Black Dawn was triggered, announced by that flash of intense purple light and the violent earthquake, which will soon destroy the entire city.

Should the characters hesitate, the archdruid will once again call out to them, insisting that there is no time left and that Hellenbrown will soon be completely destroyed. He came with five **giant eagles** (*Monster Manual*, p. 324) to be able to take the king and his faithful servants away from that place. Even if the king is unconscious or dead, Elu Edrahil will want to take his body into custody at any cost. There is no time to enter the palace and save the king's son.

WRAPPING UP EPISODE 1

Elu Edrahil is an ally of the crown and Belador and will carry both living and dead characters and their allies on his eagles. The druid knows that he will be able to find refuge in a city allied to the crown and that it will be possible to resurrect the king (if he died) and any dead characters, as long as their bodies are intact.

Characters reach 6th level when they complete this episode.

EPISODE 2: THE CITY OF BYBAY

The previous episode ended abruptly with the rescue of the survivors by the archdruid Elu Edrahil, shortly before an earthquake destroyed the entire area. The ritual of summoning the Chaos Portal caused a huge earthquake, which led to the destruction of Hellenbrown and its surrounding area.

The druid is leading the characters and survivors with his eagles to the north; more precisely, to Bybay.

This mighty fortress is ruled by Lord Margrave Harmund II, a proud warrior and one of the few people that King Belador trusts blindly. The two fought several battles side by side and this has consolidated their relationship, now fraternal.

THE CITY OF BYBAY

Further north, between the Dark Forest and the Frozen Peaks, proud Bybay can be found. This mighty fortress, defended by thick walls and a large garrison, is ruled by one of the more prestigious noble houses of the Southern Realms: House Urlik. The city's thriving trade revolves around armor and weapons, along with the wheat and barley grown on the Sunset Plain. Bybay is currently ruled by Lord Margrave Harmund II, nephew of Count Lanxet and son of Lord Harmund I.

During the journey, the druid Elu Edrahil will not address many words to the group; he intends on explaining the mystery of his disappearance and what is happening in the kingdom only once they arrive at their destination.

ARRIVAL IN THE CITY

As evening falls on the third day, exhausted by the long journey aboard the giant eagles, you see a city surrounded by mighty walls in the distance. Elu Edrahil tells you that you have finally arrived in Bybay.

The giant eagles land in the large square (found in zone 1 of the map on [page 30](#)) in front of the Lord's palace. The square is shown in the image above. Some soldiers

He is a powerful fighter and a noble warrior, a close friend and trusted right-hand man of the king. The undead have not yet managed to penetrate the fortress walls thanks to the large and well-trained garrison. Due to the constant dangers arising from the harsh and dangerous territories that surround the city, the inhabitants are practical and direct rather than concerned with ostentation and pomp.

MAP 5: THE CITY OF BYBAY
BY DYSON LOGOS

surround the group, asking who they are, but as soon as the druid and the king have identified themselves the attitude of the guards suddenly changes, becoming polite and obsequious. A soldier will immediately go to notify Lord Margrave of their arrival.

In the event that His Majesty Belador is dead, the high priests of the order of the Zealots of Tyr will unite and, through a powerful ritual, bring the king back to life with the *resurrection* spell (see page 270 of the *Player's Handbook*). In this case, you will have to adapt the scene presented below:

You see an imposing man, wearing full armor and a blue cloak, swiftly cross the square and stand in front of Belador. After a brief glance, he bursts into laughter and hugs the king. Immediately afterwards he turns to you: "I don't know your names, but if you are in the company of this man and have helped him get here, then let me thank you. I am Margrave Harmund II, and I will be glad to host you."

The characters are accompanied to the castle quarters, where they will be offered refreshments and hosted for the night together with the survivors (if any), the king, and the druid. Each of them will be able to take a *long rest* and recover strength. If there are any dead characters, the high priests of the Zealots of Tyr will proceed to perform a ritual to bring them back to life.

As soon as the characters have recovered, they are summoned to the war council, where they can be updated on the events that have occurred and recount their experiences.

THE WAR COUNCIL

The next day, guards lead the characters through the corridors of the castle, up to the council of war:

You are invited to sit inside a huge hall. A beautiful carpet emulating a stained-glass window stands at your feet along with numerous ornate tapestries on the walls, depicting scenes of bloody battles. From a huge fireplace a sparkling fire heats the room and in front of you Lord Margrave is positioned at a seat at the head of a huge table with about twenty chairs, all occupied. The room is very busy.

Inside the room there are nobles, advisers, soldiers, magicians, and officials. There are at least fifty people. Both Belador and the druid Elu Edrahil are seated. If she is still alive, Catelyn Sigrid is also present, and she will greet the characters.

Initially, Lord Margrave greets the characters, asking them to tell their story and specifically to explain to those present what happened inside Hellenbrown. Once the characters have introduced themselves and told the council what happened up until the terrible moment when the city started to collapse in on itself, Elu Edrahil will take the floor.

The druid begins his story, starting from that fateful day in the woods in which both he and the king were attacked. He had asked to meet the king as he had learned of the terrible machinations enacted by a coven of necromancers and Edrahil suspected that they were the cause of the hordes of undead that roamed the kingdom. Shortly before the druid and the king could speak, they were attacked by a huge group of goblins led by Slobad, as well as numerous cultists led by a powerful and evil necromancer riding a nightmare (the characters may have already met Malekith in the first part of the previous adventure, *The Second Black Dawn*).

After a bloody battle and despite being seriously wounded, Elu Edrahil managed to escape, bolstered by the strength of desperation, activating a powerful magical object that transported him hundreds of miles away.

The druid took several days to return to the kingdom, but he did not waste the time necessary for the return journey: he had discovered that the king was held prisoner in a cemetery in the Vast Marsh and immediately rushed there to save him; but once he got there, he found only the corpses of the enemies, a sign that someone must have already taken steps to save Belador.

Finally, sensing a sinister omen and a sudden change in the energies of the earth, he traveled to the court astride giant eagles he called to him, sensing that something serious was about to happen. The druid thus ends his story.

Elu Edrahil still does not know what exactly happened, but by now he believes that there is no longer any doubt that the forces of evil are trying to subjugate the entire kingdom. He states that Hellenbrown probably no longer exists, completely destroyed by earthquakes that had a magical and unholy origin.

At that moment, a woman intervenes, introducing herself as the Red Sorceress: she is famous for being a powerful enchantress, head of the magic academy of Niberium. Her past is shrouded in mystery. She confirms the final part of the druid and the characters' tale, claiming that through magic she was able to see that a huge magical portal has been activated in the city of Hellenbrown and that it emanates a power as enormous as it is dark and dangerous.

During the story, most of those present are visibly worried and bewildered. It will be up to Lord Margrave to call everyone to order and to solemnly assert that this is not all: in fact, other threats are on the horizon. Explorers from the west report that Queen Sylene is arming a powerful army and that her madness is now uncontrolled: spies infiltrating Sylene's court report her trying to forge an alliance with the necromancers to wage war against the king and his allies, and conquer the kingdom.

The meeting ends with the following words from Lord Margrave:

The time has come to prepare for war. We must assemble our armies and call up allies loyal to the crown. It is not the time for division or discussion, but to fight for what is dearest to us. I don't know if Lady Sylene has completely lost her mind, but we must be prepared for any eventuality.

Soon after, Lord Margrave asks the characters to follow him into a small room next door, away from prying eyes and ears.

As soon as you enter, he explains how critical the situation is, but that at the moment it is necessary to remain calm and think carefully. There is a need for trusted people to help the crown and its allies. While the war council will take care of the military side, this will take some time, both to discuss strategies and to recruit allies.

Margrave intones the following words:

It is now certain that behind the attack on the city there is a sect of cultists called the Black Hand. Belador would like to send someone to find his son and brother in Hellenbrown, but it is too dangerous now. On the other hand, there are rumors that the Black Hand has a base nearby. We need someone trustworthy to investigate and find out what they are up to. Would you like to help us? You will be well rewarded for the trouble.

If the characters accept the quest, Lord Margrave provides them with the following information: the person they

should contact is a humanoid named Thorin. Around 10 pm tonight, he will be found at the Inn of the Beheaded Goblin, in the slums (see Area 2 in the city map on [page 27](#)). One of the characters must wear a red handkerchief around their neck to be identified by the spy, who will then approach them. The purpose of the mission is to find out if there really is a Black Hand base near Bybay and if so, find out where it is.

When the characters return to their rooms, a messenger of the lord informs them that they will be guests in the castle as long as they want. Their rooms are luxurious, and the quality of the food served in the lord's castle is high (characters will live a *comfortable lifestyle* every day). In addition, the castle blacksmith is on hand to repair their weapons and armor, should they need it. Finally, the characters have free access to all the basic equipment present in the *Player's Handbook*, such as rations, torches, etc. (within reasonable limits). The messenger hands the characters some red handkerchiefs for the mission and a bag with 100 golden dragons, to be given to the spy.

Before the characters leave the castle, the druid Elu Edrahil will visit them, thanking them for their precious help. The druid will say that he is researching to try to better understand what really happened in Hellenbrown and that so far, he has collected numerous clues, but that he still lacks a piece of the puzzle to understand the big picture. He will tell the characters that he must immediately return to his forest as he has been absent for too long, but before doing so, he will give each of the characters a *potion of animal friendship*, to make it easier for them to travel to Edrahil's Wood in case they want to visit him again.

IN THE KING'S CHAMBERS

If the characters wish to visit the king, they can go to the rooms where he is staying, protected by a heavy armed escort (if she survives, Catelyn will also be among the soldiers). If he was wounded or killed, he has been treated by powerful priests and is at full strength again. If they visit him, the king will thank them for what they have done, giving each of them a *potion of greater healing* (cure 4d4 + 4) that the priests had left to help him regain his strength (but that he no longer requires) and 50 gold dragons, saying that he does not forget promises made and as soon as times are better, worthy celebrations will follow in their honor.

If asked about the current situation, he will tell of the torment that afflicts him, since he does not know the fate of his son and his brother, Prince Artex. He will also express his concern to the characters about what may have happened to the inhabitants of Hellenbrown; Belador knows, however, that for the moment it is too dangerous to think of approaching the capital with an army.

Finally, the king will inform the characters that he has heard that the Zealots of Tyr, a religious order present in the city, are asking for help. It seems that a monster has devastated a village south of Bybay. If the characters are interested in learning more, he advises them to go to the temple of Tyr in the city.

CASUAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE CITY

Once the characters leave the Lord's castle to explore the city, they are faced with a huge expanse of houses - the city of Bybay is quite large and populous. Given the critical situation, there are many armed soldiers walking around. The population is composed of many different ethnic groups, but with a prevalence of humans.

The lord's castle, from which the characters exit (see Zone 1 of the [city map](#)), is located in the Rich Zone of the city, while the Inn of the Beheaded Goblin, where the characters must go to meet the informant of Lord Margrave, is located in the slums (Zone 2).

Here are some random encounters that can be used as the characters move around the city. They are optional and at the discretion of the DM.

CASUAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE CITY

1d8	Encounter or Event
1	Collapse
2	Day of celebration
3	Distracted bard
4	Escape
5	Exchange in person
6	Public execution
7	Religious procession
8	Robbery

Collapse. A building or structure (such as a bridge) collapses in front of the characters, causing injuries. They can be involved in rescuing survivors and also try to discover the cause of the accident.

Day of Celebration. It is a day of celebration, and the streets of the city are full of people and banquets. Characters can join in the festivities for a few hours, relaxing and having fun. They can meet new or old friends and rivals.

Distracted Bard. A famous bard visiting Bybay plays his magical harp through the streets of the city and inadvertently summons two **barlgura** (*Monster Manual*, p. 56). He runs away, leaving the players to face the demons.

Escape. A **spy** (*Monster Manual*, p. 349) is fleeing from a squad of city **guards** (*Monster Manual*, p. 347) and the characters find themselves a few feet away from the fugitive, who has stolen goods in his hand. If they manage to catch the criminal and recover the stolen goods, they are generously rewarded by the guards.

Exchange of Person. The characters are mistaken for criminals and stopped by eight **guards** (*Monster Manual*, p. 347), led by a **mage** (*Monster Manual*, p. 347). Characters can try to avoid arrest by making a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Persuasion) check; alternatively, they will be taken to the nearest guard post for further investigation.

Public Execution. The characters cross a square and notice a large crowd of people who have gathered to witness a public execution. They may try to intercede with the guards to rescue death row inmates.

Religious Procession. A religious procession moves through the streets of the city. It may be in honor of Tyr, who is highly revered in Bybay, but also of any other good deity. Characters can join it, especially if they share the same faith. The priests present can listen to the characters and give them advice.

Robbery. The characters are attacked by a local gang, comprising eight **thugs** (*Monster Manual*, p. 350) and a **bandit captain** (*Monster Manual*, p. 344), that wants to rob them.

THE INN OF THE BEHEADED GOBLIN

The Inn of the Beheaded Goblin is located in the slums of the city (Zone 2 on the city map), at the intersection of two rather dark and seedy alleys. The building in question is quite well known and the characters should have no problem finding it.

When players enter the inn, read the following text:

As soon as you open the doors, you are bathed in a strong musky fragrance - the smell is quite pungent and reminds you of spoiled meat. The space around you is really large and a fire warms and illuminates the environment. On the walls you notice many rather macabre and disturbing trophies - there are numerous heads belonging to the most varied races: you recognize an ogre, a gnoll, an elf, and an ogre. A dwarf's voice resounds from behind the counter: "Welcome strangers, what can I serve you?"

The owner of this inn is a rather eccentric and creepy dwarf named Baern; he has a large bandage around one eye. The trophy heads belong to enemies that Baern personally killed; he believes it shows everyone how powerful he is and keeps the people fearful of him, protecting him and his inn from attacks.

Baern is a **veteran** (*Monster Manual*, p. 350) and is initially quite wary of strangers but has no problem offering his patrons very spicy stew to hide the rancid and very bitter taste of the beer.

If the characters engage with Baern, he becomes intrigued by them. Baern begins to talk about his past as a mercenary and the fact that he fought several battles before retiring to private life and taking over this inn. At least that's what he likes to tell people. In reality he is a smuggler and a fence of stolen goods: if the characters want to sell something hot, he will be happy to buy the goods at 50% of the value. In addition, Baern can sell contraband material to characters, purchased on the black market (for more information see the table *Contraband Goods*).

As the conversation progresses, the innkeeper will discreetly try to figure out if his illegal activity may affect the characters. If the characters are suspicious or offended by the proposal, Baern will immediately try to change the subject, ignore it, and deny that he participates in any illegal activity.

If the characters are interested in doing business and buying items from him, see *The Contraband Merchandise* section below. Otherwise, you can go directly to the paragraph *Inside the Inn* on [page 37](#).

THE CONTRABAND MERCHANDISE

Here is a list of items Baern illegally sells inside the Inn of the Beheaded Goblin. The prices, as well as the list of objects, can be modified at the discretion of the DM.

CONTRABAND GOODS

Object	Cost
Acid (vial)	25 gd
Axe of the Executioner	15,000 gd
Contraband Liqueur (1 liter)	20 gd
Demonic Sword	15,000 gd
Demon Venom	200 gd
Ghast Poison	200 gd
Magic Key	200 gd
Medusa Venom	2,500 gd
Mushroom Venom	600 gd
Ring of the Cursed Pirate	5,000 gd

NOTE TO THE DUNGEON MASTER

The characters have two possibilities of finding the base of the Black Hand: contact the spy named Thorin or interrogate the corrupt cambion (see [page 41](#)).

ACID (VIAL)

As a bonus action, the character can use acid on a metal lock he is trying to pick. He gains advantage on the check to pick the lock and can make the check without thieves' tools.

RING OF THE CURSED PIRATE

Ring, rare (requires attunement)

This ring belonged to an old pirate who, through dark rituals, was transformed into a demon. When the character wears this ring, he gains a +1 bonus to AC and saving throws, resistance to cold damage, and is able to understand and speak Abyssal.

Curse. Once this cursed ring is put on, the character cannot take it off unless it is targeted by a *remove curse* spell or similar spell. While wearing the ring, the character suffers disadvantage on attack rolls against demons and on saving throws against their spells and special abilities.

AXE OF THE EXECUTIONER

Greataxe, very rare (requires attunement by a character who is not of good alignment)

It is said that this axe belonged to the king's executioner and claimed numerous victims. But every life taken away demands a price... This axe is in fact steeped in the pain and suffering experienced by hundreds of people, victims of this blade. Anyone who recognizes this axe will tend to treat both the object and its owner with suspicion.

You gain a +1 bonus on attack rolls and add +1 to damage rolls. Also, once attuned to the weapon, when you attack a creature that has at least one head and you roll a 20 on the attack roll, you cut off one of the creature's heads. If the creature is unable to survive without the severed head, it dies. A creature is immune to this effect if it is immune to slashing damage, if it doesn't need it to continue living, if it has legendary actions, or if the DM decides that its head is too large to be severed by this weapon. Instead, such a creature takes 3d12 extra slashing damage from the hit.

Curse. This axe is cursed, and its curse is passed on to you when you attune to it. As long as it is cursed, you do not want to part with it or ever lose sight of it. Whenever you sleep, you become obsessed with the souls of the axe's victims, which disturb your sleep and torment you. Whenever you take a long rest, in the morning you suffer a random *short-term madness* effect, which can be found on the table on page 259 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. After decapitating at least 10 enemies with this axe, you suffer the effects of *long-term madness* instead (*Dungeon Master's Guide*, p. 260), after completing a long rest. If, on the other hand, you decapitate more than 50 enemies, you suffer the effects of *indefinite madness* (*Dungeon Master's Guide*, p. 260). The curse can be broken by the *remove curse* spell but, in addition, you must dig a grave, where you will have to lay the corpse of a defeated enemy with this axe and perform a ritual to free the souls imprisoned within the axe itself. A powerful priest may be aware of how to perform this ritual.

MAGIC KEY

One magic key can open many different types of locks. When you use the magic key, you can automatically open any lock with a DC 20 or lower. After using the magic key ten times, it loses its properties and becomes useless.

CONTRABAND LIQUEUR

This liqueur is produced by distilling the seeds of a rare flower that grows only in the Vast Marsh. Given the dangers involved in picking these flowers, the trade in this liqueur is strictly prohibited. The liquid has a reddish color and has a very strong and sour taste at the same time. A person who gets drunk from this alcohol is prone to visual and auditory hallucinations.

DEMONIC SWORD

Weapon (greatsword), very rare (requires attunement by a character who is not of good alignment)

Trapped in this greatsword is the soul of a powerful demon that will affect anyone who tries to use this weapon. You gain a +1 bonus on attack rolls and damage rolls made with this magical weapon. Additionally, if it hits, you can choose to deal 3d6 additional necrotic damage and recover hit points equal to half the necrotic damage dealt. You can use this ability 3 times per day. The charges are restored after a long rest.

Curse. This greatsword is cursed and possessed by a demon seeking revenge. When you attune to this weapon, the curse extends to you as well. As long as you are cursed, you refuse to part with the greatsword and take it with you everywhere you go. As long as you are attuned to the sword, you suffer disadvantage on attacks made with other weapons.

Also, as long as you carry the greatsword, you must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw whenever you take damage in combat. If you fail, you are forced to attack the creature that hurt you until you or the creature drop to 0 hit points.

The curse can be broken by the *remove curse* or *banishment* spell. In this case, the greatsword becomes a +1 weapon with no other properties.

GHAST POISON (INHALED)

This poison is made from the poisonous miasma of a dead ghastr. The poison is contained inside an ampoule. A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 8 hours. Holding your breath does not work against inhaled poisons, as they act on nasal membranes, tear ducts, and other parts of the body.

MUSHROOM POISON (CONTACT)

This poison is obtained from the acid present in particular poisonous mushrooms. If the poison comes into contact with a creature's skin, it suffers the effects. A creature subjected to this poison must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, otherwise it becomes poisoned for 1 hour. A poisoned creature is paralyzed; the creature can re-roll the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, and if it succeeds, the effect ends.

DEMON VENOM (INJURY)

This poison is obtained from the spores of a vrock. A character can use the poison contained in this vial to coat a slashing or piercing weapon or up to three pieces of ammunition. An action is required to apply the poison. A creature hit by the poisoned weapon or ammunition must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, or take 4d6 poison damage.

Once applied, the poison maintains its potency for 1 minute before drying.

MEDUSA VENOM (INGESTED)

One ampoule contains a dose of this greenish liquid. A creature ingesting this poison must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. If the creature fails its saving throw by 5 or more, it is instantly petrified; otherwise, it begins to magically turn to stone and is restrained. It must re-roll the saving throw at the end of its next turn. If it succeeds, the effect ends. If it fails, it is petrified until released by *greater restoration* or a similar spell.

INSIDE THE INN

In addition to the innkeeper, in the inn there are four **thugs** (*Monster Manual*, p. 350) in the service of Baern, three **bandits** (*Monster Manual*, p. 343) who are having a party, and a figure in a cloak with the hood lowered. This latter person is Thorin, an **assassin** (*Monster Manual*, p. 343), the only difference being that Thorin is Small in size) with a monstrous appearance and the informant Lord Margrave spoke of. He is sitting at a table in the shadows at the back of the inn, positioned to observe any who enter or leave the building. Due to his appearance, he always wears a cloak with the hood pulled low over his face (see the image below). He has a cryptic and elusive way of speaking. If one of the characters wears a red handkerchief around their neck, after a few minutes he will signal them to come closer; otherwise, he will remain in the shadows for a while, trying to figure out who the characters are and if they were sent by Lord Margrave.

After identifying the characters as adventurers on a mission on behalf of Lord Margrave, he will say that he has the information on the location of the base of the Black Hand, but that before speaking he wants to receive the agreed remuneration. Upon receiving the bag with the coins, Thorin will complain that they are not enough and will demand triple the agreed amount, refusing to reveal what he knows unless the characters give him another 200 gold dragons.

He will also accept a magical item if the characters don't have the dragons needed to pay for it. Characters can try to

intimidate or deceive him, but either way it will be complicated, because Thorin is used to dealing with the scum of the city and risking his life every day so he will not be intimidated or fooled easily (in this case the characters have disadvantage on their checks).

If the characters resort to force, the four thugs in the room and the innkeeper Baern intervene by taking the side of the spy, while the bandits instead run away. Should things turn bad for Thorin, he will be willing to report what he knows in exchange for saving his life. If killed, the characters will find on his corpse a piece of paper that says, "*Abandoned Tower, Shacks outside the city, Amberiu Xaltar*".

Regardless of how the characters manage to get Thorin to speak, he will reveal the following information if they are successful:

I don't know where the Black Hand base is, but I know a person who does. Go out of town about half an hour's walk, to the Shacks. Near the Shacks there is a tower. There is a person there who will be able to help you. Her name is Amberiu Xaltar.

Thorin has been hired by the Black Hand, along with other assassins, to take out Amberiu Xaltar, but he won't tell the characters that. Having already been paid, he is willing to sell this information to Lord Margrave in order to collect more coin and then ditch the mission (to understand who Amberiu Xaltar is, read *The Forsaken Tower* on [page 38](#)).

THE FORSAKEN TOWER

The Forsaken Tower is located near the Shacks, in the southern part of the city (Zone 3, see the [city map](#)).

This is where Amberiu Xaltar lives. She is a human who fled the Black Hand base along with four others. She is the leader of the small group and together they found refuge in this tower. For their statistics, use the **commoner** stat block.

The tower had been uninhabited for many years due to the stories circulating about it. People believe that the tower is haunted and therefore all the locals keep a safe distance from it. Amberiu Xaltar has overcome her fear and has decided to settle there since she has no alternative: it's one of her only protections against the revenge of the Black Hand. The acolytes with her had been forcibly taken from their families by the Black Hand and feared for their lives, so they fled with Amberiu. They know that leaving the cult is a death sentence, so they have settled in the tower with plenty of provisions, hoping to be forgotten by everyone.

The building is old and full of small cracks in the walls, from which water slowly trickles. Eddies of wind occasionally blow through the numerous cracks, causing an eerie howling sound to echo through the tower and drafts of wind enter in abundance. The interior has been furnished with some makeshift equipment by the Xaltar gang (see map below).

When the characters arrive at the Forsaken Tower, read the following:

You spend some time wandering through the ruins of the Shacks district, and notice there are very few people in the area. After a while, you spot a tower in the distance that appears to match the description of what you are looking for. From a distance it looks like an abandoned ruin and a thin mist hovers around it, giving it a disquieting aura.

Although the acolytes have already spotted the characters from the lookout post, unless the characters have a passive Perception of 20 or more, they won't be aware of this.

The acolytes are terrified of anyone approaching the tower, believing those who do are sent by the Black Hand to kill them. They therefore remain hidden, trying to hide under and behind the tables and barring the door. Characters can break down the door with a successful DC 15 Strength check, or raise the inner bar from the outside with a successful DC 15 Dexterity requiring thieves' tools. Once discovered, the acolytes will ask who the characters are, begging that their lives be spared.

Characters can reveal that they are on a mission for Lord Margrave, and with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Persuasion) or Charisma (Intimidation) check, they will convince Amberiu Xaltar to speak. Alternatively, they can bribe her with 20 gold dragons. In the event of a fight, the acolytes will surrender as soon as one of them is seriously injured.

If successful, Amberiu Xaltar will provide the requested information to the characters, telling them that the Black Hand base is outside the city, about a day's walk southwest, near the Scarlet Moon Hills. She and the other renegade acolytes are not very familiar with the base, as they fled after only a brief time there and were not allowed to roam freely around the facility. They decided to flee after seeing that one of the acolytes had been turned into an abomination - some kind of mutant!

Towards the end of the conversation, when the characters have learned the location of the base, a **quasit** (*Monster Manual*, p. 63) in the service of the Black Hand discovers the place where the deserters are hiding. It is accompanied by three **veterans** (*Monster Manual*, p. 350) who aim to find and kill the acolytes who fled the base. The characters will find themselves in the middle of the battle and can choose to fight or flee - in the latter case, the enemies will not chase the characters, as they are not interested in them. If, however, they decide to stay and fight and protect the acolytes, the quasit and veterans will attack them mercilessly.

If the acolytes are rescued, they will offer to lead the players directly to the location of the Black Hand base and try to help them enter the base, but they will not proceed further.

DEVELOPMENTS

Characters may return to the city to report their findings to Lord Margrave. In this case, go directly to the *Wrapping Up Episode 2* section on [page 41](#).

If, on the other hand, the characters decide to go to the Temple of Tyr to find out more about the mission the king was talking about, continue with the next section *The Temple of Tyr*.

THE TEMPLE OF TYR

Characters may visit the Temple of Tyr (in Zone 4 of the city) after speaking with King Belador, either before or after carrying out Lord Margrave's mission. Alternatively, they may have heard on the city streets that the temple is looking for adventurers. This mission is entirely optional, and the Dungeon Master may decide to ignore this section.

The temple is inhabited by the order of the Zealots of Tyr (for more information on the order, see [page 12](#)).

Once at the temple, the characters find themselves in front of a huge stone structure, erected in Tyr's honor. An imposing statue of the god stands at the foot of a large marble staircase that leads into the temple. The aisles contain a lot of benches, used for the mass of the faithful. Inside the temple the characters find worshippers, along with some monks and many priests, focused on singing a sacred mass.

Asking for more information, a high priestess named Marigold, a long-limbed woman with a very calm voice and a rather solemn bearing, meets with the characters to ask if they are here to carry out the mission. If so, Marigold explains that these are dark times for the realm: it is rumored that a monster has attacked the village of Rocca Fredda, just south of Bybay and that it will probably do so again. At the moment, the lord's guards are too busy defending the borders so the Zealots of Tyr are looking for a group to help the locals. There is no time to waste according to Marigold! Additionally, the high priestess has heard rumors that the Black Hand may have something to do with this, which adds greater urgency to the situation. She asks the adventurers if they will help the kingdom and discover further information on the matter.

The Zealots of Tyr offers horses and 2,000 gold dragons to the entire group. Characters will be able to return to collect the money once the mission is completed.

THE VILLAGE OF ROCCA FREDDA

If the characters accept Marigold's assignment and set off south on horseback, it takes about a day to travel to the village of Rocca Fredda. So, if they leave Bybay at the first light of dawn, they should see the village in the distance as the sun goes down.

Rocca Fredda is located near the Scarlet Moon Hills and is a village of about a hundred buildings inhabited mostly by farmers and peasants. As soon as the characters arrive in the village, they find desperate people, crying loudly on the street corners. If the characters ask them why they are crying, they will continue screaming cries of pain and despair, until a woman with swollen eyes starts to speak.

"Our children! A monster kidnapped them. The bravest among us tried to save them but no one has returned alive! We have no hope, please save them!"

The local people are grief-stricken and terrified of the situation.

About two weeks ago a demon showed up in the village, demanding that every evening a young man be led to a clearing in the nearby forest. The inhabitants tried to oppose it but those who took up arms against the monster were brutally slaughtered. The inhabitants of Rocca Fredda then begged the city and the Temple of Tyr for help.

The villagers find it difficult to accurately describe the demon's features, since the attacks happened at night but reveal that the monster had wings and emanated an aura of death and destruction.

The inhabitants introduce the characters to the young man who will be delivered tonight as a sacrifice. His name is Ulap. They ask the characters to escort him to the clearing and then put an end to this hideous monster.

THE CLEARING

If they decide to help the villagers, the characters might accompany Ulap to the clearing and set up an ambush, or one of them may pretend to be Ulap.

The inhabitants inform the players that the clearing is two hours' walk from the village, in the middle of a wood. At the center of it is a large boulder, in which the victim must wait alone until midnight, when the demon comes to take the lad (see map opposite).

The characters may decide to explore the clearing before sunset to prepare an action plan. The demon, a **corrupt cambion** (see Appendix B), will arrive in the company of a **shadow demon** (*Monster Manual*, p. 64) at midnight.

The demons are sure none of the villagers have the courage to challenge them, so don't expect an ambush or trap. They also do not know the identity of the victim (nor is it of interest to them).

Of course, if the demons are attacked, they will react. Otherwise, the **corrupt cambion** will use its Fiendish Charm ability to charm the victim and take them to a nearby cave.

MAP 8: THE CLEARING

Five other boys from the village are held there. All the other kidnapped boys have already been delivered directly to the Black Hand.

The demon is called Bocar and is willing to reveal to the characters the location of the base of the Black Hand in order to save its life. It doesn't know why it has to kidnap boys; it simply follows orders without asking questions.

DEVELOPMENTS

Once the characters defeat the demons, they can return any survivors to the village. Also, if they have found out, they can report that the other boys have been taken by the Black Hand and may now be inside their lair. The inhabitants will thank the characters by welcoming them as heroes and promising to create statues of them in the center of the village to commemorate their heroic enterprise. If the information on the Black Hand is discovered and shared with the villagers, they will also ask the characters to save the other kidnapped boys.

WRAPPING UP EPISODE 2

The characters return to the palace to Lord Margrave and the king to report to them all that they have learned about the existence of the Black Hand base. The characters will be rewarded with 1500 gold dragons each for the valuable information reported.

Characters reach 7th level when they complete this episode.

EPISODE 3: THE BASE OF THE BLACK HAND

The characters return to Lord Margrave's castle with information confirming the existence of the Black Hand base. Whether the characters learned the location of the base from Amberiu Xaltar, or by interrogating the corrupt demon, it turns out that the base is located not far from Bybay, about a two-day horse ride south, on the edge of the Scarlet Moon Hills.

If the characters saved Amberiu Xaltar and her companions, Xaltar's group will personally accompany them to the base. If not, the demon will have provided the characters with information accurate enough for them to find the location without too much trouble.

In this episode, players will be asked to investigate the base of the Black Hand, not only to find out what the evil sect is up to, but more importantly to dispatch their leader.

PREPARATIONS AT BYBAY CASTLE

The characters are escorted by guards to the war council chamber inside the castle.

In the council chamber they find Margrave, Belador and a number of officers, wizards, and soldiers, who are in the service of the king and his allies.

Immediately, the lord asks the adventurers what they have discovered. After listening to them, he gives them the reward of 1500 gold dragons each, as mentioned at the end of Episode 2.

The king then takes the floor, explaining to the characters what is happening in the kingdom. Scouts have discovered that Queen Sylene is equipping an army, and spies infiltrating Indatium report that she has made deals with both the leaders of the Black Hand and a powerful sect of necromancers. The leader of these powerful necromancers is called Malekith: the few who have seen the creature and managed to survive say that it is the very embodiment of evil and cruelty. It rides a flaming winged horse and wears a thick cloak that hides its likeness. As it passes, cities burn, and the dead awaken.

The king, Lord Margrave, and their allies, do not know if they will be able to reason with Sylene, so they have decided to prepare an army to defend themselves from the possible war that could break out soon.

Furthermore, the king is also very worried about the fate of his city and its inhabitants. Wizards and explorers have reported that it has sunk in on itself and the bowels of the earth have emerged. For now, it is too dangerous to venture near the capital.

At this point Lord Margrave takes the floor, thanking the characters again for their help and asking them to investigate the lair of the Black Hand, to find out what they are up to.

“Due to the preparations for the war against Queen Sylene and the forces of evil, we prefer to send a small group of trusted adventurers for this task. And you are the right heroes for this mission. I do not deny that the risk is high, but you will be generously rewarded. We must annihilate the threat of the Black Hand once and for all!”

The king and the margrave want the characters to find out what the sect is up to, its plans and alliances. But above all they want the characters to find out the identity of their leader and kill them. For completing these objectives, they offer 5000 gold dragons to each of the heroes.

Without a leader to head the sect, they believe it will be easier for Bybay's army to annihilate the cultists.

The characters prepare to leave for the Scarlet Moon Hills, home to the base of the Black Hand.

SCARLET MOON HILLS

These vast slopes are famous for the fertility of their soil, which is used by the inhabitants of nearby towns to grow local delicacies, such as the grapes used to make the famous Danatia wine.

TRAVEL

The characters are provided with horses, rations, and all the basic equipment they want, by the soldiers.

The base of the Black Hand is about a two-day ride south. The territory that the characters are preparing to cross is rather flat, consisting of moorland and some cultivated fields. The climate is harsh, the streets almost deserted;

most people sought refuge in the city after the undead invaded the land.

After a few hours of travel, read the following:

You have been riding for a few hours and a frigid wind from the north makes you pull your cloaks tight around you: the warmth of the fire in Bybay castle now seems a distant memory.

You notice a small grove on your left, which draws your attention, as the surrounding area is otherwise almost completely devoid of trees.

In the grove are six **ogres** (*Monster Manual*, p. 237) who want to attack the characters to rob and eat them. They lair near the Scarlet Moon Hills and are hunting for prey. At this point, the DM should make a Dexterity (Stealth) check for the ogres. If the characters have a passive Perception score higher than the ogres' check to hide, they spot the monsters. Otherwise, the ogres attack the characters, catching them by surprise.

Once the ogres are defeated, the characters may go in search of their lair to loot it. It is about half a day's ride away and characters can try to track the monsters to track it down: if they succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check, they reach the lair. Inside some old huts hidden among brambles and some trees, they find the treasure of the ogres:

- *Coins*: 70 gd, 33 sd, 98 cd
- *Gemstones*: 1 chalcedony (50 gd), 2 amethysts (100 gd each) and 5 lapis lazuli (10 gd each)
- *Art Objects*: 1 silver ewer (25 gd), 1 gold locket with a painted portrait inside (25 gd) and cloth-of-gold vestments (25 gd)
- *2 potions of healing* (heals 2d4 + 2)

During the second day of the journey, continuing on the road towards the base of the Black Hand, the group glimpses the remains of a small village in the distance.

This area was attacked and its inhabitants massacred by Black Hand cultists, partly because their presence disturbed the activities of the cult, but mostly out of sheer cruelty. Inside the village lie the corpses of some of the previous inhabitants. Several **carrion crawlers** (*Monster Manual*, p. 37) have been attracted to the village and now feed upon these corpses.

If the characters decide to explore the village, read the following:

As you approach the destroyed buildings of what must have been a village, you immediately pick up a pungent stench of death and putrefaction that makes your stomach turn. You notice numerous corpses on the ground and large slimy beasts, similar to enormous worms, feeding on them; these turn towards you, staring at you with their huge eyes: it seems that you have interrupted their snack.

THE BASE OF THE BLACK HAND

The Black Hand has numerous bases within the kingdom, but the one near Bybay is certainly one of the most important. Prince Artex, one of the leaders, is not in this dungeon but resides safely in a nearby temple. He has left a trusted man, a captain, to guard the base. Characters can learn where Artex currently is by exploring the documents inside his private quarters (Area B9).

The interior of the dungeon is illuminated by numerous lanterns hanging on the walls, for the benefit of the human cultists. The ceilings are 13 feet high, and the walls and floors are made of black stone, cold to the touch. The climate is very humid and cold.

None of the base doors are locked, except the private quarters (Area B9). The key to these private quarters is in the possession of the captain of the Black Hand. Artex thinks that only those who are part of the sect can get that far.

MAP 9: THE DESTROYED VILLAGE

The characters are faced with six **carrion crawlers** (*Monster Manual*, p. 37) who, interrupted while feeding, will attack them to make sure they can continue their meal undisturbed.

Once the characters defeat the carrion crawlers, if they explore the remains of the destroyed village, they find nothing but the corpses of peasants killed by the cultists. If they wish to, they can afford these corpses a proper burial.

If the party decides not to explore the village and to continue further, and if the Dungeon Master deems it appropriate, a **wyvern** (*Monster Manual*, p. 303) attacks the party along the way. The creature will try to remain in flight, never landing, and will retreat if seriously injured.

At the end of the second day, following the directions provided, the characters arrive at the place where the base of the Black Hand should be found.

ARRIVAL AT THE BASE

You have arrived at the place where the base of the Black Hand should be found. The area is rather isolated and silent: around you, you can see a few withered and dying trees and a few dead tufts of grass. A little further on, about sixty feet away, you notice a trap door in the ground and some rotting corpses located nearby.

The characters have arrived at the entrance to the base. It extends into an underground dungeon which is accessed through an iron hatch, guarded by two **ogre zombies** (*Monster Manual*, p. 316) and a **beholder zombie** (*Monster Manual*, p. 316). The monsters appear to be dormant, but they will wake up and attack anyone who comes within 60 feet of the hatch and who doesn't belong to the Black Hand.

Once the monsters are defeated, the characters can easily lift the iron hatch, which is not locked.

B1. ENTRYWAY

The characters arrive in this area by bypassing the zombie surveillance and entering the hatch.

You see in front of you numerous black stone steps that lead down to an underground corridor. The area is lit by several lanterns hanging on the walls.

Down the stairs, the characters can head right towards the Guard Post (see Area B2) or left towards the Control Room (see area B4).

There are no patrols inside the lair.

B2. GUARD POST

This is one of two areas accessed through the main corridor after passing the entrance.

In the center of the room is a rectangular wooden table with several chairs, seating one **Black Hand fanatic** (see Appendix B), one **Black Hand cultist** (see Appendix B) and four **Black Hand mutants** (see Appendix B). All of them are ready to attack anyone they recognize as a potential threat to the sect, having the task of controlling who enters and leaves the base.

B3. ROOM OF THE PRISONERS

This is the base prison. There are six wooden poles running along the edges of the room and another large pole in the center. A prisoner from Rocca Freda is tied to each pole (these are some of the boys kidnapped by the corrupt cambion on behalf of the Black Hand, see [page 41](#)).

The prisoners are bound, gagged, and hooded, so that they cannot see or speak. They can choose to become Black Hand cultists, swearing blind obedience to Bane through a ritual conducted at the Ceremonial Altar (Area B6). If they refuse, they are taken to the Hall of the Damned (Area B5) and transformed into mutants.

MAP 10: THE BASE OF THE BLACK HAND
BY DYSON LOGOS

When the characters enter this room, there is a 25% chance that a **death hag** (see Appendix B) will come along with her **flesh golem** (*Monster Manual*, p. 169) to take a prisoner. In the event that this occurs, the flesh golem and the hag will no longer be present in the Control Room (Area B4) and in the Hall of the Damned (Area B5) respectively, as described in the relevant sections below.

Characters can untie prisoners without difficulty.

B4. CONTROL ROOM

This hexagonal room has a large black stone column in the center, which appears to support the entire ceiling. There is a disgusting smell in the air that makes you nauseous. At the far end of the room, you notice a door and in front of it is a muscular brute, made up of a macabre mass of flesh, and a deformed warrior, standing guard.

Inside the room, which acts as a transit between the entrance to the dungeon and the Hall of the Damned, there is a **flesh golem** (*Monster Manual*, p. 169) who obeys the orders of the hag (located in Area B5), and a **Black Hand mutant**.

They have orders to attack anyone who enters the room and does not say the words "Power to Bane": the only ones who know the password are the death hag and the Black Hand captain.

The flesh golem was created using the corpses of enemies and those unearthed from surrounding cemeteries.

B5. HALL OF THE DAMNED

A long, thin stone platform runs through the middle of this room. On either side, stairs descend to two pits full of sand and bodies. A hag with blackened fingers turns to you and yells, "Intruders! Go my creatures and kill them all! I will have more corpses for my experiments," ending the sentence with a menacing, insane giggle.

A **death hag** is found inside this room along with four **Black Hand mutants**, who awaken from the pools below and move towards the characters to attack them.

The hag is in the service of the Black Hand and deals with sacrifices in honor of Bane. In this room she transforms people into mutants.

In the pools there are also some decaying corpses belonging to those who failed to survive the ritual.

B6. CEREMONIAL ALTAR

This small room houses an altar erected in Bane's honor. Here, Black Hand cultists hold rites to initiate new members.

At the end of this small room, you see an altar illuminated by strong red light coming from numerous candelabras resting on top of it. Above the altar towers a rough marble statue depicting a man with demonic features sitting on a throne, watching you.

A strong poisonous gas begins to emanate from the base of the statue, quickly filling the entire room. After the first round, characters in this room must make a successful DC 12 Constitution saving throw, otherwise they are poisoned for 1 hour.

If they search the statue, the characters can make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. If successful, they find the following potions hidden in a hollow inside the statue: one *potion of greater healing* (heals 4d4 + 4), two *potions of vitality* (cures diseases and poisons) and one potion containing *demon venom* (see [page 36](#)).

B7. LOUNGE

A huge hall is revealed as you enter this area. Many large black candles sit in sconces on the walls, illuminating the entire room. A laugh draws your attention, and a shiver runs down your spine. You see, positioned on the south side on a raised dais, a man in full black armor sitting on a chair. There are five cultists around him. "Intruders ... What a good feeling. My sword hasn't quenched its thirst in battle for too long."

Within this room are a **Black Hand captain** (see Appendix B), two **Black Hand mutants**, and three **Black Hand cultists**, who immediately attack the characters.

The captain is the trusted man Artex assigned to guard the base when he is absent. To access the prince's private quarters it is necessary to pass through the hall.

The captain, if in critical condition, will threaten the characters that the head of his sect will avenge him. However, he will never reveal Artex's identity, even under torture.

Along with his equipment, characters can find the keys to open the door to the private quarters.

B8. WAREHOUSE

This area is a small, damp, dark ravine dug into the rock and used as a warehouse. Here the Black Hand collects and stores food supplies, some weapons, armor, and various other objects. There is also a small pool of drinking water.

If characters explore the area, they find: 10 long swords, 3 light crossbows, 7 sets of leather armor, 12 sets of studded leather armor, 8 battleaxes, 5 scimitars, 3 coils of hemp rope, 11 tunics, 20 ration packs, 23 torches, 2 ampoules of oil, and 3 skins of water.

B9. PRIVATE QUARTERS

The door that allows access to Artex's private quarters is locked. The door is iron, has AC 19, 28 HP, is immune to psychic and poison damage, and is resistant to piercing and slashing damage. The Black Hand captain has the key to open it. Characters can attempt to pick the lock with thieves' tools (DC 20 Dexterity check) or, alternatively, they can break the lock with a successful DC 20 Strength check.

As soon as the characters manage to enter the room, read the following text:

A large hexagonal hall extends in front of you. It must contain the quarters of an important person, as you see a large throne sitting in front of a tub full of foul-smelling blackish liquid. You do not see anyone, only a bed, some furniture, as well as a table located on the other side of the room, on which you notice some documents.

This room contains the private quarters of Prince Artex, who moved there after leaving the capital following recent events.

He is not at the base at the moment but in a nearby temple. The characters, exploring the room, can easily understand this by analyzing the documents that are located on the table.

In the documents there is a description of a dark temple, with directions to reach it from the base of the Black Hand.

Furthermore, the documents speak, in a very brief and confused way, of a sacrifice that will allow the opening of a portal from which hordes of demons will come out and destroy the world. The document hints that in the temple the true leader of the Black Hand will have to perform unholy and sacrilegious rituals, to ensure that Bane can finally return and reign undisturbed over the entire continent.

Inside the room there is also a tub containing a blackish liquid: it gives off a strong smell of rotten eggs and is viscous to the touch.

It is actually a poison used by Artex to extract confessions from prisoners. Its effect is described here:

Contaminated Truth Serum (Ingested). A creature that ingests this poison takes 2d6 necrotic damage and must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, otherwise it becomes poisoned for 1 hour. The poisoned creature cannot knowingly lie, as if under the effect of a *zone of truth* spell.

DEVELOPMENTS

Once the exploration of the dungeon is complete, the characters learn of the location of the dark temple. The group will likely be motivated to explore it to discover the identity of the leader of the base and confront them.

THE FINAL JOURNEY

The characters, through the information discovered in the private quarters of the Black Hand base, can easily reach the dark temple, which is about half a day's walk away.

Characters should not encounter other monsters before reaching the dark temple as the area has been cleared by the sect.

Thanks to the information found, after a few hours you reach a large ravine, located between two slopes and partially hidden by trees, brambles, and weeds.

You see a large temple not far away: its structure, made of black stone and bones, stands out against the skyline. An icy wind, coming from the north, makes your skin crawl.

THE DARK TEMPLE

Prince Artex is inside the temple, in the company of his beasts. He directs the necromantic rites and operations of the evil sect from here. In the Prison (Area T4) there are some chained peasants.

The interior of the dungeon is completely dark and seems uninhabited, except for the Armory (Area T3) and the Hall of Sacrifices (Area T6). In both rooms there are numerous lanterns hanging on the walls that illuminate the area. The ceilings are 20 feet high. The walls and floors are made of bone and black stone, cold to the touch. The climate is freezing.

None of the base doors are locked.

T1. HALL OF STATUES

This room is dimly lit. Both the floor and the walls are of black stone lined with what looks like bone. The ceiling is very high and four stone statues with demonic features, near the top of each wall, seem to stare at you.

As soon as the characters enter the room, four **gargoyles** (*Monster Manual*, p. 140) identify them as intruders, and attack.

MAP 11: THE DARK TEMPLE
BY DYSON LOGOS

They stand with their arms over their heads tied to the wall, gagged, and hooded. Artex uses them to feed his displacer beasts.

Characters can free prisoners without any difficulty.

T5. DISPLACER BEASTS' LAIR

This area is unlit but a small amount of light from outside the room allows you to barely make out two large, empty kennels. In front of them are chewed bones and pools of blood.

In addition to the empty kennels of the displacer beasts, inside this room are some provisions and numerous items. If the characters explore the area, they find three barrels containing: 10 ration packs, 2 perfume vials, 10 ampoules of oil, a small metal mirror, and 10 black candles. In one corner there is also a small table with 10 blank sheets on it, a nib, and a bottle of ink.

Going up a short flight of stairs leads to the Hall of Sacrifices (area T6).

T6. HALL OF SACRIFICES

Opening the heavy metal door makes a sinister noise, and a huge hall opens up before you. Dozens of black candles light up the area and numerous statues of winged, hooded men fill two sides of the hall. A strong smell of incense envelops you. At the back of the room, you see a man seated on a throne of bones watching you, flanked by two displacer beasts.

"Hello adventurers, I see you have finally arrived. You did well to get here. My compliments."

Although for a moment you don't recognize him, you suddenly realize that the man speaking to you is Prince Artex. He looks like another person: the right side of his face is completely disfigured.

Artex the Corrupted (see Appendix B) has already cast the *magic armor* spell, having sensed the presence of intruders inside the temple. To learn more about his history and the reasons that led him to betray the king, see [page 54](#).

With him are two **displacer beasts** (*Monster Manual*, p. 81), who defend him until death.

Artex, before fighting, will try to convince the characters to join his cause:

"I guess you are surprised to see me here. You don't know what I saw. The future that awaits us is bleak: Bane will triumph and destroy all who try to oppose him! But it's not too late to make the right choice. There is nothing more you can do to save the kingdom. Join me and he will spare you. It is useless to fight against such a superior power, the only possible and logical thing to do is to join it. Unimaginable powers and enormous rewards await you if you make the right choice!"

T2. GUARD ROOM

This area can be accessed both from the outside and from the Hall of Statues (Area T1). This room comprises two long corridors and a square area and leads to either the Armory (Area T3) or directly to the Hall of Sacrifices (Area T6).

The entire area is guarded by three **helmed horrors** (*Monster Manual*, p. 183) in the service of Artex, who will attack anyone who enters it without their lord's permission.

T3. ARMORY

Lantern light illuminates this area. In front of you is a corridor that ends in a large metal door. Hanging on the walls are numerous paintings depicting still-life scenes.

A step leads to the right side of the hall, where there are five recesses in the wall. Inside these are five sets of **animated armor** (*Monster Manual*, p. 19) with five **flying swords** (*Monster Manual*, p. 20) that will activate and attack the characters as soon as they arrive in the center of the armory, trying to catch them by surprise.

Once the animated objects have been defeated, the characters can head towards the Prison (Area T4), towards the Displacer Beasts' Lair (Area T5), or towards the Hall of Sacrifices (Area T6).

T4. PRISON

Inside this small room are six imprisoned **commoners**.

If the characters accept the fallen prince's ominous offer, he will ask them to drop their weapons as proof of their good faith. Then he will send the displacer beasts to attack the characters anyway, since he still considers them to hold too much dangerous information to live.

If the characters refuse, the battle begins.

If in critical condition, Artex will invoke the name of Bane and Malekith, raving about the end of the world and asking the characters to reconsider and join him. He will also try to convince them that he knows where the king's son Marcus is and that if they leave him alive, he will reveal it to them. Of course, this is a lie – he will tell them nothing – and is only a ploy to make the group drop their guard before he attacks them again. The king's son was actually delivered by Artex to the necromancers and has already been used to initiate the rite that opened the Chaos Portal in Hellenbrown (at the end of Episode 1 of this adventure). It will take the necromancers a few weeks to finally open the portal and unleash the Second Black Dawn.

Artex will fight to the death. If killed, his body will disappear, only to later appear in the Abyss.

Inside the room there is a black sapphire (worth 5,000 gold dragons) and several letters, which speak of the blood sacrifice required from the king or his son to begin the ritual of the Second Black Dawn. Further documents reveal details on the portal that would allow the reincarnation of Bane and the release of a horde of demons who will destroy the entire realm. In addition, there is also mention of some sacred artifacts that, if found and collected, might be able to close the portal.

CONCLUSION

Artex's defeat (or victory) marks the end of the adventure. If the characters fail, Artex will continue his quest to complete the rituals to ensure the Black Hand and Bane

dominate the entire realm. The king and Lord Margrave will not know what happened and the world will be one step closer to the apocalypse.

If the characters manage to defeat Artex, the most important 'treasure' they gain is information on the existence of the sacred artifacts that might save the realm, while the Black Hand will suffer a serious setback and it will take them some time to regroup.

Characters reach 8th level when they complete the adventure.

Once they reach Bybay, the characters will be rewarded with 5,000 gold dragons each and will be celebrated as heroes. The king learns with dismay and disbelief the news of his brother's betrayal and the fact that his son has been used for the ritual.

However, it's not over yet! Malekith's plans continue. The Chaos Portal is about to open, threatening the existence of all life forms. Help the king and the forces loyal to the crown find the artifacts to close the portal and destroy Bane's plans for rebirth in the next chapter of the saga: The Portal of Chaos!

APPENDIX A: MUSIC

This section provides a soundtrack that can be used at significant moments in the adventure:

Song's Name	Author, Band or Movie	Situation
The Guild Of Ambience	<i>The Guild Of Ambience</i>	Music useful for many situations (crypt, forest, marketplace, etc.)
The Trail	<i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt</i>	In the Beginning (Episode 1)
Fear No Darkness	<i>Total War: Warhammer 2 Soundtrack</i>	A Request for Help (Episode 1)
Knights March Theme	<i>King Arthur Soundtrack</i>	The North Entrance of the City (Episode 1)
You're... immortal?	<i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt - Hearts of Stone</i>	A Band of Criminals (Episode 1)
The Battle of the Pelennor Fields	<i>The Return of the King</i>	The Magician's Shop (Episode 1)
Dark Angel (Epic Choral Action)	<i>Phil Rey</i>	The Temple of Lathander (Episode 1)
Revan's Theme ~ Occupation of Balmorra [Extended]	<i>Star Wars: The Old Republic</i>	The King's Square (Episode 1)
The Steward of Gondor	<i>The Return of the King</i>	The Arrival of Elu Edrahil with the giant eagles (Episode 1)
Edoras	<i>The Return of the King</i>	Arrival in the City (Episode 2)
Medieval Fantasy Music – Medieval Market - Folk, Traditional, Instrumental	<i>Ean Grimm - Fantasy Music World</i>	Casual Encounters in the City (Episode 2)
The Sunstone Aen Seidhe	<i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt</i>	The Inn of the Beheaded Goblin (Episode 2)
For Honor! For Toussaint!	<i>The Witcher 3: Blood and Wine</i>	Fight in the Forsaken Tower (Episode 2)
Everybody's Gone to The Rapture Soundtrack - The Light We Cast	<i>Jessica Currey</i>	The Temple of Tyr (Episode 2)
Await the King's Justice	<i>Game Of Thrones</i>	The Village of Rocca Fredda (Episode 2)
The Song Of The Sword-Dancer Extended	<i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt</i>	The Clearing (Episode 2)
Elder Scroll - Skyrim: Far Horizon	<i>London Philharmonic Orchestra</i>	Preparations at Bybay Castle (Episode 3)
Ufrior	<i>Netflix's THE WITCHER (OST)</i>	Travel (Episode 3)
On the Champs Désolés	<i>The Witcher 3: Blood and Wine</i>	Arrival at the Base (Episode 3)
A Necromancer	<i>The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug</i>	B2. Guard Post and/or B4. Control Room (Episode 3)
Ladies of the Woods (Extended Version)	<i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt</i>	B5. Hall of the Damned (Episode 3)
Chaos Undivided - Dynamic	<i>Total War: Warhammer Soundtrack</i>	B7. Lounge (Episode 3)
The Rains of Castamere (Instrumental - Long Version)	<i>Game Of Thrones</i>	B9. Private Quarters (Episode 3)
The Battle of the Hornburg	<i>The Return of the King</i>	The Final Journey (Episode 3)
The Borrower	<i>Elephant Music</i>	T1. Hall of Statues (Episode 3)
Dark Angel	<i>Phil Rey</i>	T2. Guard Room (Episode 3)
Winchester	<i>Elephant Music</i>	T3. Armory (Episode 3)
Duel of the Fates	<i>Star Wars, by John Williams</i>	T6. Hall of Sacrifices (Episode 3)
The Fields of Ard Skellig	<i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt</i>	Conclusion (Episode 3)

APPENDIX B: MONSTERS AND NPCs

This appendix describes the various nonplayer characters and monsters that the characters may encounter during the adventure. These creatures are presented in alphabetical order.

NEW SPELLS

Some non-player characters and monsters have new spells, which are described in Appendix C on [page 60](#). They are appended by the plus symbol⁺ to differentiate them from the others.

ARTEX THE CORRUPTED

We cannot fight against the looming chaos that will rule our lives. But we can join it and embrace it, trying to make the most of it.

Prince Artex, King Belador's younger half-brother, has always been a marginal figure within the royal court of Hellenbrown. Growing up in the shadow of his older brother, he has always harbored a hatred and a great envy towards him.

The sect of necromancers that are led by Malekith and the Black Hand found in him a perfect pawn to achieve their goal of destabilizing the realm and opening the portal of chaos: they needed to sacrifice the king. Bribing a member of the royal family was ideal for starting their evil plan.

One day, Artex began to hear voices, more and more insistent, whispering in his mind until he could ignore them no longer, saying that he deserved more, that he was entitled to more, and that he should take revenge on his brother.

Soon after, he began to have visions about what would happen shortly thereafter in the kingdom: hordes of undead wandering undisturbed, free peoples enslaved, and Bane reincarnated to the Material Plane to rule the whole realm under his tyranny.

Artex began to believe what he heard and saw and succumbed to flattery and fear. He thought that it would be useless to oppose the forces of evil and that one had to bow down to them in order to survive. Besides, it was all an opportunity to acquire the power he had always wanted.

A group of cultists contacted him, revealing Bane's rebirth, and offering him a command post within the Black Hand, with the promise that he would become lord of the realm. In truth, he would only remain a pawn in the hands of Malekith and Bane.

So, when Artex was asked to assist in the kidnapping of the king, he saw his chance and didn't hesitate. Once Belador's sacrifice failed, he was commanded to start the riots in Hellenbrown

and to take the king's son, Marcus, as a sacrifice to open the Chaos Portal.

He has followed orders and moved to a large Black Hand base near Bybay, from where he directs operations.

Having now completely devoted himself to the Dark Lord, his physical form has changed: the right side of his body is completely disfigured and corrupted by chaos, and his face is unrecognizable. An eye has appeared on his right hand: this allows him to have true sight within 30 feet.

Artex has two companion animals, two displacer beasts, who follow him and will protect him until he dies.

In the event of a fight, before resorting to combat, he will try to bribe his opponents with flattery and threats, promising enormous rewards and leveraging their fears and their dark desires. Obviously, he will then kill anyone who is not useful to him.

Artex possesses two *potions of superior healing* (heals 8d4 + 8), which he will use on himself in case of difficulty.

ARTEX THE CORRUPTED

Medium Humanoid (Human), Lawful Evil

Armor Class 13 (*ring of protection*, 16 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 60 (11d8 + 11)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	12(+1)

Saving Throws Str +2, Dex +3, Con +2, Int +8, Wis +5, Cha +2

Skills Arcana +7, Deception +4, History +7, Intimidation +4, Persuasion +4, Religion +7,

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14, true sight 30 ft

Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal, Terran
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +3

Dark Devotion. Artex has advantage on saving throws against the charmed and frightened conditions.

Mantle of Spell Resistance. Artex wears a *mantle of spell resistance* that gives him advantage on saving throws against spells.

Ring of Protection. Artex wears a *ring of protection* that grants him +1 to AC (already included in AC) and saving throws (already included in saving throws).

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Spellcasting. Artex casts one of the following spells, using Intelligence as his spellcasting ability (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks):

At will: *fire bolt*, *light*, *minor illusion*, *unholy whispers*⁺, *thaumaturgy*

2/day each: *mage armor*, *charm person*, *crown of madness*, *necrotic bolt*[†],

1/day each: *cone of cold*, *major image*, *greater invisibility*, *fireball*, *Evard's black tentacles*

Reactions

Spellcasting. Artex casts one of the following spells, using Intelligence as his spellcasting ability:

2/day: *shield*

1/day: *counterspell*

CATELYN SIGRID

"In the din of battle, Catelyn is like the sound of a hammer hitting the anvil!"

– Soldier, on Catelyn Sigrid

Catelyn Sigrid is a captain of the Hellenbrown City Guard in command of the garrison guarding the city's north gates. Catelyn is a strong and disciplined woman with a determined temper. Despite her severity, Catelyn has managed to earn the respect and esteem of the soldiers through her actions and has repeatedly demonstrated her courage and worth, managing to make a career within the city garrison.

Catelyn has a *potion of healing* (heals 2d4 + 2) and a *potion of greater healing* (heals 4d4 + 4), which she will use on herself, the king, or one of the characters in case of difficulty.

Catelyn greatly admires His Majesty Belador; she will obey his every order and will not hesitate to sacrifice her life to save that of the king.

CATELYN SIGRID

Medium Humanoid (Human), Lawful Good

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 65 (10d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (0)	12 (+1)

Skills Athletics +5, Insight +2, Perception +2, Persuasion +3

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elven

Challenge 3 (700 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Devotion to the Kingdom. Catelyn has advantage on saving throws against the frightened condition.

Actions

Multiattack. Catelyn makes two greatsword attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

BLACK HAND

The Black Hand is an organization that has been active for many centuries, whose main purpose is to subvert the existing power and order to establish an absolute dictatorship, headed by Bane.

Below are the statistics of the members of the dark cult.

BLACK HAND CULTIST

To become a cultist requires blind obedience, a good dose of fanaticism and an evil disposition, often coupled with some signs of mental imbalance. The initiatory rite consists of swearing allegiance to Bane, donating all one's material possessions to the order of the Black Hand, and promising to serve the Dark Lord for life, without any hesitation or repentance whatsoever. Furthermore, the novice is required to commit a crime, such as the murder of an enemy of the church of Bane; the victims can be a cleric or a paladin, or lowly a simple believer of an antithetical faith to the Dark Lord.

A cultist must obey all orders and must not hide anything from their superiors. Disobeying a rule is a transgression that can be punished with death. Cultists are used by the sect as pawns for their sinister maneuvers and are considered expendable to achieve the sect's goals. Sacrificing oneself for Bane is one of the highest honors within the Black Hand.

BLACK HAND CULTIST

Medium Humanoid (Any Race), Typically Lawful Evil

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)
Hit Points 22 (5d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	14 (+2)	11 (0)	10 (0)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

Skills Deception +3, Persuasion +3, Religion +2

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1 (200 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Blind Fury. The cultist has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of its allies is within 5 feet of the creature and is not incapacitated.

Dark Devotion. The cultist has advantage on saving throws against the charmed and frightened conditions

Actions

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Spellcasting. The cultist casts one of the following spells, using Wisdom as a spellcasting ability (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks):

At will: *light*, *unholy whisper*⁺, *thaumaturgy*
1/day each: *bane*, *necrotic bolt*⁺, *inflict wounds*

BLACK HAND FANATIC

Black Hand fanatics are among the craziest and most dangerous members of the sect - men and women who have been part of the cult for so long that they have lost any glimmer of humanity.

They use intimidation and oppression to influence the weak and to command the cultists and new followers of the order. More than power, they are driven by a thirst for blood and a desire to satisfy Bane's will. Having almost completely lost all form of reasoning, they throw themselves headlong into the fray and are not afraid to die.

Corrupt and wicked, they are ready to carry out any order given to them, going so far as to slaughter even a child without the slightest hesitation.

BLACK HAND FANATIC

Medium Humanoid (Any Race), Typically Lawful Evil

Armor Class 18 (scale mail, shield)
Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)
Speed 30 ft

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	10 (0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Intimidation +4, Persuasion +4, Religion +2
Senses passive Perception 11
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 2 (450 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Blind Fury. The fanatic has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of its allies is within 5 feet of the creature and is not incapacitated.

Dark Devotion. The fanatic has advantage on saving throws against the charmed and frightened conditions.

Actions

Multiattack. The fanatic makes two melee attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft, one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

BLACK HAND MUTANT

Black Hand mutants are cultists so blinded by the lust for power that they want to become corrupted through the magic of Bane and the dark gods. Alternatively, they are young men and women kidnapped from surrounding villages who are offered as a sacrifice to the Dark Lord.

They are transformed through ritual into corrupt and blasphemous creatures. On a physical level they undergo a random transformation that makes them almost unrecognizable and hideous.

In addition to undergoing a permanent transformation of its body, a mutant of the Black Hand also undergoes moral and psychological corruption, which leads it to forget its past life almost completely, to transform itself into a being animated only by hatred and anger.

It obeys the orders of its superiors, but once unleashed, it is difficult to control and stop.

The mutation table is provided on the [next page](#): the Dungeon Master can roll 1d6 to randomly determine the creature's mutation type. Each mutation affects the creature's stats and must be taken into account when using its stat block.

BLACK HAND MUTANT

Medium Humanoid (Any Race), Typically Chaotic Evil

Armor Class 13 (studded leather armor)
Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	11 (0)	10 (0)

Skills Athletics +4, Intimidation +2, Religion +1
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 2 (450 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Dark Devotion. The mutant has advantage on saving throws against the charmed and frightened conditions.

Uncontrolled Hate. The mutant deals an extra 2 (1d4) damage when it hits with a weapon attack (included in the attack).

Actions

Multiattack. The mutant makes two melee attacks.

Greataxe. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d12 + 2 plus 1d4) slashing damage.

MUTATIONS TABLE

1d6 Mutation Effect

- | | | |
|---|-----------------|--|
| 1 | Poisonous Bite | The mutant gains this action: <i>Melee Weapon Attack</i> : +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., a creature. <i>Hit</i> : 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw against the disease, otherwise it is poisoned for 1 hour. |
| 2 | Extra Leg | The mutant increases its speed by 20 feet. |
| 3 | Hideously Large | The mutant's hit points are increased by 25, but its speed is reduced by 10 ft. and its Armor Class is decreased by 1. |
| 4 | Tail | The mutant gains this action: <i>Melee Weapon Attack</i> : +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., a creature. <i>Hit</i> : 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage. |
| 5 | Two-Headed | The mutant has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks, as well as saving throws against the blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, stunned, and unconscious conditions. |
| 6 | Leathery Hide | The mutant's skin becomes rock hard, increasing its Armor Class by 2. |

BLACK HAND CAPTAIN

To aspire to become a Black Hand captain, it is not enough to faithfully serve the order for many years. One must be wicked and insane to the core.

Corrupt, with no possibility of redemption, a captain yearns for death and destruction, harboring a hatred for all that is alive and opposed to its will.

BLACK HAND CAPTAIN

Medium Humanoid (Any Race), Typically Lawful Evil

Armor Class 18 (plate)

Hit Points 97 (13d8 + 39)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16(+3)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +6, Cha +6

Skills Athletics +7, Deception +6, Intimidation +6, Persuasion +6, Religion +4

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +3

Blind Fury. The captain has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of his allies is within 5 feet of the creature and is not incapacitated.

Dark Devotion. The captain has advantage on saving throws against the charmed and frightened conditions.

Hard to Kill (1/day). When the captain drops to 0 hit points, but is not killed instantly, it drops to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The captain makes two greatsword attacks or two javelin attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit*: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Spellcasting. The captain casts one of the following spells, using Wisdom as a spellcasting ability (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks):

At will: *unholy whispers*⁺, *light*, *thaumaturgy*
2/day each: *bane*, *necrotic bolt*⁺, *inflict wounds*
1/day each: *blindness/deafness*, *crown of madness*

Bonus Actions

Incite Hate (1 / Day). The captain chooses up to five allies belonging to the Black Hand cult that can hear him within 60 feet of where he is. He harangues them to foment destruction in Bane's name and for 5 rounds they deal an additional 2 (1d4) damage.

CORRUPT CAMBION

A corrupt cambion is a fiend contaminated by necromancy and dark rituals performed by the sect of the Black Hand. They are born from the union of a fiend and a humanoid but are usually corrupted as soon as they reach adulthood. The promise of power and strength causes them to yield to their most primal and dark instincts and become puppets wielded by the Black Hand.

A corrupt cambion decides to embrace the evil and dark powers it wields, serving the cause of Bane and the Black Hand. A corrupt cambion believes that once Bane is reborn and dominates the world, he will grant it the leadership it deserves.

It faithfully serves the sect of the Black Hand and does so out of both respect and fear, but above all because it believes it will reach a position of greater power in the future. They usually serve as powerful soldiers or have strategic roles and functions.

CORRUPT CAMBION

Medium Fiend, Typically Lawful Evil

Armor Class 19 (scale mail)

Hit Points 102 (12d8 + 48)

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	16(+3)

Saving Throws Str +8, Con +7, Int +4, Cha +6

Skills Deception +6, Intimidation +6, Perception +4, Stealth +7

Damage Resistance cold, lightning, fire, necrotic, poison: bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Proficiency Bonus +3

Actions

Multiattack. The corrupt cambion makes two attacks: one with its warhammer and one with its sting.

Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 feet, one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage, or 10 (1d10 + 5) if used with two hands to make a melee attack, plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 feet, one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Fiendish Charm. One humanoid the cambion can see within 30 feet of it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed for 1 day. The charmed target obeys the corrupt cambion's spoken commands. If the target suffers any harm from the corrupt cambion or another creature or receives a suicidal command from the cambion, the target can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a target's saving throw is successful, or if the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the corrupt cambion's Fiendish Charm for the next 24 hours.

Spellcasting. The corrupt cambion casts one of the following spells, requiring no spell components and using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks):

3/day each: *alter self*, *command*, *necrotic bolt*⁺, *detect magic*

1/day: *circle of death*

DEATH HAG

Death hags are foul creatures of extreme evil, whose main goals are to gain power and destroy life. A death hag doesn't care for others and rejoices in pain and ruin. They study for long years to discover the secrets of the afterlife.

They carry with them a powerful magic item, made after years of intense study, called a magic rune, which grants them power and renown with other hags. The magic rune usually takes the form of a black stone with a circular shape and is used by the hag to imprison the souls of those she has killed, magnifying her magical powers. In order to free the trapped souls, it's necessary to destroy the rune.

The hag is strongly tied to this magic item and will do anything to protect and preserve it. After they have created their magic rune, each hag starts to hunt victims to trap their souls.

DEATH HAG

Medium Fiend, Typically Neutral Evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 97 (13d8 + 39)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14(+2)

Skills Arcana +5, Deception +4, Insight +4, Perception +4,

Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal, Sylvan

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Magic Rune (10 souls). As long as the death hag is within 20 feet of her magic rune, she can cast animate dead as many times as the number of souls imprisoned inside the rune, or until it's destroyed.

Mimicry. The hag can mimic animal sounds and humanoid voices. A creature that hears the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check.

Actions

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Illusory Appearance. The hag covers herself and anything she's wearing or carrying with a magical illusion that makes her look like another creature of her general size and humanoid shape. The illusion ends if the hag takes a bonus action to end it or if she dies. The changes wrought by this effect fail to hold up physical inspection. For example, the hag could appear to have smooth skin, but someone touching her would feel her rough flesh. Otherwise, a creature must take an action to visually inspect the illusion and succeed on a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check to discern that the hag is disguised.

Necrotic Curse (1/day). The hag targets a creature within 15 feet of her that she can see. Summoning foul and evil power from the Shadowfell, the hag channels it in a maleficent whisper that hits the target and drains its vitality. The target must roll a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failed roll it takes 28 (7d8) necrotic damage, or half as much damage on a successful save. Constructs and undead are immune to this effect.

Spellcasting. The hag casts one of the following spells, requiring no spell components and using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks):

At will: *chill touch*, *minor illusion*
1/day each: *hex*, *inflict wounds*

APPENDIX C: SPELLS

This section describes the new spells possessed by the monsters and NPCs in Appendix B.

UNHOLY WHISPERS

Necromancy cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You telepathically whisper words in a dark, demonic language, seeking to corrupt a creature within range that you can see. The target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or take 1d10 psychic damage.

NECROTIC BOLT

1st level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 90 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

A black, pitch-smelling ray flashes towards a creature chosen by you and within range. Make a ranged spell attack against the target. On a hit, the target takes 2d6 necrotic damage, and the target's next attack roll before the end of your next turn suffers disadvantage, due to magical darkness and the miasmas that surround it until then.

At Higher Levels. When the caster casts this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 1st.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

THE ADVENTURE IS NOT OVER!

THE CHARACTERS MUST NOW BEGIN THE SEARCH FOR ARTIFACTS CAPABLE OF CLOSING THE CHAOS PORTAL AND PREVENTING THE RETURN OF BANE AND HIS ARMY. MEANWHILE, WAR BETWEEN QUEEN SYLENE AND THE KING'S FORCES HAS BROKEN OUT AND THE STABILITY OF THE REALM IS SEVERELY TESTED. NEW ALLIES, SUCH AS THE MIGHTY RED SORCERESS, AND NEW ENEMIES AWAIT THE CHARACTERS IN THE NEXT CHAPTER OF THE SAGA: *THE PORTAL OF CHAOS*.

WHILE WAR RAGES ON, EXPLORE THE REALM IN SEARCH OF LOST ARTIFACTS AND CLOSE THE PORTAL BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.

GET READY TO FACE THESE AND OTHER CHALLENGES IN THE NEXT CHAPTER OF THE SAGA: *The Portal of Chaos*.