Courts of the Shadow Fey

5E

BY

WOLFGANG BAUR AND DAN DILLON

Eric Lindahl (Order #51842079)

Courts of the Shadow Fey

Kobold Press

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Courts of the Shadow Fey

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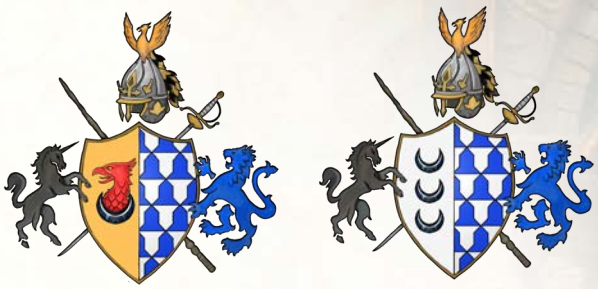

Shadow Realm

Roach Knight

Sorreminx

Black Prince

Revich

Brightspur

Yngress the Red

Chelessfield

Moonlit King

Eric Tomlinson (Order #5184207)

Introduction

Some say the world is white and featureless. Others say the world is a black abyss.

Half black, half white. Half sorrow, half joy. Half living, half a ghost. The Realm of Shadow is neither one thing nor another; it is a place of halves. One might think of it as half regret, half done, half dead. But it is just as fair to say half rich, half cured, half won. The shadows are a place of neither pure evil nor pure good, but only that muddle where true balance lies, where lives are rich and sad and complicated. Half villains and half heroes, who strive but never win. But who never quite lose.

The Shadow Courts

Welcome to the Realm of Shadow. You're halfway home.

The shadow fey maintain two seasons and two forms of rule. The season of the Winter Court is the crueler one, ruled by the Moonlit King, and it is a rare occurrence and often a violent one as well. The Summer Court, ruled by the Queen of Night and Magic, is far more prevalent, with a gentler air and manner. Both monarchs and their nobles dwell in the Shadow Realm. The members of these courts are referred to generally as lords and ladies (by those who fear them) and more precisely as the shadow fey, or scáthsidhe.

For almost one hundred years, all this was of little interest to the burghers of Zobeck. The shadow fey remained involved in their own affairs, ignoring the wars, sieges, royal marriages, and petty rivalries of the human kingdoms. Until now.

ELITISM AS VILLAINY

In American life, elitism is a crime, but in feudal times it was just the natural order of things. Nobles ruled, bishops decreed excommunications and forgiveness, and peasants and merchants sucked it up. Yet nowhere in most fantasy roleplaying games does class and status show up. I decided that *Courts of the Shadow Fey* was going to do something with this theme in addition to the more obvious themes of demons and shadow-related power sources. The design pivot I chose was to give class and status a metric: you can truly measure status and prestige in this adventure, just as you can attach a value to Wisdom or to a spell's level. (The wider Midgard campaign setting adopted this metric as well, though it finds less use in dungeon crawling than it does in urban or courtly arenas.)

Elves, in my mind, have often been underrated as villains. They are genteel, civilized creatures who live longer than, and look down their noses at, smelly barbarians and bearded, beer-swilling dwarves. They are elitists who—and this makes it so much worse—are probably right when they claim that other races cannot lay claim to the elves' high culture, deeper knowledge of magic, or perfection in the arts. They're snobs, and rightfully so.

This snootiness drives players apeshit, which makes it a perfect attitude for villains to display. Experienced heroes—especially those coming into their own "sweet spot" in personal power—are masters of melee and lords of magic. Telling them they're not the best at something and then showing them a ladder of Status ranks to climb is like throwing red meat to a lion. Which is why I used this idea as part of the framework for a courtly adventure: the characters' success is determined not only by exploration and combat, but also by their ability to "work the system," earning Status and the privileges that come with it. If the likelihood of an invite from the prince is connected to a point system, the result is a more effective adventure at the relatively low cost of some record-keeping. This adventure puts snobbery and status on a mechanical foundation.

So here we are. This is the best possible setting I could build for the shadow fey, the hothouse world of the nobles and their servants, featuring deadly combat, dangerous liaisons, and a set of hurdles that can keep a party looking for the right key to understanding the fey's snobbish attitude—once they earn the proper achievements. It seems to have worked well in playtest, and I hope it inspires your players to expand their gaming horizons a little as well.

My profound thanks to all the patrons who supported this work. I've wanted to write an Amber-meets-the-Fey adventure for ten years, and your patronage made it possible. I hope you find the results to your liking.

—Wolfgang Baur

Eric Lindahl (Order #3154079)

The adventure begins when the fey court turns from one season to another, and the Winter Court briefly holds sway just as a valuable piece of information reaches the king's ear. After a century of neglecting the mortal world, the Winter King takes the throne following the return of one of the shadow fey's hidden ambassadors from the Free City of Zobeck, when the emissary revealed to His Majesty that the arrangement with House Stross was now null and void. Apparently, says he, the humans overthrew their king and now rule through some council of merchants. The Moonlit King—unpredictable at the best of times—is enraged and shocked by this news. If the Stross bloodline no longer rules the city, then surely possession of the place reverts to its prior lords. Those lords are the shadow fey, in the body of their king and queen, and they want it back.

And in fact, events unfold as the king commands, at least at first. In some ways, the city does rightfully revert to the fey, who originally ruled it. They act as though their word is the law, and they appear more and more often on the streets. If things continue in this vein, the humans and others in Zobeck will live only at their sufferance.

The Winter Court's season of rule ends shortly after the Moonlit King sends his ambassador and servants along the Shadow Road to Zobeck. During the rule of the Summer Court, the Queen of Night and Magic maintains his policies and delivers a set of edicts to the city. At first, these new laws are annoying but manageable, but the edicts quickly become more and more onerous. Seemingly, the fey are here to stay. And they mean business.

Why are the fey suddenly interested in the affairs of other races? Perhaps the party can find a way to straighten all this out. . . .

A NOTE ON DESIGN

The plot is a "bucketed" one, with five stages that run sequentially. The goal was to create separate segments, acts, or chapters, each with its own mood, short story arc, and resolution. The roughly thirty possible encounters can take a party from 7th level to 11th level, though it's expected that not every party will experience every encounter.

Each section is fairly loose, and once the party meets the relevant requirement, a new set of encounters becomes available. The older opportunities largely disappear, and new challenges arise. The only figures who are relevant throughout are the king and queen, although their influence is felt largely by reputation in the early chapters.

Introduction to the New Edition

At the time I wrote *Courts* for 4th Edition, Kickstarter wasn't a thing, and Kobold Press was barely scraping by. Things have changed, and the shadow fey have appeared in many new forms as villains, becoming major antagonists in the 5th Edition version of Midgard, and having their own set of entries as monsters in the *Tome of Beasts* and in the *Creature Codex*.

Apparently, snobby elves really do irritate players, and their run as villains in the world is going to be a long one. My profound thanks to Dan Dillon for wrangling the new edition monsters into shape and taking a much-needed hammer to the finale and fine-tuning the firebird hunt. Thanks to Marcel Mercado and Marc Radle for making the new edition look amazing.

—Wolfgang Baur
October 2018

Adventure Summary

The first stage of the adventure involves two assassination attempts: one against a priest of the Sun God, the second against the characters. In between, the party notices the strange doings of the fey who arrive in Zobeck and begin making demands of the population, creating disruption as the existing authorities try to assert themselves against the capricious and sometimes deadly force used by the shadow fey.

The characters are invited to visit the fey's hidden ambassador, who is secretly hoping that the mayhem arising from the shadow fey's rule over the city can be avoided, although he is much too loyal to say anything too clearly. The party learns the ritual to open a fey Shadow Road and leaves the city behind in hopes of traveling to the courts of the shadow fey. After a couple of hostile encounters on the road, the party arrives at the courts in the Shadow Realm only to find them apparently abandoned. The characters can investigate, fight some animated guardian constructs, and gradually peel back the layers of illusion that hide the courts from casual trespassers. They might speak to goblin servants, visit the stables, and become entangled in matters involving the lower factions of the courts. If the characters amass enough prestige, they are invited to meet more and more nobles, and are eventually allowed out of the Lower Halls and allowed to mingle with the upper crust.

As their Status improves, the characters face new opportunities. They are invited to the Swan Festival held by the courtesans, whose dances and flirtations could prove dangerous. They might meet the Black Prince, the Demon Lord of Roaches, Baron Suvid, and

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other members of the nobility. And they will certainly be challenged to a duel, seduced by a succubus, given the opportunity to hunt down the mythic firebird, and be granted a lantern dragonette as a mark of favor—and, if they choose, they can pursue the hand of one of the courtesans.

All this activity raises their Status and eventually gets the characters an invitation from the Queen of Night and Magic, Her Majesty Sarastra, who grants them an audience and tells them they may discuss the matter of Zobeck's rulership—and their own fate—with the Moonlit King. They are sent off to find him in the Spiral Maze, where he lives in a tower protected by traps, an ancient eye golem, and shadow beasts. Meeting the Moonlit King can be either a diplomatic mission or a combat encounter, although the king's mental state means that Charisma (Persuasion) is a frail reed indeed. He might grant the characters what they wish and send them on their way back to the mortal world, or they might need to defeat him and his devils in combat first. On their way out of the maze, they might again meet the Demon Lord of Roaches, who offers them great rewards in exchange for the king's *Orb of Rule*. The party must decide whether to retain that source of power (and have one of its number become a member of the courts), trade it to the demon lord, or give it to the queen in exchange for riches and the return of the city. No one said the choices would be easy.

The king is dead—long live the Moonlit King!

ENCOUNTER CHOICES AND DIFFICULTY

Throughout the adventure, encounters are provided at varying categories of difficulty so each one can be tailored to the party's capabilities or circumstances. The difficulty assessments are based on a party of four characters, who start at 7th level in Act I and advance in level as the adventure progresses.

In addition, this edition of *Courts of the Shadow Fey* provides alternate encounters for higher-level play, and for various levels of ability. When you see a notation such as "9th-level characters" or the like, this is a modification to the encounter that makes it more of a challenge for characters of higher-than-expected level. In other words, *Courts* can be played with a party of 7th-level characters at the start, and you can choose Easy, Medium or Deadly encounters for them, but you could also begin with higher-level characters and keep things challenging for those more accomplished adventurers by choosing more difficult encounters when those options are available.

Act 1: A Chill in the Air

The wind is chilly with the promise of winter, the trade fair has closed up for the year, and the last of the dwarf caravans have struck home for the Ironcrags before the passes are snowed in. The city settles into the quieter rhythm of late autumn and awaits winter's first frost.

Act 1, Scene 1: The Assassination

The characters are in town when things go wrong. Shadow fey toughs are threatening Oleg Khandarc, a priest of the sun god Khors, who has been warned to stay away from the temple of Svarog where the shrine to Khors stands. The characters are called in by Misha Jorelik, a novice priest who slipped away to get help.

> A young man wearing the yellow tunic of the sun god stumbles into the tavern. "Come quickly!" he says. "Thugs are threatening the priest of the sun, and blood may spill on holy ground!"

The first player to ask a question gets an answer; then Misha says, "I must find help, not gabble. Follow me!" and runs off. If the characters do not follow, the priest and his acolyte are both found dead not long after, and the temple grounds are marred with blood. The holy ground must be reconsecrated.

If the characters follow Misha back to the temple, they hear shouts coming from inside as they approach. And they see a piece of parchment, held by a knife driven into the enormous doors in Temple Square.

Written in Elvish, the note reads:

> Let it be known to all who come here: the charter of the Temple of Perun and Khors is revoked by order of the Ambassador Thelamandrine. None may enter, visit, chant, keep vigil, or worship here unless and until the priesthood conforms to the new practices. Those who violate this order are subject to summary execution or removal by the forces of the Realm.
>
> By his hand,
>
> His Excellency Glaninin Thelamandrine, Hidden Ambassador-In-Extraordinary of the Winter Court to the Fey City of Zobeck

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ASSASSINATION AT THE TEMPLE

1. The Temple
2. Rectory
3. Mess Hall
4. Kitchen
5. Priest's Quarters
6. Merchant House
7. Apartments
8. Shops
9. Candlemaker
10. Wainwright's Guild
11. Brewmiester's Guild

C - Shadow Fey Cutthroats
H - Hounds of the Night
N - Misha, the Novice
P - Oleg, the Priest
S - Shadow Fey Rakes

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After the characters enter the temple, read or paraphrase the following:

> The shrine is filled with illumination from a brightly glowing statue of the sun god, currently despoiled by shifting shadows. Elves in black cloaks are in a threatening position near the priest, who stands defiant against them. Pews fill the far end of the chamber, and the priest stands under a white dome supported by eight pillars. He seems calm. "You do not belong here," says the priest. "I demand you leave, in the names of Svarog and Khors."
>
> "If you will not listen to the city's rightful ruler," says one of the fey, "you will pay the price." The elves advance toward the priest, their blades raised as they move to cut him down.

The shadow fey rakes (and the hound, if present) threaten the priest at the start, while the shadow fey cutthroats hide in the shadows (and thus should not be placed on the grid, if one is being used).

Assuming the party interferes, they might save the priest Oleg and the acolyte Misha from certain death. The priest (AC 13, saves +0 Dex, +1 Con) can take three hits from the rakes; the acolyte (AC 10, saves +0 Dex, +0 Con) dies after just two hits. If the hound is present, its bite counts as two hits, and its Frost Breath counts as three hits on a failed saving throw and one hit on a successful save.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Medium—2 shadow fey cutthroats, 1 shadow fey rake

Hard—2 shadow fey cutthroats, 2 shadow fey rakes

Deadly—1 hound of the night, 2 shadow fey cutthroats, 2 shadow fey rakes

Illumination. The statue of Khors is well lit, although a creature who succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a strange shadowy substance flitting across it. The spaces near the curtains and along the walls are unusually dim and lightly obscured, certainly sufficient for shadow fey to hide in.

Fire Pit. A creature that enters the small fire pit or starts its turn there takes 5 (2d4) fire damage.

Pews. The rows of wooden pews are difficult terrain for someone moving perpendicular across the pews but normal terrain for someone moving along their length. A successful DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check allows a character to run across the backs of the pews at normal speed.

Shadow Fey Youths

Young shadow fey are as arrogant and cocky as they are graceful and skilled. Maturing in a society that places emphasis on success and ambition, young shadow fey aggressively seek to raise themselves in the courts. For some, this means mastering the intrigues of court life through wit and charm while, for others, it is a life of arcane study. For most eager shadow fey, however, the only path to success is the way of the blade. Shadow fey culture values dueling as an art, and there is no shortage of ambitious fey who seek to master it.

Shadow Fey Cutthroat

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+1)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Int +4

Skills Deception +4, Insight +4, Perception +4, Stealth +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of its turns, the shadow fey can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Fey Ancestry. The shadow fey has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put it to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The shadow fey's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

2/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The shadow fey deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the shadow fey that isn't incapacitated and the shadow fey doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow fey has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. The shadow fey has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

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ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow fey makes two rapier attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Shadow Fey Rake

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Cha +4

Skills Acrobatics +6, Arcana +2, Intimidation +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The shadow fey has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put it to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The shadow fey's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

2/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow fey has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. The shadow fey has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow fey makes two melee attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. The shadow fey rake adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the rake must see the target and be wielding a melee weapon.

Hound of the Night

Large monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d10 + 30)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	9 (–1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +5, Wis +5

Skills Intimidation +3, Perception +5, Stealth +6

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Immunities cold

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages understands Elvish and Umbral but can't speak

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Blood Scent. A hound of the night can follow a scent through *phase shifts*, ethereal movement, *dimension door*, and *fey steps* of any kind. *Teleport* and *plane shift* are beyond its ability to follow.

Innate Spellcasting. The hound's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom. It can innately cast the following spell, requiring no material components:

At will: *dimension door*

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ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d10 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Frost Breath (Recharge 5–6). The hound exhales a 15-foot cone of frost. Each creature in the cone must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 44 (8d10) cold damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

Shadow fey cutthroats are fey who do not follow the rules of honorable dueling or who have sold their services to the highest bidder instead of playing the games of court. As efficient and dishonorable killers, they rely on stealth to stalk targets, preferring to strike from the shadows and unleash their sneak attacks.

Shadow fey rakes constantly press the fight. They use *misty step* to gain advantageous position, and to strike at more vulnerable but less accessible targets.

If present, the hound attacks the acolyte with its bite, and then turns on any interlopers so the rakes or cutthroats can finish the priest. If possible, it aims its breath weapon to hit the priest and the characters but avoid the shadow fey.

The assassins flee when both the priest and the acolyte are dead, or when three of the fey can no longer fight. If the characters demand their surrender, they consider the option only if they have completed their mission by killing the clergy. They're confident they can escape any mundane prison easily, and so might go willingly. If it is present, the hound simply uses *dimension door* to escape the premises.

SHADOW FEY LORE

When players ask what their characters know about the shadow fey, you can ask them to make an Intelligence check for general knowledge. Provide information as described below, or use a helpful NPC to convey it when appropriate.

Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Nature) DC 12—The hierarchy of the shadow fey is ever changing. Young shadow fey, especially, rise and fall quickly. Ruthless and determined, they rely on dueling and backstabbing to curry favor with the nobles of their court.

Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Nature) DC 17—Not all shadow fey play along with duels and court politics. Many, instead, hone their talents toward more murderous ends as assassins. This makes them indispensible to the court while not always subject to its dramatic whims.

Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Nature) DC 22—Shadow fey dislike either sunlight or complete darkness—they prefer twilight whenever possible, though their darkvision makes darkness easy for them to navigate.

Note: Many places in the adventure have entries similar to these, providing information that becomes known by a character who gets a success on the indicated check.

Development

If the assassins flee, the party can help the novice or priest (if either survived) or examine what's left of them. Neither carries unusual wealth, messages, or items; both are clearly members of the clerical order of the Sun God, judging by their garments and holy symbols.

Examine Shadows. If a character examines the strange shadows on the statue, ask for an Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Religion) check and consult the following table:

Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Religion)

Check	Result
10 or lower	Definitely some shadows on that statue. Someone should clean it.
11–14	Khors is a sun god; the presence of shadow on his statue is a mark of desecration. Marking it in this way requires powerful magic.
15–19	The statue needs to be consecrated.
20 or higher	The shadows on the statue are pure matter from the Shadow Realm, and they cannot be removed without divine magic.

Examine Corpses. If the characters examine the corpses of the fey, they find the treasure described below. In addition, Intelligence (Investigation) or Intelligence (Nature) checks reveal the following information:

Intelligence (Nature) or Intelligence (Investigation)

Check	Result
10 or lower	They look like fey creatures, and they possess bladed weapons.
11–14	These are not elves but scáthsidhe, or shadow fey. They are a legend in Zobeck, long since vanished from everyday life.
15–19	The shadow fey are creatures of neither the forest nor the fey wilderness. (Highest result possible on Investigation checks.)
20 or higher	The shadow fey are natives of the Shadow Realm, which is another plane of existence and the source of shadow magic.

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If someone in the party makes an Intelligence (History) check, use the following information:

Intelligence (History)

Check	Result
19 or lower	The history of the shadow fey is all forgotten or lost.
20–29	The scáthsidhe vanished from everyday life almost a century ago, withdrawing to their realms just as other fey creatures have abandoned the mortal world.
30 or higher	The shadow fey once ruled the Margreve Forest, north of the city. They had some alliance or bargain with the people of Zobeck, and that's why the forest has never been cut down. A royal family rules the fey.

Treasure

The assassins carry 400 gp worth of strange coins and four black opals worth 500 gp. Someone who makes a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes the coins as currency of the Shadow Realm. The opals are marked with an engraved crest of the Moonlit King. They can be exchanged for +1 Status later, in the courts, if the characters still have them.

Act 1, Scene 2: Disquiet in the City

The characters might investigate things after the assassination, but things also start to investigate them. In particular, they are followed by shadows, and their sleep is invaded.

> Autumn seems to have snuck up on the city. A deepening chill hangs in the city air, and the streets are filled with fog and cold mist. People are settling in for winter.

Following the mayhem at the temple of Perun and Khors, some strange things have been happening around town: a street has disappeared, and new heralds in black tabards have been spotted on street corners, declaiming the "Queen's Edicts" and disappearing when approached.

Use the following material as encounters for the party, to increase the sense of strangeness in the city, or as information gained on successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or Intelligence (Investigation) checks.

TEN STRANGE HAPPENINGS

1. **Fey Hunt**. A group of fey hunters armed with bows and spears are hunting shadows through the streets of Zobeck while largely ignoring the people. Their white phantom hounds and stamping, strangely beautiful stag mounts trample through the crowded marketplace, scattering people to all sides. What they hunt through the streets is not human, dwarf, or kobold, but wild deer, shadowy black bears, and a ghostly boar with tusks like knives—all of which they have released into the city. The hunters have no qualms about endangering innocent bystanders.
2. **Shadow Councilors**. The Praetorian Council meets in its halls and discovers that its usual numbers have been overshadowed by a group of fey visitors who seat themselves and begin discussing city business. When the council attempts to remove them forcibly, the human, dwarf, and kobold councilors find themselves thrown out by their own guards (who have been tricked by fey glamours).
3. **Trouble in the Street**. A fey bard has gained a great following, but everywhere he sings, the performance ends in a terrible brawl. The injured include a dozen members of the city watch.
4. **Disappearances**. Rumors claim that people who offend one of the fey walking the streets disappear. Others claim that the gangs such as the Cloven Nine and the Redcloaks are taking advantage of a troubled time to settle scores (see the *Zobeck Gazetteer* for gang details).
5. **Longer Twilight**. The astronomers of the Arcane Collegium believe that the days are even less well lit than before. The conjunction of a new moon with the winter solstice comes in a few weeks, and that is an especially inauspicious time.
6. **Repentant Criminal**. An assassin tries to kill the mayor, and when his attempt fails, he turns himself in and hangs himself in his cell. The Collegium necromancer who questions him using a speak with dead spell discovers that the assassin repaid a debt to a fey overlord to prevent worse happening to his children. The children, though, are missing.
7. **River Freezes**. The river Argent freezes solid for half a day. Merchants despair, captains worry about harm to their barges, and children are delighted to play on the ice.
8. **Beer Sours**. The important White Rose Brewery has an entire batch go bad. The dwarves are incensed; the fey left a notice that the soured beer was a "penalty for words meant to insult and injure the city's right and proper rulers. All future brewings will suffer likewise until a sufficient apology is offered."

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9. **Mocking Shadows**. The characters' shadows taunt them for not throwing in their lot with the hidden ambassador, and even threaten them by saying, "The shadows will rule, the sun is setting" and similar phrases meant to disquiet the characters.

10. **Shades at the Gates**. The clockwork watchmen that usually watch over the North Gate and Dwarven Gate fail to operate normally. They are replaced by shadow fey guards wearing white tabards marked with a black moon. Attempts by the city watch to oust the interlopers fail because the city watch cannot reach the gate; they wander all over the city, but every time they approach the gates, they take a wrong turn and wind up elsewhere. The Zobeck guard captain, Hovart Edelstein, is enraged, but the Arcane Collegium seems powerless to counter the charm.

THE QUEEN'S EDICTS

If the party takes no action to investigate, events continue apace. The Queen of Night and Magic has given instructions to her hidden ambassador; he, in turn, promulgates a set of edicts to the city by sending out black-cloaked heralds to announce these edicts in Elvish.

The characters might hear the first edict directly from the hidden ambassador; they are asked to come before the council to speak and offer advice or magical aid.

While they are in the city hall chambers, the proceedings are interrupted:

> A figure dressed in black and white and holding a scroll steps forward from a dark corner and gives a short speech in Elvish.

For characters who understand Elvish:

> "The Moonlit King has spoken and upheld his claims, just and remembered. Once the longest night has passed, the king and queen of the Realm of Shadow shall rule the lands of Zobeck once more, appointing a statthalter as Their Royal Highnesses see fit.
>
> "As Hidden Ambassador to the city now built upon those lands, I stand ready to arbitrate in the name of the Shadow Court, winter and summer, day and night. Let no scáthsidhe be harmed or harassed in these lands, on pain of blindness. I await your full compliance; you may petition me if the need arises."

The fey bows once after speaking, then disappears.

If the characters attack before the speech is done, the ambassador simply flees sooner and gives his speech at the citadel or the watch barracks instead.

The Queen's Edicts are expressed in papers stuck to the city gates and announced by loud shadow fey and goblin criers in Crown Square and the Greenmarket at dawn and dusk each day. At first, these regulations are annoying but manageable, such as a ban on cursing and an end to the Festival of Light (which isn't until midsummer, so no one notices). Yet those who disobey find themselves unable to sleep well, and sometimes find their voices gone for days at a time.

Then the heralds proclaim an interdict against the worship of the city's patron goddess, Rava. All those who visit the temple are robbed: every coin, jewel, and item of value is taken from them as a "fine." The priests are attacked, just as the priest of Khors was, by shadow fey rakes and assassins, and occasionally a hound of the night.

The edicts quickly grow more demanding: no temples may be entered without permission of the queen and her ambassador, no one may eat meat without paying a portion to the fey, and no one may declare a toast without praising the fey.

Word on the Street. The characters can talk to citizens or do their own poking around to get some news about recent events and their import, using Intelligence (Investigation) or Charisma (Persuasion) checks:

Intelligence (Investigation) or Charisma (Persuasion)

Check	Result
14 or lower	The city is restless; it will be a hard winter.
15–19	The Street of Tailors and the courtyard in the Green District near the market disappeared for an entire day.
20–24	The temple of Rava has been closed since the day of the assassination attempt. The priests and priestesses of the Gear Goddess and patron of the city are nowhere to be found.
25–29	The fey who attacked the high priest of Khors are shadow fey, who usually keep to themselves in the Margreve Forest, north of the city. Rumors say that other officials in the city have been threatened as well.
30 or higher	The events of recent days point to something more than troublemaking fey. The priesthood of Porevit says a "hidden ambassador of the shadow fey" approached its centaur high priest, Ogolai, seeking an understanding.

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THE AMBASSADOR'S INVITATION

On top of all these happenings, a strange visitor appears one night in the characters' dreams and invites them to visit Winter's Kiss, the hidden ambassador's home in Zobeck.

There's just one problem: no one in the city seems to have heard of Winter's Kiss. The fey have kept such a low profile up till now that their ambassador, who has lived in Zobeck for a decade, is not known by name or occupation. Indeed, asking about the hidden ambassador brings a blank stare from most people.

If the characters are immediately interested in following up on the invitation and locating Winter's Kiss, go to Scene 4 for more information.

FEY EVENTS: GRADUAL OPPRESSION AND STRANGE JOYS

If the characters show little interest in finding the hidden ambassador, the city slides closer and closer to a change of government. Use some or all of the following events to show that ignoring the problem is a bad idea.

1. **Fey Crime**. The local watch has no jurisdiction over the fey (or so the fey claim). As a result, the rakes and other young shadow fey run riot in the city, robbing, dueling, and destroying property. When confronted or accused, they disappear or simply laugh, knowing that their misdeeds will have no consequences until such time as the statthalter or the hidden ambassador calls them to account.
2. **Gates Sealed**. Dwarves and humans who might leave the city as it grows less hospitable are not allowed to leave with their families. The shadow fey guards only allow a single family member out through the gates at one time, keeping the rest in the city as hostages to ensure the traveler's return. In theory, this situation can end when the statthalter or the hidden ambassador signs the right proclamation.
3. **Young Sacrifices**. Beautiful young women and handsome lads are invited to an "Eveningstar Ball," which seems like a pleasant time—but many who attend are charmed and seduced and carried away by rakes and fey nobles.
4. **Counting Their Subjects**. The shadow fey order city officials to perform a census and record everyone's birthday, hair color, and other details of a private nature.
5. **Kobold Immunity**. Kobolds seem strangely unaffected by most of this activity (their pact with the shadow fey is a separate peace, and they are unaffected by the deal with House Stross).

HAUNTED DREAMS

During this time, everyone's rest is disturbed to some degree by nightmares and strange noises. Each character must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw after finishing a long rest in Zobeck. On a failed save, that character has a bad rest and gains none of the usual benefits.

Act 1, Scene 3: A Clear Message

Although the characters might know nothing about the shadow fey, the fey have certainly been speaking to humans, dwarves, and kobolds who know the characters by their growing reputations—and the fey don't plan on letting such powerful heroes disturb their plans. The information they gain makes it clear to the shadow fey that the characters are a threat—so at some point, the fey target the characters for assassination.

Choose a time for this encounter when the party has just defied the shadow fey in public, or defeated one of their agents, or when the party is close to figuring out what's going on.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Medium—1 soul eater, 2 tough shadows

Hard—1 soul eater, 1 wraith

Deadly—2 soul eaters, 2 tough shadows, 1 wraith

Soul Eater

Medium fiend, neutral evil

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)

Speed 30 ft. fly 100 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	22 (+6)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Con +5, Cha +3

Skills Intimidation +3, Perception +3, Stealth +9

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities paralyzed, poisoned, stunned, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Infernal

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Caster Link. When a soul eater is summoned, it creates a mental link between itself and its conjurer. If the soul

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eater's assigned target (see Find Target) dies before the soul eater can drain the target's soul, or if the soul eater is defeated by its target (but not slain), it returns to its conjurer at full speed and attacks. While the soul eater and the conjurer are on the same plane, it can use its Find Target to find its conjurer.

Find Target. When a soul eater's conjurer orders it to find a creature, it can do so unerringly, despite distance or intervening obstacles, provided the target is on the same plane of existence. The conjurer must have seen the desired target and must speak the target's name.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The soul eater makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6 + 6) slashing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Soul Drain. If the soul eater reduces a target to 0 hit points, the soul eater can devour that creature's soul as a bonus action. The victim must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a successful save, the target is dead but can be restored to life by normal means. On a failed save, the target's soul is consumed by the soul eater, and the target can't be restored to life with *clone*, *raise dead*, or *reincarnate*. A *resurrection*, *true resurrection*, or *wish* spell can return the target to life, but only if the caster succeeds on a DC 15 spellcasting ability check. If the soul eater dies within 120 feet of its victim's corpse and the victim has been dead no longer than 1 minute, the victim's soul returns to the body and restores it to life, leaving the victim unconscious and stable with 0 hit points.

Tough Shadow

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 25 (3d8 + 12)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)	8 (–1)

Skills Stealth +4 (+6 in dim light or darkness)

Damage Vulnerabilities radiant

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Amorphous. The shadow can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch wide without squeezing.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, the shadow can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Sunlight Weakness. While in sunlight, the shadow has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

ACTIONS

Strength Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) necrotic damage, and the target's Strength score is reduced by 1d4. The target dies if this reduces its Strength to 0. Otherwise, the reduction lasts until the target finishes a short or long rest.

If a non-evil humanoid dies from this attack, a new shadow rises from the corpse 1d4 hours later.

Wraith

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silvered weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The wraith can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the wraith has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 21 (4d8 + 3) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the

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target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Create Specter. The wraith targets a humanoid within 10 feet of it that has been dead for no longer than 1 minute and died violently. The target's spirit rises as a specter in the space of its corpse or in the nearest unoccupied space. The specter is under the wraith's control. The wraith can have no more than seven specters under its control at one time.

The soul eaters focus their attacks on any creatures openly bearing holy symbols, with a preference for worshipers of a sun god, followed by any obvious followers of Rava. They then turn on heavily armored or hard-hitting foes, but always attacking the same enemy. For groups requiring slightly more of a challenge, but not a full jump to a deadly encounter, consider having the soul eater split into two shadows when it dies. The shadows act on the soul eater's initiative count.

Treasure

If a soul eater is slain, its shadowy ashes contain a magical powder with the properties of a *potion of greater healing*.

Act 1, Scene 4: Seeking the Hidden Ambassador

As the characters have likely already learned, mundane attempts to locate Winter's Kiss are no help at all, but some spells might prove useful.

Speak with Animals. Given the nature-friendly aspect of the fey, this spell works better than one might expect; a bird (a crow or a songbird, but not a pigeon) or even a rat might know that Winter's Kiss is located near the Arcane Collegium, or near the Market District (this is the Shadow Fey Exchange, a place often confused with the ambassador's residence). The place is magically protected from the view of most people, enchanted to disappear from the eyes of those who were born after the enchantment was spun. As a result, only the elderly, the elf-marked, and a few wizards with keen arcane sight can find it easily. Animals were not included in the protective glamour, so a pigeon or a rat might say something like "The Mouse King has spoken of it. The fey keep a few of us as pets and servants." The animals' answers are all vague about how to

actually enter the place, and finding the exact location requires interpreting the directions of various urban wildlife, possibly requiring additional ability checks (Intelligence [Nature] DC 15 or Wisdom [Insight] DC 18), bribes of nuts and cheeses, or the ability to follow a bird as it flies.

Divination. More precise in some ways than *speak with animals*, the spell yields the following truthful reply: "Lost fey souls guard the ancient stones where red caps once hung." The last reference alludes to "the House of Red Hats," which was the Stross counting house before the Great Revolt and has since been sold to the spice merchant Enneas Thel and renamed Winter's Kiss. A successful DC 17 Intelligence (History) check, or consulting any of the city's older merchants, reveals the location of the building. A visit is then easy.

Legend Lore. This spell works perfectly to locate Winter's Kiss, but if the characters have easy access to this magic, they might be too powerful for the adventure as written. If the characters have no other good option, the priestess of Rava the Gear Goddess might cast *legend lore* on their behalf if the characters seek her out and pay for the Clockwork Oracle (see "Zobeck and the Crossroads" in the *Midgard Worldbook*, or see the *Zobeck Gazetteer* for 5th Edition).

IF THE CHARACTERS DON'T COOPERATE

For whatever reason, the characters might decide to play a waiting game and see what develops. If that's what happens, the fey don't invade, exactly; they just declare themselves in charge and assume that everyone will obey them. This leads to a curious sort of dual government for a time; the human guards are flummoxed by fey magic, and the fey pretty much ignore all human institutions that do not interfere with their goals.

If the characters don't investigate further for a month, a herald announces that no one may breathe the king's air in the Gear District (which leaves the gearforged the only ones who can visit). At dawn and dusk, the fey seize control of the city gates, the council chambers, and the temple of the Green Gods. They don't exactly fight the city's watchmen; however, they enforce their declared laws. Those who break them are beaten, cut, or shaved hairless. Some are exiled from the city.

Naturally, the Praetorian Council, the mayor, and others find these edicts a threat to their authority and a danger to the city. Why the sudden fey arrival? How can a bargain be struck with such capricious and arrogant creatures? Perhaps they can persuade the party to seek out the hidden ambassador after all.

Act 1, Scene 5: Dogs at the Door

Once the characters discover how to reach the ambassador and parley with him, the house seems ordinary. When the party first arrives, read:

> The house seems perfectly ordinary, although you can tell that no one enters or leaves by what seems to be the front door. The walls are of thick gray slate. The door bears a fresh coat of white paint and an elegant silver knocker in the shape of a wolf's head. The shutters are gray and tightly closed.
>
> A small window in the front door is shuttered. You hear barking from within.

The door is unlocked. Knocking on it brings a shadow fey rake, who opens the window in the door and introduces himself as Canderminne Tallowglass, a servant to His Excellency, the Ambassador-In-Extraordinary of the Shadow Realm. He seems surprised to see humans at the door, and he addresses any elf, gnome, or other fey with the party as if that character were the leader of the group. He does expect a reason for their visit; if the characters present the invitation, they are allowed in and then told to wait in the hall (see "Enter, Friend, and Welcome" below).

If no invitation is shown, the characters can talk their way in with a successful DC 20 Charisma (Deception) check or a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Canderminne is skeptical of those who breach protocol but reluctant to turn them away.

If the party does not show the invitation and they fail to talk their way in, Canderminne politely asks them to leave: a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check enables them to ask a single question before leaving. Each additional question requires another check, and at the first failure, Canderminne steps back from direct contact with the characters and calls out the dogs.

Winter's Kiss is guarded by a large number of hounds and wolves; the encounter below should be run at least twice if the characters try to attack the place in force.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Medium—2 hounds of the night
Hard—2 hounds of the night, 2 shadow wolves
Deadly—2 hounds of the night, 1 shadow fey rake, 2 shadow wolves

Eric Lindahl (Order #3154079)

Hound of the Night

Large monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d10 + 30)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	9 (–1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +5, Wis +5

Skills Intimidation +3, Perception +5, Stealth +6

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Immunities cold

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages understands Elvish and Umbral but can't speak

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Blood Scent. A hound of the night can follow a scent through *phase shifts*, ethereal movement, *dimension door*, and *fey steps* of any kind. *Teleport* and *plane shift* are beyond its ability to follow.

Innate Spellcasting. The hound's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom. It can innately cast the following spell, requiring no material components:

At will: *dimension door*

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d10 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Frost Breath (Recharge 5–6). The hound exhales a 15-foot cone of frost. Each creature in the cone must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 44 (8d10) cold damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

Shadow Fey Rake

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Cha +4

Skills Acrobatics +6, Arcana +2, Intimidation +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The rake has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put it to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The shadow fey's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

2/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow fey has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. The shadow fey has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow fey makes two melee attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. The shadow fey rake adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the rake must see the target and be wielding a melee weapon.

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Shadow Wolf

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 37 (5d10 + 10)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	3 (–4)	12 (+1)	7 (–2)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Damage Resistances cold

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The shadow wolf has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Pack Tactics. The shadow wolf has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the wolf's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) cold damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Development

If the characters gain entry to Winter's Kiss without violence, award each character 2,000 XP.

ENTER, FRIEND, AND WELCOME

If the party passes muster, Canderminne bids them welcome to Winter's Kiss and asks for each character's "name and rank," so he can announce them. Once he is satisfied on that score, he ushers them inside.

The servant leads you down a long, carpeted hall to the audience chamber, a room dimly lit by a few candles.

A white owl sits on a perch at the end of a long dining table. A single chair stands in the room, and seated on it is a fey with black hair, a thin nose, and pointed ears almost as long as a goblin's. His clothes are pure black and heavily embroidered in more black; his leggings are pure white and embellished with hexagonal designs. He holds an ivory wand.

The servant says, "Visitors, Your Excellency." [He then repeats the characters' names and ranks, starting with fey and titled characters. He neglects to mention obvious henchmen, servants, and barbarians.] The shadow fey noble ignores you long enough to be rude, then turns and says to the party's perceived leader, in a corrupted version of Elvish, "Why do you trouble me? Oh, yes, I may have invited you, but I did not expect you to take me up on the offer. Much less to bring minions with you."

The white owl is the sorcerer Freja Owlsdaughter. The rake remains at the door, politely not watching. If the party includes a speaker of Elvish, the ambassador's mood improves noticeably. ("You speak like civilized people!")

The ambassador then explains why he wanted to meet the party.

"Ah, yes, I did invite you for a reason. Stand, and listen well. My servant will bring us goblets and a stoup of wine. You are well known in the city, you know. All my spies tell me so. And thus, your open and heartfelt support for the queen's just and proper rule will make things easier for all. I require your immediate word of honor that you will not attempt further armed insurrection against the just and proper ruler of the city.

"And to be clear, I mean the queen. If you have any other thoughts, discard them. Unless you can somehow change her mind, she can and will rule over everything as soon as humans learn that her claim is just, and her rule inevitable. Perhaps she will arrive in procession in full splendor, to cow the weak."

There's potential here for a heated conversation. The ambassador does not yield a single point if the characters argue in favor of what he calls "humans ruling lands that do not belong to them." To give them incentive to see things his way, he offers them titles, such as Lord of Zobeck or Mortal Magister to the Shadow Court or even Master of the Faithful for a cleric, if it helps. If he is asked about the earlier assassinations, he simply declares that a "change of administration" is under way. No apology is forthcoming.

At this point, a character who succeeds on a DC 20 Wisdom (Insight) check realizes that the ambassador is holding things back, not revealing the full truth of his opinions on the matter.

HISTORY LESSON

If the characters request an explanation for the presence of the fey, the ambassador summarizes the history of the fey's involvement with Zobeck:

The queen's claim to this territory dates back to before the city's founding, when the shadow fey ruled all the lands from the Ironcrags to the Ruby Sea.

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When House Stross was overthrown in the Great Revolt, the lands reverted to possession of those that granted the fiefdom—namely, the Lambent House of Her Celestial and Royal Majesty, Sarastra Aestruum, Queen of Night and Magic, Duchess of the Heavens, Countess of Thorn, Mistress of Air and Darkness, Lady of the Summer Palace and Bride of Shadows, as well as her husband and the father of the royal line, His Lunar and Royal Majesty, Ludomir Imbrium the XVI, the Moonlit King of the Shadow fey, Lord of the Shadow Realm, Lord Protector of the Black Elves, Duke of the Elvish Ironcrags, Baron of Bratislor, Earl of Zobeck, Master of the Winter Palace, and Count-Palatine of Salzbach.

The claim lay unacknowledged for a few decades, during which time the shadow fey were otherwise occupied, but it remains valid. The Margreve Forest and all lands within sight of it are part of the claim.

CONVERSATIONAL PITFALLS

If the characters try to assert themselves against the ambassador and his enormous sense of ego and privilege, things can go very badly. Thelamandrine considers humans, kobolds, dwarves, and other non-fey to be lesser races, and he reacts poorly to any attempt to suggest that the shadow fey are in the wrong in their claim. The Queen's Writ is the law in the ambassador's eyes; to say otherwise is treasonous.

If a character tries to discuss the mayor, Zobeck's status as a free city, the rights of citizens, or the worship of Rava and the Sun God, the speaker immediately realizes (with a successful DC 10 Wisdom [Insight] check) that the statement has been taken as deeply offensive by the ambassador—after which he asks, point blank, whether the characters are "enemies of the court." A successful DC 18 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) or Intelligence (History) check steers the conversation away and avoids the question. If he is not satisfied with the answer, he calls on the sorcereress, the deathwisp, and possibly the shadow fey to cover his retreat. If the characters claim to want to fight against the queen, the hidden ambassador is happy to oblige them.

Additional Information. The party might learn more from Hidden Ambassador Thelamandrine with good roleplaying and clever questions. You can dispense this information according to the situation, or make it available to characters who attempt a Charisma (Persuasion) check. Higher check totals can include the results of lower checks as well, at your discretion.

Charisma (Persuasion)

Check	Result
14 or lower	"The queen is sometimes amused to meet foreigners."
15–19	"The king was the one who declared that the claim to the city is both valid and of interest to the court."
20–24	"The king and the queen are, indeed, not always of one mind in affairs of state. But this is not your concern."
25–29	"The king has retired to his tower, and his instructions have grown somewhat . . . cryptic. He has moods and seasons that are beyond your understanding, simple folk of the daylight lands."
30 or higher	"The queen has taken a lover, and she might be looking for an excuse to expand her power . . . But no, I descend into gossip. Enough—show our guests the door! They bore me, and I do nothing but prattle. Summon me proper companions for the night!"

The ambassador privately thinks that this effort to enforce the fey's ancient claim to the city is foolhardy (although he never quite says so). He tells the party that the city will surely be quiet and under the shadow fey's benevolent rule within in a year and a day, or perhaps much sooner; time passes strangely in mortal lands and, as folk say, "Who knows when Her Majesty will appoint a viceroy?" At that time, all resistance to the fey rulership of Zobeck must cease, or blood will flow in earnest.

If the characters succeed in their entreaties to the ambassador, he tells them a method exists that would allow them to visit the court and plead their case directly, by heading out along the Shadow Road. If asked about the details, however, he is coy at best:

> "My responsibility," he says, "is to convince you that such an action would be foolish. Surely your visit to the Shadow Realm would be suicidal and a waste of effort." He winks. "But if you would go, I cannot stop you, for the queen's court is open to all comers."

The ambassador knows the city well enough to know that attempts to enforce the fey's claim will be bloody and likely futile in the long run. Some eighty years of independence, combined with the influx of human and dwarf worship of the Gear Goddess, makes the city a potential backdrop for misunderstanding and disaster. Though he cannot openly help the party in any way,

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Thelamandrine is willing to stand aside or even point them in the right direction, provided he can ultimately deny any involvement in their plans if they fail.

FIGHTING THE AMBASSADOR

If the characters refuse to parley, or the conversation goes poorly, and they insist on fighting, they are making things difficult for themselves later. But the ambassador is more than willing to fight.

Arrival at Winter's Kiss. The ambassador, Freja Owlsdaughter, and six rakes are visible at the house; up to five deathwisps and possibly a few shadows are well hidden behind the walls and floors, appearing only if the ambassador or the sorcereress call for them.

> The ambassador is already fleeing, knocking over his chair in his haste. From the floor and from the walls step guardian creatures of black armor, yet only skulls and shadows are visible within their helms.
>
> The owl speaks a word and becomes a fey sorceress.

The characters start in the area indicated on the map.

Freja and the deathwisps cover the ambassador's retreat with a furious attack meant to buy him time. Hidden Ambassador Thelamandrine moves behind the tapestry at the south end of the room. With his minions to guard him, he prepares a spell to depart along the Shadow Road. These battles are intended to be quite difficult for a 7th-level party. The shadow fey will not pursue retreating characters, but will remember the insult.

If at all possible, the Ambassador flees the combat by way of the Shadow Road, rather than confronting a band of murderous heroes.

WITHIN THE EMBASSY, FOOLISH CHOICES

Hard—Freja Owlsdaughter, 1 deathwisp

Deadly—Freja Owlsdaughter, 2 deathwisps

Deadly (11th-level characters)—Freja Owlsdaughter, 4 deathwisps

Illumination. The manor of Winter's Kiss is dimly lit by muted lanterns between the shadows.

Freja Owlsdaughter, the Shadowsworn

Medium humanoid (elf, shapechanger), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (bracers of defense, mage armor)

Hit Points 123 (19d8 + 38)

Speed 30 ft. (5 ft., fly 60 ft. in owl form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +5, Cha +7

Skills Arcana +4, Deception +7, Perception +5, Persuasion +7, Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Fey Ancestry. Freja has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

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Innate Spellcasting. Freja's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. She can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components.

4/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Shapechanger. Freja can use her action to polymorph into an owl, or back into her humanoid form. Her statistics, other than size, are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying falls to the ground, merges into her form, or is worn if the new form is capable of wearing it. She reverts to her humanoid form if she dies.

Spellcasting. Freja is a 10th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). She knows the following sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): *blade ward, chill touch, friends, mage hand, minor illusion, ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor, magic missile, shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *blindness/deafness, gust of wind*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, hypnotic pattern*

4th level (3 slots): *blight, confusion*

5th level (2 slots): *cone of cold*

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Freja has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. Freja has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage and 7 (2d6) cold damage.

Deathwisp

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +6, Wis +6

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Umbral

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Flicker. The deathwisp flickers in and out of sight, and ranged weapon attacks against it are made with disadvantage.

Incorporeal Movement. The deathwisp can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside a solid object.

Shadow Jump. A deathwisp can travel between shadows as if by means of *dimension door*. This magical transport must begin and end in an area with at least some shadow. It can jump up to a total of 40 feet per day. This ability must be used in 10-foot increments.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the deathwisp has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Unnatural Aura. Animals do not willingly approach within 30 feet of a deathwisp, unless a master succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check.

ACTIONS

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 36 (7d8 + 5) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Create Deathwisp. The deathwisp targets a humanoid within 10 feet of it that died violently less than 1 minute ago. The target's spirit rises as a wraith in the space of its corpse or in the nearest unoccupied space. This wraith is under the deathwisp's control. The deathwisp can keep no more than five wraiths under its control at one time.

Treasure

The deathwisps have no treasure, but Freja has one item she holds very dear: a pair of *bracers of defense*.

DEVELOPMENT

If the ambassador attempts to flee, continue with:

> A heavy tapestry conceals the door the ambassador went through. Elvish writing, in mithral and studded with shining green jewels, covers its surface.

The door is not trapped or warded. The inscription is written in an unusual dialect: "These chambers are not for you, mortals, and not for those who have never looked upon the shadow forest. Those who pass against

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the ambassador's wishes will meet his soldiers and join his army of servants."

The mithral and jewels can be pried out with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check using jeweler's tools, smith's tools, or thieves' tools. They are worth 4,400 gp in total: six citrines worth 500 gp each and 1,400 gp worth of mithral. Doing so takes about 5 minutes and gives the ambassador an opportunity to complete his ritual.

If the ability check fails by 5 or more, one of the jewels is cracked and ruined by the character's overly hasty attempts to pry it loose.

A character who examines the door and succeeds on a DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check discovers what appears to be a discharged magical trap on the door. The darker greenish hue of the jewels indicates that their power has been expended.

The characters might choose to take a few minutes of discussion or preparation after fighting Freja Owlsdaughter. If they do so, halve the time necessary for the ambassador to escape (see below) from 4 rounds to 2 rounds.

EXIT STAGE LEFT

Deadly—1 deathwisp, Hidden Ambassador Thelamandrine

Deadly (9th-level characters)—1 deathwisp, Hidden Ambassador Thelamandrine, 1 shadow fey rake

Deadly (10th-level characters)—2 deathwisps, Hidden Ambassador Thelamandrine, 2 shadow fey rakes

As the party goes through the door behind the tapestry where the ambassador fled into the ballroom. They are immediately beset by the ambassador and his allies. If he can chant for 4 rounds (as a bonus action each round), he opens a shadow portal and escapes.

ZOBECK CANON

The Dragged Woman, the other sluagh, can be temperamental and often commands expensive prices. Her information usually works only once. While she might be able to help the characters with an immediate path to the courts, they will have no return route and might need to learn the ritual there. You could use this option for groups who know of the Dragged Woman, or who want to skip such investigations after a single barter with the Dragged Woman. If so, her passage deposits the characters on the Shadow Road.

See either *Streets of Zobeck* or the *Zobeck Gazetteer* for more details regarding the Dragged Woman.

The shadow fey, however, know that the characters have entered the road, and conspire against them. Such groups proceed to Scene 7, but suffer at least two encounters on the road.

Deathwisp

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +6, Wis +6

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Umbral

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Flicker. The deathwisp flickers in and out of sight, and ranged weapon attacks against it are made with disadvantage.

Incorporeal Movement. The deathwisp can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside a solid object.

Shadow Jump. A deathwisp can travel between shadows as if by means of *dimension door*. This magical transport must begin and end in an area with at least some shadow. It can jump up to a total of 40 feet per day. This ability must be used in 10-foot increments.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the deathwisp has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Unnatural Aura. Animals do not willingly approach within 30 feet of a deathwisp, unless a master succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check.

ACTIONS

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 36 (7d8 + 5) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

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Create Deathwisp. The deathwisp targets a humanoid within 10 feet of it that died violently less than 1 minute ago. The target's spirit rises as a wraith in the space of its corpse or in the nearest unoccupied space. This wraith is under the deathwisp's control. The deathwisp can keep no more than five wraiths under its control at one time.

Hidden Ambassador Thelamandrine

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (*+1 studded leather, ring of protection*)

Hit Points 141 (22d8 + 44)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Cha +7

Skills Arcana +6, Deception +9, Insight +5, Intimidation +9, Perception +5, Persuasion +9, Stealth +8

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan, Umbral

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The ambassador has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The ambassador's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. He can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

5/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the ambassador has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. The ambassador has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ambassador makes three attacks with his rapier. If he has a dagger drawn, he can also make a dagger attack.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of its turn to end the effect on itself.

REACTIONS

Parry. The ambassador adds 4 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, the ambassador must see the target and be wielding a melee weapon.

Shadow Fey Rake

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Cha +4

Skills Acrobatics +6, Arcana +2, Intimidation +4

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Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The shadow fey has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put it to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The shadow fey's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

2/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow fey has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. The shadow fey has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow fey makes two melee attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. The shadow fey rake adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the rake must see the target and be wielding a melee weapon.

Treasure

The party might find treasure that the ambassador keeps in a locked chest in his chambers. The ambassador's chest contains two jewel-studded, golden wine goblets worth 2,500 gp each and 2,000 gp in Zobeck coin.

Development

If the party does not fight the ambassador but instead chooses to roleplay through the scene and fares well, Ambassador Thelamandrine gives each character a gold and glass goblet (worth 2,000 gp) "fit for a royal feast," and his sorceress grants them a boon of "a visit from my tailor" for "not behaving like so many louts we have entertained in this simple home." This gift takes the form of a pair of silk and black leather *bracers of defense* for an arcane or fey character (which appears in a strange leather parcel with a note addressed to the character at some point in the next few days) and the possibility that the sorceress Freja Owlsdaughter will reappear as an ally later in the adventure. Award each character 2,500 XP.

Act 1, Scene 6: Finding the Shadow Road Ritual

With the hints received from Hidden Ambassador Thelamandrine, the party might ask around about the ritual that opens the Shadow Road. There's little to go on at first, but the city of Zobeck does have the Arcane Collegium and fey living within its walls who consider the place home and who know secrets. One of them will ultimately provide the information the party needs.

The skill challenges in this scene—Research at the Collegium, Lych Gate, The Reluctant Sluagh, and Beneath the Pier—can be conducted as ability checks or as roleplaying exercises, allowing characters to utilize their creativity. They can be pursued in any order, and they build on one another, but they need not all be undertaken. (Conversely, you can decide it's possible for the characters to try again if their first attempt at a

SKILL CHALLENGES

A skill challenge simulates an attempt to perform a task that takes a longer time and a greater effort than a single ability check. In its most basic form, the characters make a series of ability checks with the goal of earning a required number of successes before accumulating a maximum number of failed checks (similar to how death saving throws work).

The presentation of skill challenges varies throughout the adventure, depending on the needs of a particular scene. Regardless of its format, every challenge identifies a number of ability checks (and their DCs) appropriate to the task and the benefit that's earned by getting a success. It also explains what happens when the challenge results in an overall success or failure.

Of course, characters might try to make checks or do other things that aren't accounted for in the text of the challenge, including casting spells or using elements of class features and backgrounds. Reward creative thinking appropriately: for example, Intelligence checks to decipher significant meaning in ancient writings could be made with advantage, or at a reduced DC, if accompanied by the use of *comprehend languages*. Err on the side of assisting an action with the use of spells rather than using a spell to take the place of a check outright, but keep the scene interesting, and flowing.

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challenge results in failure.) As a result of experiencing the challenges, the adventurers should acquire the basic information about the *tread the Niflheim road* ritual and the ability to recognize those places where the ritual can be performed.

RESEARCH AT THE COLLEGIUM

At the Arcane Collegium, the adventurers research the particulars of the Shadow Road ritual. They interact with a group of Collegium students or the Collegium librarian on the grounds or possibly in one of the nearby taverns, such as the Hedgehog or the King's Cup.

Overall Success Requires: 4 successes before 3 failures.

Possible Actions for Successful Checks

- Ask for help from the librarian: Charisma (Persuasion), Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (History), or Wisdom (Insight) (all DC 13) or Charisma (Intimidation) (DC 15). Only 1 success can be earned from this task.
- Research the material without help: Intelligence (Arcana) (DC 15).
- Seek help from students: Charisma (Persuasion), Intelligence (Investigation), Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (History), or Wisdom (Insight) (all DC 15).
- Ask for help from Ottily Riverbend (CN female shadow fey wizard 9), a good friend of Ambassador Thelamandrine and the current Master of Star and Shadow Magic at the Arcane Collegium. She would certainly report this to the ambassador, but she might help regardless. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check would do the trick, or a scroll of shadow magic, or an offer to carry a message to her relatives in the courts (entirely innocuous, and dealing with a family trust and a suitor for her brother).
- Ask for help from the retired Master of Star and Shadow Magic, Sariel of Morgau (NE human male wizard 9), who has gone to the nearby mountains and would require a three-day trip to see. Requires Charisma (Persuasion) (DC 16) or a gift of some minor magic, or perhaps a *philter of memory* or another gift.

Overall Success: Award the party 1,000 XP for succeeding in the challenge. If the group agrees to record the ritual for the library (and provides a blank book for the purpose), a member of the Collegium suggests the party take a *chapbook of cure moderate wounds* (containing 25 scrolls of that spell in a single bound volume) with them. One of the Collegium's treasures from the days when sorcery was used to keep shadow fey from ambushing caravans, it might help in a place where the flow of time can be erratic.

Overall Failure: The characters experience an additional encounter while traveling the Shadow Road.

Information Gained from Successful Checks

- A few possible sites exist for the ritual throughout Zobeck—what signifies them is not always clear.
- One promising site is the Lych Gate, an old temple gate that was incorporated into the Ghetto Wall.
- A spinning lantern must be used in the casting.
- The full text of the ritual isn't recorded in the library. A fey might barter the details in exchange for something.
- Two sluagh, fey spirits of unclaimed souls, are known to live in Zobeck. One of them, Knuckletooth, told a Collegium apprentice about the ritual years ago. The apprentice long since left for distant Siwal, and the records aren't in the library . . . but the sluagh might still live in town. You could ask it.

Bonus Information Gained from Overall Success

- The Lych Gate can somehow be activated to show images or scenes.
- There is both a time and sacrificial component to the ritual.
- Choosing the correct site is often crucial to performing a fey ritual.

LYCH GATE

The adventurers find a ruined gate incorporated into the wall surrounding the Kobold Ghetto. The engraved stone pillars and carved gabled roof of the gate show worn scenes of travel, trade, and war. The gate is part of the masonry of the Kobold Ghetto wall. With investigation, hard work, and persistence, they decipher its clues and activate it—causing it to reveal tidbits of information that flash between passing shadows.

Overall Success Requires: 4 successes before 3 failures.

Possible Actions for Successful Checks

- Decipher the faded fey symbols on the gate to activate it: Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (History), or Wisdom (Perception) (all DC 18).
- Talk to people in the area and learn what might activate the gate: Charisma (Deception), Charisma (Persuasion), or Intelligence (Investigation) (all DC 13).
- Use local legends to unlock the gate's secrets: Intelligence (History), Intelligence (Religion), or Intelligence (Investigation) (all DC 18).

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Overall Success: Award the party 1,000 XP for succeeding in the challenge. When the characters succeed, they activate the gate and receive the following information:

- The general location of the reluctant sluagh's lair.
- The sluagh's name and face.
- The Collegium library and the Hedgehog Tavern, frequented by students.
- Signs show the importance of light: one sequence starts black, grows to the barest sliver of the sun on the horizon, and then fades back to black.
- Carvings that show a woman weeping at the feet of a dead hanging man; the ritual might be related to death or grief in some way.

Overall Failure: The characters experience an additional encounter while traveling the Shadow Road.

Information Gained from Successful Checks

- Two sluagh, fey spirits of unclaimed souls, are known to live in Zobeck. One of them, Knuckletooth, told a Collegium apprentice about the ritual years ago. The apprentice long since left for distant Siwal, and the records aren't in the library . . . but the sluagh might still live in town. You could ask it.
- The Lych Gate is also known as the "Sluagh's Window" because it will often show the sluagh, Knuckletooth. Occasionally, if asked, it will show the Dragged Woman (see the "Zobeck Canon" sidebar).
- The Knuckletooth's lair was burnt down to a ruined husk of a structure.
- If the Collegium hasn't been visited: the shadow fey are of particular interest to a group of Collegium apprentices. Otherwise: certain fey symbols on the gate are recognized as traveler's marks that represent a river and a road.
- The ritual must be performed just before sunrise or just after sunset.

THE RELUCTANT SLUAGH

Using details drawn from stories, old texts, and hidden locales, the adventurers discover the lair of a Sluagh native to Zobeck—a miserable creature with pale gray skin, stringy black hair, and jagged teeth in an oversized mouth. It is known as Knuckletooth. It lives within the burnt-out remnant of a house and appears from the shadows of corners or from the darkness beneath a rubble pile.

Overall Success Requires: 4 successes before 3 failures.

Possible Actions for Successful Checks

- Barter with the sluagh for knowledge: Knuckletooth knows the *ritual of memories lost* (see page 29) and will perform it to share knowledge if offered a good trade: Charisma (Persuasion), Intelligence (Arcana), Wisdom (Insight), or Wisdom (Perception) (all DC 18).
- Intimidate the sluagh for knowledge: Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (History), Wisdom (Insight) (DC 20); Charisma (Intimidation), Dexterity (Stealth) (DC 18).
- Search for the sluagh's lair: Charisma (Persuasion), Dexterity (Stealth), Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (History), Intelligence (Investigation), or Wisdom (Perception) (all DC 13). Only 1 success can be earned from this task.
- Search the area for clues about sluagh: Dexterity (Stealth), Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (History), Wisdom (Perception), Wisdom (Survival) (all DC 18). Only 1 success can be earned from this task.

Overall Success: Award the party 1,000 XP for succeeding in the challenge. When the characters succeed, they befriend the sluagh and receive the following additional information:

- Knuckletooth provides the remaining bare-bones aspects of the ritual, or fills in the gaps of what might have been learned at the Collegium. He says that the ritual requires a sacrifice—a confession of lost love or betrayal.
- If the Collegium hasn't been searched: Knuckletooth indicates that the library is often a useful place to learn.
- Knuckletooth reveals the proper site for the ritual, beneath the pier.
- If the Lych Gate hasn't been visited: Knuckletooth indicates that it sometimes shows seekers useful bits of information.

Overall Failure: The characters experience two additional encounters while traveling the Shadow Road.

Information Gained from Successful Checks

- Shadow fey enjoy intense emotions of suffering and loss. They barter in such emotions but have more base intentions, too.
- If the Collegium hasn't been visited: the shadow fey are a topic of particular interest to a group of Collegium students: "Go bother them." Otherwise: certain fey symbols are recognizable in the graffiti drawn on the ruined house.
- The sluagh prefers to speak Elvish.
- The sluagh tells the adventurers they can expect to meet fey giants and shadow horrors on the Shadow Road.

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BENEATH THE PIER

After investigating the various sites throughout Zobeck, the adventurers can attempt the ritual, powering it with the details gathered throughout their investigation. They acquire a longboat and row out beneath the river pier to the place they learned about from the sluagh. This challenge represents the difficulty in putting their newfound knowledge to practical use. Once they complete this challenge, whether they achieved an overall success or not, they need not go through this additional effort to use *tread the Niflheim Road* in the future.

Ambassador Thelamandrine happens to be taking his evening constitutional along the quays and will stop to admire the river. He does not speak to the party directly, but he forces a goblin servant accompanying him to respond to characters' questions, answering one per overall success they have achieved thus far. It's a bit roundabout, but Thelamandrine wants to have as much plausible deniability as possible.

Overall Success Requires: 3 successes before 3 failures. Special circumstances apply in this case. Regardless of success or failure in this skill challenge, the characters learn the *tread the Niflheim Road* spell, thereby gaining access to the Shadow Road, and can transcribe it at their next opportunity.

KNUCKLETOOTH THE SLUAGH

Knuckletooth the sluagh is the fey spirit of an unclaimed soul, said to live in Zobeck and occasionally speak with people about the incantation. Like most of its kind, it has pale gray skin, stringy black hair, and jagged teeth in an oversized mouth. It loves the sound of crying children and has a taste for freshly butchered pigs' knuckles.

It is one of the few fey in the city that ever show themselves, although it prefers to hide and speak from the shadows. When it speaks—in Elvish, of course—it likes to play games with questions. It is an ageless thing, a haunt of the city, and is quite cruel and secretive in its dealing with the city's mortals—but remarkably kind to children and animals.

Possible Actions for Successful Checks

- Keep the boat steady against the current while the character performing the ritual intones the mystic syllables to usher the group from this world to the Shadow Realm: Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Wisdom (Survival) (both DC 18). Characters who have proficiency with water vehicles receive a +5 bonus on this check.

Table 1–1: Shadow Ritual Failure

d6	Result
1	**Bleaching**. A character is drained of all pigmentation and color, appearing only black and white. Clothing worn by the character eventually becomes shades of gray.
2	**Soft Speech**. A character loses the ability to speak above a whisper and cannot be heard from more than 5 feet away.
3	**Demi-shadow Dreams**. Disturbing nightmares prevent any restful sleep sufficient to heal, regain Hit Dice, or recover spell slots during a long rest until the affected character makes three successful DC 15 Wisdom saving throws. The character can attempt one of these saving throws each time it finishes a long rest.
4	**Twitch Disease**. The character suffers tremors and paranoia, and has disadvantage on saving throws against being frightened. When the character finishes a long rest, it can make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. When it succeeds on two of these saves, it recovers from the disease.
5	**Shadow Rot Disease**. The character's skin becomes ashen. When the character finishes a long rest, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) necrotic damage. Its hit point maximum is reduced by the amount of damage taken. If the creature's hit point maximum is reduced to 0, the creature dies. It can't regain its normal hit point maximum until it recovers from the disease. If the creature makes two saving throws against the disease, it recovers, and it can then regain its original hit point maximum when it finishes a long rest.
6	**Shadow Twin**. A character's shadow detaches and becomes an undead shadow in every encounter until the character receives the benefit of *remove curse, dispel evil and good*, or similar magic. The shadow automatically surprises the party the first time it attacks.

Eric Tomlinson (Order - 5183207)

- Recall some of the ancient stories associated with the dark fey: dredging up the lost passphrases and songs help the party cross from this world into the Shadow Realm: Intelligence (History) (DC 15).
- Utilize the tidbits of knowledge and magic gathered thus far: The ritual warps the shadows into a gate drawing the party into the Shadow Road: Intelligence (Arcana) (DC 15).

Overall Success: Award the party 1,000 XP for succeeding in the challenge. The ritual is successfully performed, and the characters are deposited on the Shadow Road. Proceed with Scene 7, Encounters along the Road.

Overall Failure: The characters are flung into the Realm of Shadow even though the ritual failed. They experience one additional encounter while traveling the Shadow Road.

Information Gained at the Pier

- Motion is a necessary part of the ritual. One must travel from an illuminated space to a darkened space.
- The fading light into darkness and the gradual reintroduction of light parts the veil between worlds.
- Parting the wall between this world and the Shadow Realm requires pain or suffering of some kind.
- Admission of a betrayal or a broken heart speeds the ritual, fueling the powers that make it possible.
- If the confession comes from someone who is left behind rather than traveling, it is more potent.
- Favored transit locations are marked with unobtrusive fey symbols. This pier has those symbols.

At your option, the party also suffers some more flavorful problems from Table 1–1: Shadow Ritual Failure. Either way, completing this check finishes the performance of the ritual and opens the gate. While open, the site permits travel to the Shadow (or Niflheim) Road, and the party can reach the courts of the shadow fey in the Shadow Realm.

The Shadow Road is a part of Midgard, connecting its various cities and castles in a magical web. Although most people have heard of the roads as fey or shadow work, few know much about how the Shadow Road works. Wizards, elf-marked humans, shadow fey characters, and bards might have additional information about it; if such a character asks about the Shadow Road, or a helpful NPC brings up the subject, consider allowing characters who have some connection to shadow roads and shadow magic to make an Intelligence (Arcana) check, gaining knowledge as indicated by the check total.

10 or lower	You really don't know how the Shadow Road works.
11–15	Fey roads connect two points through magical travel. The two points are always set in advance, and the doors leading to them are never open for long.
16–20	The entrances to the Shadow Road are often sites where a murder, suicide, or other significant tragedy occurred.
21–25	The destination of a fey road can be changed, but only by a fey or a powerful wizard. Most roads require a ritual or a magical key to open.
26+	Some roads are guarded, and others lead only in one direction. *Option*: Mention that in a few stories, the shadow roads in Zobeck are said to be near bridges.

Act 1, Scene 7: Encounters along the Road

Travel on the Shadow Road should be memorable. You should choose one encounter for the road if the casting was successful and, possibly, one or even two more if casting the spell involved several failures. The possibilities are these:

Déjà-Vu in the Shadows (page below)

The Haunted Forest (page 32)

The Moebius Shadow (page 35)

All encounters on the road are subject to the following property of the Shadow Road:

Dim the Light. Any effect that deals radiant damage deals half damage to the target and half damage to the attacker as the shadowy road protects itself.

Bear in mind that in dim light, Wisdom (Perception) checks are made with disadvantage (resulting in a –5 penalty to passive Perception scores).

ENCOUNTER A: DÉJÀ-VU IN THE SHADOWS

This encounter takes place near the Shadow Road and should either be run at a lower CR or after the characters have advanced to 8th level (which they might have done by this point). When the characters arrive in the shadow realm, they find themselves in the middle of the ruins mirroring Zobeck in the mortal world, near where they fought the shadow fey in Scene 1. Prowling the ruins are shadow-bound ghouls, and one of the slain assassins' soul rises as a deathwisp. The Shadow Road stretches out in front of them, leading them through the maze of ruins rather than the houses of Zobeck.

Eric Lindahl (Order #3154079)

FEY RITUALS

The shadow fey and other powerful, enigmatic wielders of magic have developed a few special spells known as fey rituals. They work just like other spells, with the exception that any creature capable of casting spells can learn to use a fey ritual if it discovers the ritual's description, usually in a written form. A creature that knows a fey ritual can teach it to another. Whether a creature is taught by a mentor, or learns the ritual from a written source or other research, a creature must scribe the details into a book using special inks and reagents that cost 50 gp per level of the spell.

Once a creature has scribed a fey ritual, it can attempt to cast the spell as a ritual, even if it doesn't possess the Ritual Casting feature.

RITUAL OF MEMORIES LOST

4th-level enchantment (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a small pastry)

Duration: Special

During the night of a new moon, you bleed upon the pastry component during the ritual. At the end of the casting time, you must make an Intelligence (Arcana) check against a DC equal to 10 + the target's Charisma modifier. On a success, a humanoid target who willingly touches the pastry loses a memory from its life. The target chooses the memory it gives up. You infuse the memory into the pastry. The memory remains potent as long as the pastry remains fresh, usually for two days unless measures are taken to keep it from going bad. A creature that uses its action to consume the pastry permanently gains the memory as if it had experienced it originally.

The target of the spell sacrifices the memory, losing it forever. Only a *wish* spell or similarly powerful magic can restore the lost memory, which also removes it from the creature that gained the memory. The target is disoriented, giving it disadvantage on ability checks, until it finishes a long rest.

TREAD THE NIFLHEIM ROAD

4th-level conjuration (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: Touch

Components: S, M (a lantern on a chain and a sackcloth bag)

Duration: 1 minute

You can use this spell to open the entrance to a portion of the Niflheim Road, known more commonly to non-fey as the Shadow Road (or the fey road). The spell permits travel to designated locations within the Shadow Realm. The starting point in the mortal realm must be the site of a murder, a suicide, or another significant tragedy. If you are in the Shadow Realm at the end point of a Shadow Road when you cast this spell, it opens a portal to the corresponding location in Midgard.

When you are in a suitable location, you spin a lantern and lift it in and out of a bag of sackcloth, creating alternating light and shadow. At the end of the casting time, you must make a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check. On a successful check, a 20-foot-radius shadow portal opens onto the Shadow Road for 1 minute.

On a failed check, you take 11 (2d10) cold damage, you gain one level of shadow corruption, and you have disadvantage on any further Intelligence (Arcana) checks to cast this spell successfully until you finish a long rest.

While the portal is open, any creature that enters the portal from either side appears at the other location 1d4 hours later, along with anything the creature holds or carries, though to the creature it seems as though no time has passed. If the creature travels with several others, they all arrive in the same round and in the same sequence that they entered the road.

The destination of the road is always set when the portal opens—meaning that small variations of this spell exist that connect different starting points and destinations. You can spontaneously change the destination during the casting under certain circumstances. Those with fey blood can change the destination of the Shadow Road by making the Intelligence (Arcana) check with disadvantage. You must have visited the new destination before, not merely heard of it (a bartered memory is also sufficient; see *ritual of memories lost*).

Any number of creatures of any size can use an open road; the only limitation is the number that can reach and move through the portal before it disappears. Certain roads are guarded; others lead in only one direction. Anyone standing in the vicinity of either side of the portal sees a foggy road through a forest but gets no hint of the destination. Environmental effects at one side of the portal don't affect the other end.

Eric Lindahl (Order #51842079)

Wisdom (Perception) DC 15—This place amid the dark ruins is oddly familiar.

Intelligence (Investigation) DC 20, after successful Perception check—This place is similar to the area where you recently fought those fey assassins.

Just after the adventurers recognize the place, read:

> A flash of light, like lightning but without thunder, rips through the pitch-dark sky and slams into the ground about forty feet away from where you are, among the ruins.

As the adventurers approach the spot where the light hit the ground, read:

> As you near the place where the mysterious light touched down, you see darkness gathering, taking form. Slowly a shape rises from the dark mist covering the ground around you. Arms, body, and finally a head coalesce on the humanoid yet insubstantial body in front of you. Two points of pitch-black darkness stare at you from the places where its eyes would be.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 20—The shadow forming in front of you bears a resemblance to one of the fey assassins you killed recently. (A character who succeeds on the Wisdom (Perception) check has advantage on their initiative roll when the shadow-creature attacks.)

The shadow-creature screams "Revenge!" before hurling itself toward the characters.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Hard—Gorak the Mad Ghoul, 1 mad ghoul, 1 deathwisp

Hard (8th-level characters)—Gorak the Mad Ghoul, 1 darkness ghoul, 1 mad ghoul, 1 deathwisp

Hard (9th-level characters)—Gorak the Mad Ghoul, 1 darkness ghoul, 1 mad ghoul, 2 deathwisps

Illumination. This part of the road is dimly lit out to a 50-foot radius, with darkness beyond that.

Rubble. Squares with rubble are difficult terrain.

Walls. The walls in the ruins vary in height from 2 to 10 feet. They are easy to climb (no ability check required), and ample cover and hiding places are available.

Gorak the Mad Ghoul

Medium undead, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 67 (9d8 + 27)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +4

Skills Athletics +6, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

BECOMING SHADOW-TOUCHED

One of the most insidious dangers of traveling the Shadow Realm is shadow corruption. The dark power that infuses the entire plane is infectious. Creatures not native to shadow draw that power into themselves over time, and it begins to twist their own nature. For full information on shadow corruption, see Chapter 10 of the *Midgard Worldbook*. Alternatively, you can use a simplified version of shadow corruption in this adventure, as described here.

For every week a non-native creature spends in the Shadow Realm, it must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma saving throw or become shadow-touched. The save DC increases by 1 for each previous successful saving throw. The DC returns to 10 when the creature becomes shadow-touched, or after it spends 1 week outside the Shadow Realm.

A creature that eats food or drinks water foraged from the Shadow Realm must attempt the saving throw the next time it finishes a long rest.

A shadow-touched creature has disadvantage on attack rolls and Wisdom (Perception) checks while in sunlight, and grows sullen and withdrawn. The creature also has disadvantage on Wisdom and Charisma checks made against creatures that aren't native to the Shadow Realm, or that aren't shadow-touched. Some denizens of the Shadow Realm might find shadow-touched creatures more interesting or compelling, sensing a kindred spirit.

A creature is no longer shadow-touched after spending 1 week outside the Shadow Realm, or if it receives a *dispel evil and good* spell.

Eric Lindell (Order #3154279)

Languages Common, Umbral
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Reckless. At the start of his turn, Gorak can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls he makes during that turn, but attack rolls against him have advantage until the start of his next turn.

Stench. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of Gorak must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to Gorak's stench for 24 hours.

Turning Defiance. Gorak and any ghouls within 30 feet of him have advantage on saving throws against effects that turn undead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Gorak makes two attacks, one with his bite and one with his claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an undead, it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Darkness Ghoul

Medium undead, chaotic evil
Armor Class 13
Hit Points 45 (7d8 + 14)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	9 (–1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Skills Stealth +5 (+7 in dim light or darkness)
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Umbral
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, the ghoul can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Sunlight Weakness. While in sunlight, the ghoul has disadvantage on attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ghoul makes two attacks, one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or an undead, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Shadow Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 17 (5d6) cold damage. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or become blinded for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Mad Ghoul

Medium undead, chaotic evil
Armor Class 12 (natural armor)
Hit Points 44 (8d8 + 8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	7 (–2)	10 (+0)	6 (–2)

Skills Stealth +4
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Common, Umbral
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the ghoul can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls it makes during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The ghoul makes two attacks, one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage. If the target is a creature other than an elf or an undead, it must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Eric Fontaine (Order #5184207)

Deathwisp

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 82 (11d8 + 33)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +6, Wis +6

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages the languages it knew in life

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Flicker. The deathwisp flickers in and out of sight, and ranged weapon attacks against it are made with disadvantage.

Incorporeal Movement. The deathwisp can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside a solid object.

Shadow Jump. A deathwisp can travel between shadows as if by means of *dimension door*. This magical transport must begin and end in an area with at least some shadow. It can jump up to a total of 40 feet per day. This ability must be used in 10-foot increments.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the deathwisp has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Unnatural Aura. Animals do not willingly approach within 30 feet of a deathwisp, unless a master succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check.

Actions

Life Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 36 (7d8 + 5) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Create Deathwisp. The deathwisp targets a humanoid within 10 feet of it that died violently less than 1 minute ago. The target's spirit rises as a wraith in the space of its corpse or in the nearest unoccupied space. This wraith is under the deathwisp's control. The deathwisp can keep no more than five wraiths under its control at one time.

The deathwisp engages the adventurer who appears to be the most capable swordsman.

The ghouls have been following the smell of fresh mortal meat. They sneak in, and if no one sees or hears them, they surprise the party. The darkness ghouls move to get clear shots with their shadow bolts to blind armored characters, while the mad ghouls jump from the walls, assaulting unarmored targets.

Gorak, despite being fairly bright for a mad ghoul, wades right into combat, eager to inflict as much pain as possible. He tries to position himself adjacent to several creatures, to paralyze as many foes as he can. During any fight, he loudly describes in detail how he plans to eat his target, a favorite tactic of his when an adjacent enemy is knocked prone. He often rages and risks his own safety to kill an unconscious or paralyzed target.

Development

Proceed either to Act II (if the spellcasting was performed without flaws) or to the next encounter, "The Haunted Forest," (if the spellcasting failed on the first try, attracting more attention, or if the party is not yet 8th level). Remember that time does not pass normally on the Shadow Road, so casters will need to ration their resources. Pay close attention to the group's mood and be ready to move forward. The characters should be 8th level as they begin Act II.

ENCOUNTER B: THE HAUNTED FOREST

The Shadow Road enters a section of thick forest, and a thin mist rises from the ground. The trees cut what little light shines into a deeper gloom. Something is crashing through the undergrowth, and then it comes out onto the road: a dark-haired giant in rags, holding spears that shine with a baleful red light. Groans echo in the undergrowth to either side of the road.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Medium—2 forest marauders, 1 shadow hound

Hard—2 forest marauders, 1 shadow beast

Deadly (8th-level characters)—2 forest marauders, 1 shadow beast, 2 shadow hounds

Illumination. This part of the Shadow Road is dimly lit. The entire area is lightly obscured, imposing disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks.

Pits. The marked pits are 40 feet deep and contain spikes; they are too small for a forest marauder to fall into, and the shadow beasts float over them. Only the shadow hounds can fall into one. A creature that falls into the pits takes 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage

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from the fall plus 11 (2d10) piercing damage from the spikes, and is knocked prone and restrained, impaled by spikes. The creature takes 5 (1d10) piercing damage at the start of its turn as long as it is restrained. It can free itself as an action with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

Undergrowth. Branches and undergrowth interfere with targeting: all ranged attacks have their range reduced by 10 feet. In the first round, ranged attacks by the characters might fail automatically if they try to shoot at maximum range. After the first round, tell the players that the forest terrain hampers their ranged attacks.

White Stones on the Hill. The marauders and the hounds attack first, pushing and sliding one or two foes toward a small hill. Three enormous white stones stand there, forming a rough doorway. Creatures that are pushed through the threshold disappear from the Shadow Road and arrive alone at the Invisible Court (see Act II, page 38). They are marked with two black eyes—a "haunt mask"—which the courtiers recognize as a sign of weakness. The haunt mask remains until the Feast (see Act III, Scene 1) or until the character wins a duel with a shadow fey courtier.

UNUSUAL INSPIRATION

Inspiration can come from anywhere. This encounter was inspired by an eighty-year-old movie: *Snow White*. In particular, the initial "terror in the forest" sequence, full of eyes, claws, darkness, and pits, made me think that the forest should push the party around a little here.

The idea that the Shadow Realm should be a frightening place is pretty well established in game lore, but I thought it would be good to model something along those lines in game terms. Since characters rarely run, forced movement is a crucial part of the scene; the haunts and marauders can "herd" the party toward the white stones and pits.

Forest Marauder

Large giant, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 114 (12d10 + 48)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	6 (–2)	10 (+0)	7 (–2)

Saving Throws Con +6

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Giant, Orcish, Sylvan

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the forest marauder has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Multiattack. The forest marauder makes two boar spear attacks.

Boar Spear. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage, and the forest marauder can choose to push the target 10 feet away if the target fails a DC 16 Strength saving throw.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Shadow Beast

Medium fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +6

Skills Stealth +7

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral, Void Speech

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The shadow beast can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Innate Spellcasting. The shadow beast's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *fear, telekinesis*

Magic Resistance. The shadow beast has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow beast has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Multiattack. The shadow beast makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage.

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Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) slashing damage.

Shadow Push (Recharge 5–6). The shadow beast buffets opponents with a gale of animated shadows in a 15-foot cone. Any creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 10 feet and knocked prone.

Shadow Hound

Medium fiend, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	4 (–3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +5 (+8 in dim light or darkness)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Keen Smell. The shadow hound has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Shadow Stealth. While in dim light or darkness, the hound can take the Hide action as a bonus action.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow hound has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 21 (3d10 + 5) piercing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Shadow Wave. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 10 ft., one creature. *Hit:* The creature is pushed 5 feet away from the shadow hound.

ENCOUNTER C: THE MOEBIUS SHADOW

This section of the road passes through a mountain. As the adventurers enter the mountain, read the following:

> The magical road enters a tunnel bored into the mountainside. Matte walls of crumbling stone replace the dimly perceived vistas of the Shadow Realm.

After the party has traveled for another 10 minutes, the road becomes a Moebius strip.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 18—The road twists slightly underfoot. It looks perfectly straight and level but seems strangely off balance.

The adventurers are now trapped within a loop: 30 squares of travel in either direction brings them back to the location of the shadowrock render (or renders). When the party can see the monster, read the following:

> Ahead stands a whirling monstrosity, looking like a crying shadow crushed by watching its first death, talons honed to razor points and mouths drooling hungrily.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Hard—Thuvis Cloudshadow, 1 darkstone sculptor, 1 shadowrock render

Deadly (8th-level characters)—Thuvis Cloudshadow, 1 darkstone sculptor, 2 shadowrock renders

Deadly (9th-level characters)—Thuvis Cloudshadow, 1 darkstone sculptor, 3 shadowrock renders

Running the Moebius Strip

A Moebius strip is a topological oddity—a strip of material with only one side. The best way to understand it is to make one. Take a long, narrow strip of paper, twist one end 180 degrees, and tape the two ends together. You can run your finger along the surface of the strip in one direction and travel along both sides of the strip. To a character walking along the Moebius strip, the path will seem to be a loop. However, a creature at the beginning of the strip and another one halfway along it are actually separated only by the thickness of the strip itself.

The Moebius strip that represents this portion of the Niflheim Road is 25 feet wide and 400 feet long. The easiest way to track the movements of creatures on the strip is to draw it as two long rectangles, a top and a bottom, each with ends A and B. Creatures leaving endpoint B on the top rectangle reappear at endpoint A on the bottom rectangle. Number the rows of squares from 1 to 40. Each row is on opposite faces of the Moebius strip.

However, recall that creatures on different faces of the loop are upside down relative to one another, and that "left" and "right" change directions when a traveler moves along the strip due to the twist in space. In other words, a character teleporting or moving by misty step through the road from the right-hand side of row 1 on the top rectangle will appear on the left-hand side of row 1 on the bottom. Because this geometry is not intuitive but becomes clear with experience, you might want to practice this encounter before introducing it to the players.

Once the characters have observed some clue indicating that the loop is actually a Moebius strip, they can deduce its nature with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana)

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or Wisdom (Survival) check. Show the players your model of a Moebius strip so they can more easily grasp the tactical possibilities.

Illumination. Dim light suffuses this section of the Shadow Road. Neither mundane light sources nor magical light of lower than 4th level increases the level of illumination. No matter how bright a source of light might be, visibility on the Moebius strip is limited to 60 feet. Beyond that, everything fades into darkness in a way that is disorienting to look at for too long.

Edges of the Road. The road passes through a mass of dull black shadowstone. Oddly, shadows don't show up on the surface of the stone.

Ceiling. The ceiling is 20 feet high.

Gravity. Gravity pulls creatures toward the road all along the strip.

Shadow-Wise Creatures. Certain creatures, called shadow-wise because of their affinity for shadows or their actual shadowy nature, have an advantage over others in how they can interact with the Moebius strip. A creature is shadow-wise if it is a native of the Shadow Realm, if it has any levels of shadow corruption (see the *Midgard Worldbook*, page 415), or if the creature has shadow-based powers (such as those granted by the Way of Shadow monastic tradition).

Seeing through the Road. The shadowy material that makes up the road is not opaque. Characters with darkvision or any other ability to see in darkness can see through the road by taking the Search action and succeeding on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check; shadow-wise creatures have advantage on this check. A creature's passive Perception score applies after it has seen through the road. The substance of the road lightly obscures the view of what lies on the other side. (Note that the upside-down orientation of creatures on the other side of the loop provides a hint to the nature of the Moebius strip.)

Attacking through the Road. Spells or effects that emanate from a creature, such as auras, pass through the road as if it were not there. Creatures that can see through the road can attack through it as if it were not there. Against other spells, attacks, or effects (such as breath weapons), the road provides total cover.

Passing through the Road. Shadow-wise creatures can pass through the road as if it were a 5-foot-thick patch of difficult terrain. All other creatures must use some kind of teleportation effect to pass through the road normally, counting the road as 5 feet of the distance. Teleporting creatures that are not aware of the Moebius strip appear on the other side of the road upside down and immediately fall prone. Subsequent teleportation by the same character—or the initial teleportation by characters who are aware of the loop—doesn't result in the creature falling prone. Creatures can't be pushed or pulled through the road, nor can they end their movement within the road.

Thuvis Cloudshadow

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 19 (studded leather, *haste*)

Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)

Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con + 5, Wis +4, Cha +6

Skills Arcana +4, Deception +6, Perception +4, Stealth +8

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Evasion. If Thuvis Cloudshadow is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

Fey Ancestry. Thuvis Cloudshadow has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. Thuvis Cloudshadow's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. He can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components.

3/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Quick Blood. Thuvis Cloudshadow is constantly under the effect of a *haste* spell that doesn't require concentration and can't be dispelled. His statistics include the benefits of the spell. He has advantage on Dexterity saving throws, and he gains one additional action on his turn that can be used only to take the Attack (one weapon attack only), Dash, Disengage, Hide, or Use an Object action.

Additionally, he can add his Dexterity modifier to attack and damage rolls with melee weapons instead of Strength (included in his attacks).

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Thuvis Cloudshadow has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. Thuvis Cloudshadow has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

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ACTIONS

Multiattack. Thuvis Cloudshadow makes two glaive attacks.

Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10 + 5) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. Thuvis Cloudshadow adds 3 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, he must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Darkstone Sculptor

Large elemental, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 126 (12d10 + 60)

Speed 30 ft., burrow 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8 (–1)	20 (+5)	5 (–3)	11 (+0)	5 (–3)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities acid, cold, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Terran, Umbral, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Earthglide. The sculptor can burrow through nonmagical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the creature doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

Earthsprint (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The sculptor can increase its burrow speed to 180 feet until the end of its next turn.

Hatred. The sculptor has advantage on attack rolls against dwarves and gnomes.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the sculptor has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The sculptor makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it is grappled (escape DC 15).

Shadowrock Render

Large elemental, neutral evil

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 68 (8d10 + 24)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (–3)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	8 (–1)

Damage Resistances acid, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities cold, necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Terran, Umbral, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The render can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Regeneration. The render regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the render takes fire or radiant damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the render's next turn. The render dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

Sunlight Hypersensitivity. The render takes 20 radiant damage when it starts its turn in sunlight. While in sunlight, it has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The render makes two claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage. A creature hit by two claw attacks in the same turn takes an extra 14 (4d6) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken. This reduction lasts until the creature finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

The creatures in this encounter can all see through the road. The renders begin in a rough row awaiting the party's advance. The darkstone sculptor begins combat across the loop—in other words, through the floor—from the characters, positioned so it can move in to support the renders after they engage. Thuvis Cloudshadow begins behind the sculptor and passes through the Niflheim Road to a position behind the party after any renders attack.

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The renders try to pin the party in one location with melee attacks. Thuvis Cloudshadow tries to get behind the party and use his mobility to strike and then retreat behind his allies. The sculptor concentrates its attacks on any dwarves or gnomes, or (if none are present) the apparent leader of the party. The sculptor tries to grapple one enemy and pull it through the road, to be attacked by a render. Once the separated enemy is defeated, the sculptor pulls another one through.

The darkstone sculptor and shadowrock renders fight to the death. If only Thuvis Cloudshadow remains, he flees (using *misty step*) when reduced to half his hit points.

Treasure

If the characters defeat the darkstone sculptor, they find a twisted stone and a jeweled cameo. The stone is a piece of shadowstone formed into a Moebius strip. Breaking the stone (AC 18, 15 hit points) releases this section of the Niflheim Road from its topological prison, allowing the adventurers to continue toward the Shadow Court. A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals this fact, and *detect magic* reveals an aura of conjuration on the stone.

The cameo is a mithral and onyx rendition of the Queen of Night and Magic. It is worth 7,500 gp on the Material Plane, but in the Shadow Court it could be traded for favor or Status.

Act II: The Invisible Courts

No man is so happy as he who lives under an illusion.
—Erasmus, In Praise of Folly

The characters' trip along the Shadow Road ends, and they arrive in the Shadow Realm. The courts appear abandoned at first glimpse, but such is not the case. The welcome the characters receive depends on them as much as on the residents.

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The party should be 8th level as Act II gets under way. Characters should get an opportunity to level up when their journey concludes, because the threats will escalate as events continue to unfold.

A Fey Welcome

If the party includes a fey character (a drow, an elf, a gnome, or another character of fey heritage), read the following:

The shadowy road ends at the bottom of a set of winding stairs carved out of a hillside, surrounded by fog and a dark forest. The dim light brightens for a moment, enough for you to see towers and walls on two hills to the right and left. The stairs lead up to a well-lit set of gates; lanterns hang around a pair of doors, and a large armored figure is holding the doors open.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 15—The halls and corridors seem abandoned, but you keep hearing laughter in empty rooms.

A party that has a fey character can enter without incident; the monolith footman speaks to the characters in Elvish, saying, "The courts grant you one night's rest; you must depart come morning unless you have business here."

If the party neglects to vacate the premises after finishing the rest, a footman comes to throw them out. Go to Act II, Scene 1 (see page 60).

If the party has no fey characters, read the following:

The road ends at the bottom of a set of winding stairs carved out of a hillside; wisps of fog drift through a shadowy forest. The dim light is bright enough to see towers and walls on hills to the right and left. The stairs are slick stone and seem to lead up to the saddle between the hills, but you hear no sign of habitation. An armored figure stands before the gates, holding a brightly burning sword that lights up the palace entrance on the hilltop above you.

The figure does not admit anyone through the gate who doesn't have a clear written invitation from the hidden ambassador in Zobeck or from another fey source. The priests of Porevit and Yarila in Zobeck might qualify, as would a drow, a shadow fey, an elfmarked human, an elf, or a gnome noble of the character's home plane.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 15—The halls and corridors seem abandoned, but you keep hearing laughter in apparently empty rooms.

Pumping up the Atmosphere

A large part of this section is devoted to establishing an otherworldly tone and atmosphere. The characters will be looking for people, creatures, and reasons for why there's no one here. The fey are not inclined to provide those answers. Tease the characters as long as you can with the sense that something exciting is just around the corner. Here are some possibilities:

- The characters' shoes and boots are all newly shined in the morning.
- A character's companion or familiar is gifted with a fresh griddlecake.
- A lone candle is left burning in a room.
- A fighter's armor is shined and polished to a gleaming finish.
- Shifting, muttering shadows flicker, then turn to nothing when light is brought close.
- A book is left open that describes the various courtiers and welcoming rituals of the courts of the scáthsidhe. If a reader spends at least 1 hour with the book, the text begins to include mentions of the character and his or her companions, revealing their secrets, belongings, and stories of their past. The book is a fey prank, meant to stir rivalries and encourage dueling. Some of its stories are pure invention, and others are true.
- A small glass ball the size of an orange rolls along the floor near the characters; it glows with dim purple light. The ball seems intent on going in a particular direction, such as to the stables or down a set of stairs. It leads the characters wherever you would like them to explore. Someone who makes a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check detects the distant echo of children's voices speaking Elvish, although no children are visible.

Tracking. A character can attempt to find tracks, thereby penetrating the illusion of the halls, by making a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) check. The check reveals that the halls are not abandoned—the character who succeeds can find footprints in places where the right conditions exist, such as in the dust of the dueling grounds (area 2) or in the rookery (area 43). Despite the great number of footprints indicating the presence of dozens and dozens of small creatures, no such creatures are to be found. Success on the check to find tracks also grants the character advantage on an Intelligence (Investigation) check to determine the true nature of the

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illusions that cloak the courts (see the "Investigation vs. Illusions" sidebar).

Shadow Corruption. Perhaps of great interest to newcomers to the Shadow Realm, the Shadow Court is a bastion against the insidious threat of shadow corruption (see "Becoming Shadow-Touched," page 30). While within the majority of the Shadow Court, creatures don't risk gaining shadow corruption over time. Eating tainted food brought in from outside the court is another story, and the Goblin Courts offer no such protection.

Where Is Everyone?

The denizens of the Shadow Court pay no attention to creatures of low Status or the uninvited, and the ambassador has not given the party an invitation to visit the palace. (He invited them to his house in Zobeck only because he's not foolish enough to provide a paper trail that would lead someone to accuse him of disloyalty or fraternization with humans.) So, the characters are among the uninvited, unless they happen to be carrying the letter from Ottily Riverbend to her brother (see page 25), which is their only way to be "legitimately at the courts for some purpose," and a minor one at that.

As a result, the place is cloaked in illusion, which provides the first layer of defense for the courts. The only living creatures visible to the party are the animated monolith footman minions (area 1 and elsewhere), the rooks in the rookery (area 33), the owls in New Moon Hall (area 5), and, after some successful encounters with the footmen, the lantern dragonettes (in various areas). A variety of mice, rats, white foxes, doves, and other small animals also prowl the halls, and some of these creatures might be shadow fey in disguise. Other creatures can sometimes be heard or noted tangentially, such as hounds howling or goblin servants singing or clapping or running. Every time a monolith footman is laid low, the characters (with a successful DC 20 Wisdom [Perception] check while far away) might hear hammering and see firelight flickering in the smithy as the goblin smith Tenpound Hammer (area 6) rebuilds the construct.

If the characters try to force their way in, they can certainly climb around or otherwise bypass the guardian temporarily. Once they are in the halls, the environment seems hollow and empty. Divination spells such as *clairvoyance* or *scrying* fail to reveal even a sliver of the truth about the place; they merely show the illusion at a distance.

Within a few minutes of when they settle down for the night in an "empty" room, though, a footman arrives and demands they leave. Proceed with Act II, Scene 1 (see page 60).

Status and Prestige among the Fey

In this adventure, Status is not an ability score but an earned characteristic that has direct consequences in play. Every person's Status is a measure of one's current position in the fey hierarchy of cliques and allegiances, keeping the "riffraff" from simply immediately walking up to the queen and demanding to be heard. That would be a major social failure and result in punishment and a decline in Status, unless the queen were somehow "defeated" by being forced to listen to interlopers. In general, then, Status provides a gate that filters the unworthy and opens a door to those who are sufficiently prestigious to merit attention. As a result, only those worthy of her time may speak with the queen, and this system models that social climbing through a simple rank system.

Characters gain Status ranks through their actions; impressive actions garner greater prestige, honor, power, and influence among the fey. Modest increases in Status can be realized by joining various factions or by receiving a mark of distinction from a fey lord or lady.

STARTING STATUS

Every character's starting Status in the Shadow Court is equal to the character's Charisma modifier, adjusted as follows:

- If a character is a fey and has a title such as knight, duke, or king (subject to your approval for elves and gnomes), refer to Table 2–1: Titular Status and add

INVESTIGATION VS. THE COURT'S ILLUSIONS

If the party makes little or no sense of the empty courts for a long period of time, give the character with the highest Intelligence (Investigation) modifier the honors: that character should be the first to notice something amiss in passing, assuming no active investigation of the phenomena has been conducted. This result does not mean, however, that the character sees through the illusions—just that they are recognized as illusions. The DC to recognize an illusion for what it is depends on the area of the courts: DC 15 in the Lower Halls, DC 20 in the Winter Palace, and DC 25 in the Royal Halls. Characters can attempt this check once an hour while actively investigating; simply staring at the same location continually does not warrant a second check.

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Status ranks as indicated. (The shadow fey need not respect titles granted by others courts and kingdoms, but they generally do so out of courtesy.)

- Add 1 for a character who bears an elf- or shadow fey-crafted item, such as the *bracers of defense* from Freja (see page 21).
- Subtract 1 for a character who has received a haunt mask (see "The Haunted Forest," page 32).
- Subtract 2 for a non-fey character (only elves, half-elves, gnomes, elfmarked characters, and those of fey ancestry can avoid this deduction).

Table 2–1: Titular Status

Status	Title
+1	Knight, Court Mage, Guildmaster/ Guildmistress
+2	Lord/Lady, Baron/Baroness, Archmage
+4	Duke/Duchess, Prince/Princess
+8	King/Queen, Emperor/Empress

All of the above notwithstanding, not every court follows the same rules, and different forms of nobility or different ruling groups might have different standards.

The deduction for non-fey reflects the particular customs of the shadow fey. The shadow fey see themselves as wholly superior to others, so some visitors (those with Status of 0 or lower) are beneath their notice. It's not that the shadow fey like other fey much better. It's that they are biased against halflings, humans, tieflings, aasimar, dragonborn, dwarves, goliaths, roachlings, and others.

For the purpose of this adventure, most non-fey characters begin with Status 0 or lower, and most fey characters begin with Status of 5 or lower. Characters can earn increases in Status by taking actions in the courts to impress the fey. The following methods are generally available to all characters: joining in fey politics, wooing and winning courtesans or consorts, and dueling.

Status of NPCs. Any character can determine the Status of a member of the courts through careful inquiry and conversation followed by a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Characters of fey heritage (elves, half-elves, and gnomes, elfmarked characters, and those of fey ancestry) have advantage on this check.

GAINING AND LOSING STATUS

Status—especially among the fey—can be quite fleeting: easy to gain (with a little luck), even easier to lose. Characters can lose or gain great amounts of Status in a single ill-considered act: a squire might become suddenly well-regarded after saving the king from harm in a hunting accident, or a foolish courtier might be tricked into insulting the queen's costume at a masquerade and be summarily banished from the Royal Halls.

Tables 2–2 and 2–3 list many of the opportunities to gain or lose Status in a single night of activity. You can grant other Status awards or penalties as appropriate.

Table 2–2: Increasing Status

Status	Action
+1	Defeat a monolith footman (limit five times)
+1	Succeed on a Charisma (Persuasion), Charisma (Deception), or Charisma (Intimidation) check (limit once per skill)
+1	Succeed on an Intelligence (Arcana), Intelligence (History), or Intelligence (Nature) check (limit once per skill)
+1	Play a successful prank on a shadow fey (or on a servant, for those characters with Status of 4 or lower)
+1	Join the Ravens or the Lords of Light faction
+1 or more	Woo and win a courtesan or consort (see page 84)
+2	Defeat the demon lord Akyishigal's minions (see page 107)
+2	Receive a lantern dragonette (see page 47) as a gift from the Blood Royal
+3	Save a courtier from danger
+3	Prevent a brawl
+4	Join the Grey Ladies faction
+4	Bring the firebird (see page 118) to the court
+4	Give the firebird to the queen (cumulative with bringing to court)
+5	Become the demon lord Akyishigal's lover (see page 107)
+5	Drink claret and/or go hunting with the Black Prince (see page 112)
+6	Defeat the Black Prince's raven assassins or death butterflies (see page 116)
+7	Defeat Akyishigal (see page 109) and drive it from court
+8	Woo and win the Sapphire Courtesan (see page 84)
+9	Become the queen's lover and favorite (see page 120)

Table 2–3: Decreasing Status

Status	Action
–1	Being the victim of a fey prank
–1	Attempting to browbeat or threaten the queen's servants to gain an audience
–1	Killing more than a single goblin or other servant
–1	Associating with a vandal, arsonist, or murderer in the commission of crimes
–2	Fleeing a noble who seeks your arrest or imprisonment
–2	Being fooled by a fey illusion
–2	Seen sneaking into the palace over the walls
–2	Failing to win a courtesan/consort
–2	Killing more than five goblins or servants
–3	Attacking a lantern dragonette
–3	Brawling (involved in any general melee that draws a crowd)
–3	Killing royal ravens or a swarm of death butterflies
–3	Committing vandalism or arson in the courts
–4	Being caught sneaking into a restricted wing of the palace with a weapon, armor, or implement
–5	Declining a direct order from the Blood Royal
–5	Killing a lantern dragonette
–6	Killing the firebird
–7	Insulting the Blood Royal
–8	Threatening or attacking the queen

REQUIRED STATUS FOR CERTAIN ENCOUNTERS

A minimum Status is required for the characters to merit the attention of certain major NPCs at the courts and, thus, to gain exposure to important encounters, such as meeting Baron Suvid and perhaps a demon prince. And of course, in the longer term, the characters will want to meet the queen herself—but to have any hope of that, a character's Status must be lofty indeed.

At a first approximation, characters will need a Status of around 26 to meet the queen, and a Status of 13 to woo the most junior courtesans and to duel some of the more powerful duelists. They need a Status of 11 or higher to be invited to join factions such as the Lords of Light and the Grey Ladies. The situation provides characters with incentive to duel, to win courtesans and consorts, and to politic with fey factions. Most players, once they understand how the system works, are quick to try to exploit it. Reward them with Status boosts, frustrate them with penalties, and see them contend among themselves to become famous and respected.

CONSEQUENCES OF HIGH AND LOW STATUS

When the characters arrive, they have done nothing and earned no respect, so the denizens of the Invisible Court largely ignore them. Servants are the first to notice the characters. Characters with negative or very low Status cannot even speak to the major nobles of the court; they are disregarded and quickly ushered out.

The character with the highest Status (and being a fey breaks a tie) is always addressed first by the Status-canny NPCs of the court and might be the recipient of special favors or advantages. Table 2–4 summarizes how the characters are regarded (if at all) by the members of the court, depending on the group's current Status. As they improve their Status during the adventure, the higher-numbered entries on the table apply in turn.

STATUS BONUS TO SOCIAL ROLLS

In the courts, one's Status is just as real and consequential as one's skill with a sword. Characters with high Status can browbeat, impress, or threaten others more successfully than those with low Status can. These social weapons are available to characters as well, though they might not know about them at first.

A character of sufficient Status gains access to the following special abilities:

Courtier of the Shadows

Prerequisite: Elf, fey, half-elf, or gnome; Status of 11 or higher

Before you make a Charisma (Deception), Charisma (Persuasion), or Charisma (Intimidation) check against someone of a lower Status, you can choose to gain advantage on the roll. You can use this ability a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of once), and regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest.

Dominion of the Shadow Court

Prerequisite: Elf, fey, half-elf, or gnome; Status of 21 or higher

After you make a Charisma (Deception), Charisma (Persuasion), or Charisma (Intimidation) check against someone of a lower Status but before the result of the check is revealed, you can choose to gain a +5 bonus on the check. You can use this ability a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum of once), and regain all expended uses when you finish a short or long rest.

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Table 2–4: Current Status and Fey Behavior

Status	Behavior
0 or lower	**Invisible**. Not worthy of notice except by monolith footmen and empty cloaks. Only allowed in the Lower Halls (although it's possible to climb over walls to other areas).
1–5	**Mostly Invisible**. Sometimes worthy of notice by "animals," court musicians, goblins, demon dogs, horses, and changelings.
6–10	**Barely Acknowledged**. Noticed by servants, young rakes, courtesans and consorts, and the elderly Grey Ladies, although treated condescendingly. Allowed into the true form of the Lower Halls and through the gate into the Winter Palace.
11–15	**Respectable**. Acknowledged but frequently insulted by noble courtiers. Not insulted by servants, rakes, courtesans, consorts, or Grey Ladies. Eligible to woo courtesans or consorts. Might be invited to speak to the demon lord Akyishigal and join its faction, or to join the Lords of Light and meet Revich the Blind Seer.
16–20	**Honored Guests**. Acknowledged by most courtiers except for the most senior, such as the prince and the demon lord. Not insulted by most courtiers. Greeted with bows and addressed as "Sir" or "Milady" by servants and marginal fey.
21–25	**Noble Guests**. Acknowledged by all courtiers, freely spoken to by the most senior courtiers. Treated with honor by young rakes, courtesans, consorts, and Grey Ladies. Might be invited to go hunting with the prince.
26 or higher	**Persons of Royal Interest**. Addressed respectfully by all fey. Might be invited to an audience with the queen. Possible romantic ties to the prince, the princess, the queen, or the demon lord.

FEY TRADE AND BARTER: BODY, SOUL, AND MEMORIES

Among the fey, it is not uncommon to trade in the abstract and to make the arcane and the spiritual concrete and mercantile. Indeed, such activity is a large part of their dealings at various fairs (such as the Birch Queen's Fair in *Wrath of the River King*) and of their trade with mortals. Fey prize mortal emotions and memories as "more authentic" or "primitive" compared to those of longer-lived creatures.

GIFTS

Gifts are benefits that improve skills, endurance, physical and mental prowess, even prestige—all the things associated with a particular individual's success or growth over time. Haggling can be handled using the social interaction rules. A courtier whose Status is equal to or lower than the Status of the haggling character's starting attitude begins with an indifferent attitude. A courtier whose Status is higher than the character's is hostile; it might take services performed in the courtier's favor to improve their attitude. The gifts that fey bestow upon one another, and upon others who impress them sufficiently, are of four basic types.

Gifts of the Mind and Body. A fey can trade his speed, fortitude, and so forth to another. These gifts must be given willingly and are usually exchanged between pairs of individuals. Each participant reduces one ability score by 1 or 2 and raises another ability score by the same amount, effectively trading points. In some rare cases, one party trades a gift of mind and body in exchange for crucial memories or learning. The exchange is permanent, and a given ability score can be changed only once per year in this manner.

Gifts of Learning. These gifts are skill, language, or tool proficiencies, traded permanently or temporarily for a set purpose. A character who trades for learning gains or loses proficiency in the agreed-upon aspect. Among the fey, a few other "skills" are often bartered as well such as poetry, song, and crafting arts—even skill at dance or love. Loaning a poet's gift of inspiration to another fey is considered a wildly romantic gesture.

Gifts of the Arcane and Divine. The shadow fey can trade spell slots, or uses of innate spellcasting, between themselves. The giver loses access to the slot or the use, and the receiver gains it. In the case of a spell slot, the giver chooses one specific spell, and the slot can be used only to cast that spell. The receiver must provide any components normally required for the casting. Once it is used, the gifted spell can't be used again until the receiver finishes a long rest.

Divine spells granted by deities (distinct from those available to rangers or druids) are not widely available among the fey and are highly valued as a result.

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Arcane and natural gifts are relatively common and are traded permanently or sometimes loaned. Failure to return a loaned gift might cause the culprit to wither and die or merely to twist to evil. It is considered a horrible sign to renege on such a bargain.

Gifts of Status. A character can gain or give away Status to a fey. This sort of event is quite rare (the fey view it as a major social occasion on par with a wedding or a funeral). The deed itself is a simple blood oath, followed by the giver kneeling before the recipient as the transfer of Status occurs—invariably accompanied by a loss of the giver's vital essence as well. This loss manifests as a reduction in the gifter's hit point maximum based on the amount of Status transferred; see the table below. One such gift can be made by an individual per month. Some of the most tragically romantic shadow fey tales tell of a lover who gave his life to elevate the Status of his paramour.

Table 2–5: Gifts and Status

Status Points Gifted	Hit Point Maximum Lost
1–2	5
3–4	10
5–6	15
7–8	20
9 or more	25

Hit point maximum lost in this way can't be restored by any means for a year and a day. Status granted in this way can never be returned in the same fashion; it is purely a one-way, one-time gift.

A Helpful Squire

Although the characters might get on well in the courts, the opposite could also occur. The rather senior squire, Scutaruis Thornwalker, is a helpful fellow who can answer questions—or who might take offense and challenge someone to a duel if the party insists on treating him as a servant. He's visiting the courts from Castle Rivenwood, and constantly dreams of returning home.

SCUTARIUS THORNWALKER (ESQUIRE TO HOUSE RIVENWOOD)

As a young page in Castle Rivenwood, Scutarius was unlike his peers. He was short and muscular, shy and soft-spoken—rather unusual and undesirable traits among the eloquent and elegant sidhe. Now, after centuries of loyal (and often bloody) service to Rivenwood, Scutarius sits as esquire to that noble house. He was the major domo of the castle staff as well as herald and master of horse and hound. A scarred and grim war dog himself, Scutarius is not one to be trifled with. While manipulating his own network of informants and agents, he continues to serve House Rivenwood loyally, though often under his own subtle terms and through his own private agendas.

Scutarius Thornwalker

Medium humanoid (sidhe), neutral

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 60 (7d8 + 28)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +6, Dex +8, Cha +6

Skills Animal Handling +4, Deception +6, Intimidation +6, Perception +4

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from weapons that aren't magical, blessed, or made of cold-forged iron

Condition Immunities charmed, paralyzed, magical sleep effects

Senses darkvision 90 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Fey Grace. Sidhe add their Charisma modifier to armor class, initiative checks, and Dexterity saving throws.

Spellcasting. Scutarius is a 7th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following druid spells prepared, plus several spells he has acquired as an initiate in the Cult of Valeresh, the elvish god of war:

Cantrips (at will): *blade ward, mending, resistance, shillelagh*

1st level (4 slots): *animal friendship, purify food and drink, shield, speak with animals*

2nd level (3 slots): *animal messenger, heat metal, locate object, phantom steed*

3rd level (3 slots): *conjure animals, haste*

4th level (1 slot): *dominate beast*

Magic Resistance. Scutarius has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. Scutarius's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Scutarius makes 2 bill-guisarme attacks.

Bill-Guisarme. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (1d10 +6) piercing or slashing damage, and the target creature must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be tripped and knocked prone.

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Flicker and Fade. As a standard action, a sidhe can "leap" between spaces as if by *dimension door*. This magical "flicker" must begin and end within 30 feet of some discernible light source. A sidhe can "jump" a total of 30 feet per day in 10-foot increments (that is, three 10-foot leaps or one 30-foot leap per day). Using this ability with a faerie mount brings the mount along as part of the movement.

Houndmaster's Horn (2/day). Sounding this horn as a standard action conjures one of the following "hounds," determined by a d10 roll: on 1–6, three (1d4 +1) blink dogs appear; on 7–9, two (1d4) dire wolves appear; and on 10, one winter wolf appears. Conjured creatures appear in an unoccupied space within 30 feet and remain for 2 (1d4) hours or until dropped to 0 hit points before vanishing. Conjured creatures are friendly to the horn blower and will obey commands that they can understand.

Rivenwood Regalia. This large magical battle standard bears the ancient crest of House Rivenwood and has the following properties. It grants the standard bearer a +2 bonus to Armor Class and the ability to use *regeneration* (as the spell) once per day when the bearer is within 10 feet of the standard. All allies within 500 feet of the standard gain a +2 bonus on initiative checks and become immune to the charmed, frightened, and stunned conditions as long as Rivenwood Regalia remains visibly borne aloft. All enemies within 100 feet that can see the standard have disadvantage on initiative checks and on any checks to resist fear.

FEY TREASURES: EMOTIONS WORTHY OF THE TOUCH

The greatest trick of some fey magic regarding gifts, memory, and emotion is the ability to give them physical form, using a spell like *ritual of memories lost* (see page 29). These are typically stored in cabinets as small bottles of liquid; when touching the bottle, a character can feel a tinge of the emotions kept in it.

Philter of Memory

Wondrous item, rare

This swirling liquid is the collected memory of a mortal who willingly traded that memory away to the shadow fey. The shadow fey collects the offered memory and stores it in a vial carved of semiprecious gemstone worth 250 gp. When you touch the philter, you feel a flash of the emotion contained within. You can unstopper and pour out a philter as an action unless otherwise specified. The philter's effects take place immediately, either on you or on a creature you can see within 30 feet (your choice). If the target is unwilling, it can attempt a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw to resist the effect of the philter. A creature affected by a philter experiences the memory contained in the vial. A Mnemosyne philter can be used only once, but the vial can be reused to store a new memory.

Bonds of Friendship

You swore an oath of blood and mingled tears; both of you against the injustice of the shadow fey. Goblin blood held true, a dozen years of watchful friendship and laughter behind the courtier's backs. No harm must come to your closest companion!

As a reaction when a creature you can see within 30 feet targets you or an ally with a weapon attack or a spell, you can pour out the philter. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or choose a different target. If it can't or doesn't choose a different target, the attack or spell is wasted. A creature that can't be charmed is immune to this effect.

To create this philter, a humanoid must sacrifice a happy memory of a time with a friend.

Coward's Shame

You remember how the queen banished you for your cowardice and how the court laughed. Even your mother turned her back. You could not return to the courts until she died.

The target becomes frightened. While frightened in this way, it flees from you by the most direct route it can, and it can take only actions that facilitate its escape. If the creature ends its turn more than 30 feet away from you and can't see you, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success.

To create this philter, a humanoid must sacrifice a memory of a failure or embarrassment.

Youthful Joy

You remember the sunshine and the shadows of the Margreve, picking bluebells as a young girl: the laughter of a child and the boundless strength of youth.

The target regains 3d8 + 6 hit points and removes one level of exhaustion.

To create this philter, a humanoid must sacrifice a favored childhood memory.

Raging Lust

You tore her spider silk bridal dress in the treetops and dropped the shreds to the forest floor. You shook the leaves from the trees, and her cries set the birds to flight. You would have done anything she asked.

The target is charmed by you, until you or one of your allies does something to harm the target. If you are a kind of creature the target normally finds attractive, it treats you as the object of its desire while it is charmed in this way. You can make one suggestion of the target (as if using the *suggestion* spell). The target can repeat the saving throw when it finishes a long rest. On a

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failed save, it remains charmed and you can make another suggestion; on a successful save, the effect ends.

To create this philter, a humanoid must sacrifice all memory of a romantic partner.

Philter of Righteous Wrath

The queen's rage swept everything before her, and you—her champion—destroyed all you touched. Die, traitor! Die, faithless creatures!

When you activate this philter, each creature other than you within 30 feet must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be overcome by burning ferocity. Until the start of your next turn, an affected creature must attack a foe if it is able, and every attack made by an affected creature that hits is automatically a critical hit.

To create this philter, a humanoid must sacrifice all memory of a great victory in battle.

Philter of Widow's Tears

She died in your arms, the glorious spider-maiden who spun your wedding vest and embroidered the lace you wore so proudly as the Statthalter of Corremel. Oh, that it should end thus. She was always the one who was meant to outlive your foolish plotting.

A creature you can see within 30 feet is overcome by devastating grief. The target is stunned for 1 minute. It can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

To creature this philter, a humanoid must sacrifice all memory of a deceased loved one.

Development

A party that uses items such as these might well encounter the person whose memories they consumed, for better or worse. In such a case, both sides might recognize what happened, as the shared memory sets up some sort of arcane resonance between the original creature whose memory was captured and the character who now remembers the event.

MORE FEY TREASURES

Much in the way that they use *philters of memory*, the shadow fey trade in the following forms of bartered memories, or even twists of fate.

Memories of Times Past. Some fey trade memories of important days, such as weddings, battles, or first kisses. These memories have whatever price one cares to name for them. In most cases, the memory of another such event is required in exchange.

Future Moment of Success. By agreeing to accept a failure on a future saving throw, you gain an automatic critical hit to use in the future. When you make a saving throw, the GM can declare it an automatic failure. In exchange, when you hit with an attack, you can choose to make it a critical hit. Each of these events can occur only once.

Or, conversely, you can give up a future successful hit in exchange for a guaranteed successful saving throw. In this case, when you fail a saving throw, you can choose to succeed instead. And at some point in the future when you hit with an attack, even a critical hit, the GM can declare it an automatic miss. Each of these events can occur only once. The fey who makes the trade gains the "lost" critical hit or saving throw.

Locations and Conditions in the Court

The Shadow Court is set up in three "islands" or sections, each built around a main hall with many side passages. These islands stand above the forest; the cliffs leading up to them are easily climbed but are also the home of several hundred shadows and dozens of deathwisps. The three sections are the Lower Halls, the Winter Palace, and the Royal Halls. Far below the castle is a dark forest whose roads lead to various points of interest in the Shadow Realm.

Climbing the Walls. Characters can climb up and over the palace walls with little difficulty, if they have the right equipment. Without the aid of a rope and grappling hook, it requires a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check to scale the walls. If the party does not exercise stealth in this effort, however, they immediately take a –2 penalty to Status. After all, only thieves, spies, and desperate lovers sneak into the palace. A successful DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check allows them to slip over the walls without notice.

If the Dexterity (Stealth) check fails by 5 or more, guards are summoned. Otherwise, the Status deduction comes merely from being observed and gossiped about.

Guards. The monolith footmen found in various locations are attuned to the Status of visitors. If the characters have sufficiently high Status, the footmen ignore them. A Status of 6 or higher is required to avoid the notice of the footmen in the Lower Halls. In the Winter Palace and the Royal Halls, the requirements are Status 11 and 16, respectively.

Goblins and Servants. For visitors of low Status, goblins are a useful source of information; they are short, puny, and easily cowed (with a successful DC 12 Charisma [Intimidation] check). At the same time, goblins are notorious liars and not truly cooperative even when threatened. Generally, they run away from any threat. Killing goblins or other servants is considered poor form, resulting in a –1 penalty to Status if more than

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one is killed and a −2 penalty for everyone involved in killing more than five of them.

As a courtier is likely to put it to a bloodthirsty character, "It is so difficult to find good help, and I understand you've been thinning out the herd lately. I quite understand: the terrible service, and the insolence. But, er, could you keep the discipline down to a thrashing? Goblins don't grow on trees."

Servants can retaliate against characters who mistreat them by spreading gossip, informing their masters of misdeeds by the characters (real or trumped up), and invoking the "goblin curse." This form of rebellion by the servants might take the form of spoiled food, mundane items (such as shoes and hats) suddenly going missing, and other difficulties and inconveniences. When a "cursed" character makes a Dexterity or Charisma check, it must roll a d4 and subtract the result of that roll from the check. This effect lasts until the character makes a sincere apology or visits the Goblin Court (area 8) and pays a fine commensurate with the offense.

Shadow Doors. A few of the doors on the map are marked as shadow doors; these include the Winter Gate (or Western Gate), the Eastern Gate, the Executioner's Gate, and some of the interior doors, such as the entrance to the King and Queen's Chambers (area 61). Opening a shadow door requires a successful Intelligence (Arcana) check to determine the proper sequence of mystic passes and light flashes that opens and shuts it. The DC for each gate is given in the area descriptions that follow.

LANTERN DRAGONETTES

Lantern dragonettes are a form of pseudodragon with scales like tarnished silver; their belly glows from within with an orange light that gives them their name. This glow can be muted when they keep their scales laid flat, a bit like a lantern's shutter; the glow is brightest when their scales are held away from the body.

Lantern dragonettes create illumination as a *continual flame* spell, and they usually obey commands to dim their light when requested. They eat insects, mice, and small birds, as well as bread and scraps. The fey seem to have bred them for docility; the ones found within the courts have no effective attacks and flee when threatened. (If the information becomes needed, a lantern dragonette has AC 13, 28 hit points, speed 15 ft., fly 40 ft., speaks Common, Draconic, Elvish, and Primordial, and has telepathy out to 60 feet.) For a resident or a guest, receiving custody of a lantern dragonette to accompany them and light their way in the palace halls is a sign of great favor from the royals; that character gains a +3 bonus to Status for owning a dragonette. Only about twenty dragonettes live in the palace, and they are treasured by most of the courtiers (kitchen staff are a notable exception). If a dragonette given to a character dies, the character takes an immediate −5 penalty to Status.

What is not known by any but the most senior among the fey is that the lantern dragonettes are spies for the Blood Royal. Each dawn, when the dragonettes have all dimmed their lights, they visit with the queen or the prince and tell the juiciest stories of the court's doings, betrayals, romances, and feuds as a sort of bedtime tale. Many conversations told by lantern light are known to the queen by the time the dragonettes all go to sleep at noon. A few fey believe that the lantern dragonettes can serve as the eyes and ears of the Blood Royal more directly—that the royals can actually look through their eyes under certain conditions.

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THE LOWER HALLS

1. Winter Gate (or Western Gate). The Winter Gate stands well guarded at the head of a long stair carved out of the cliff below the Winter Palace. Usually shrouded in mist and lit by a single oil lantern, the area seems almost abandoned. A monolith footman (see page 60) always stands guard inside the door; a small inset window can be opened to allow the footman to ask questions. The gate itself is a shadow door that can be opened with a successful DC 22 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

2. Dueling Grounds and Arcade. This field of pale greenish-gray grass is where children play, where duels are fought during dueling season, where lovers declaim poetry, and where captains drill their troops. Surrounded by the arches of a carved and leafy colonnade, the dueling grounds are almost always occupied by someone. The Royals and other fey of high Status visit this area only during dueling season.

3. The Silver Tree. The courtyard's main feature is a tree that has white bark and bears red and silver flowers. It is a favored spot for young lovers, courtesans, and poets (1d4 – 2 people are commonly found here). Lantern dragonettes often roost in the Silver Tree's branches.

4. Ramp up to the Winter Palace. This is a steep and cobbled passage up to the Winter Gate: difficult terrain that might also be treacherously slippery due to fog, ice, or rain. Under those conditions, a character moving along the ramp must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) saving throw or slip and fall down on the steep cobbles, taking 1d12 damage (or 2d12 if the save failed by 5 or more).

5. New Moon Hall. The hall where most visitors are first received is dimly lit and open to the air along the southern arcade. The hall is a bit of a maze, containing more than thirty striped marble pillars arranged irregularly. New Moon Hall is thronged with crows during the day and both forest owls and death butterflies at night, though they rarely trouble the fey unless a sleeping body presents an easy target. The hall smells vaguely of fox urine.

POSTER MAP OF THE COURTS

A larger poster and battle mat of the Shadow Court map is available at KoboldPress.com. Most of the adventure's encounter areas are provided in smaller detail maps, which will account for the major set-piece encounters, but if your party is keen on wandering around the palace wings at night, you might want a larger version of the two-page map given here.

6. Smithy. This work area contains an anvil and an ancient bellows, and has an open floor plan to let the heat escape. The smith in charge of repairing swords and animated suits of armor here is Tenpound Hammer (better known by his nickname, "Nails").

7. Kitchens. The master cook in charge here is Blazing Barda, a goblin, assisted by the orc butcher Skrazag the Meek. Things are plucked, stewed, and served as slop in very large quantities for the denizens of the Lower Halls. None of this food goes to the Royal Halls. Root cellars and wine cellars connect to these kitchens, but not to the Royal Halls, although some folk claim they can be used to reach the Goblin Court.

8. Goblin Court. The lowest and most vulgar of the fey courts is the Goblin Court, where Moggo the Chamberlain presides as "king." In this chamber, he rules on issues that affect servants and low-Status visitors and enjoys behaving as a tyrant—the carpet before his "throne" is spattered with blood. Bribery, flattery, and outrageous betrayal are common activities in this court, and subtlety is almost unknown. (As long as the queen's rolls are hot and the butter is sweet, she cares not what happens below.) The courtly audiences here are held at off-hours, when most servants sleep. The Goblin Hall extends along tunnels into the hill beneath the Winter Palace, although few know just how far those tunnels extend or that the goblins have their own dancing hall. All of the goblins in the Shadow Court are native to the shadow realm and immune to its corrupting qualities.

9. Lesser Guests' Quarters. Each of these simple, tidy rooms contains a bed of linens laid over rushes, a pitcher of clean water, and a three-legged stool. The rooms cannot be locked.

10. Stables. Goblin and changeling grooms watch over the black and white horses of the shadow fey nobles here. The biggest and best of the pens in the stable is the home of Lazulin, the blue horse of the royal family. The prince most often rides it, although some believe "it" is actually an entire herd of magical, sky-traveling steeds. Certainly, the king and queen are known to sometimes turn the horse into a pair, one gray and one azure, for their journeys among the clouds at the equinox, when the rulership of the Shadow Realm changes hands. The goblin grooms will violently defend Lazulin if they must (see Act II, Scene 4 for a suggested encounter with the beast).

11. Librarium and Kennels. A once-great hall of learning, this area is now a mass of rat-eaten scrolls and moldering tomes. A DC 25 Intelligence (Investigation) check, however, might reveal that this appearance is largely illusory. The place is used to store provender for

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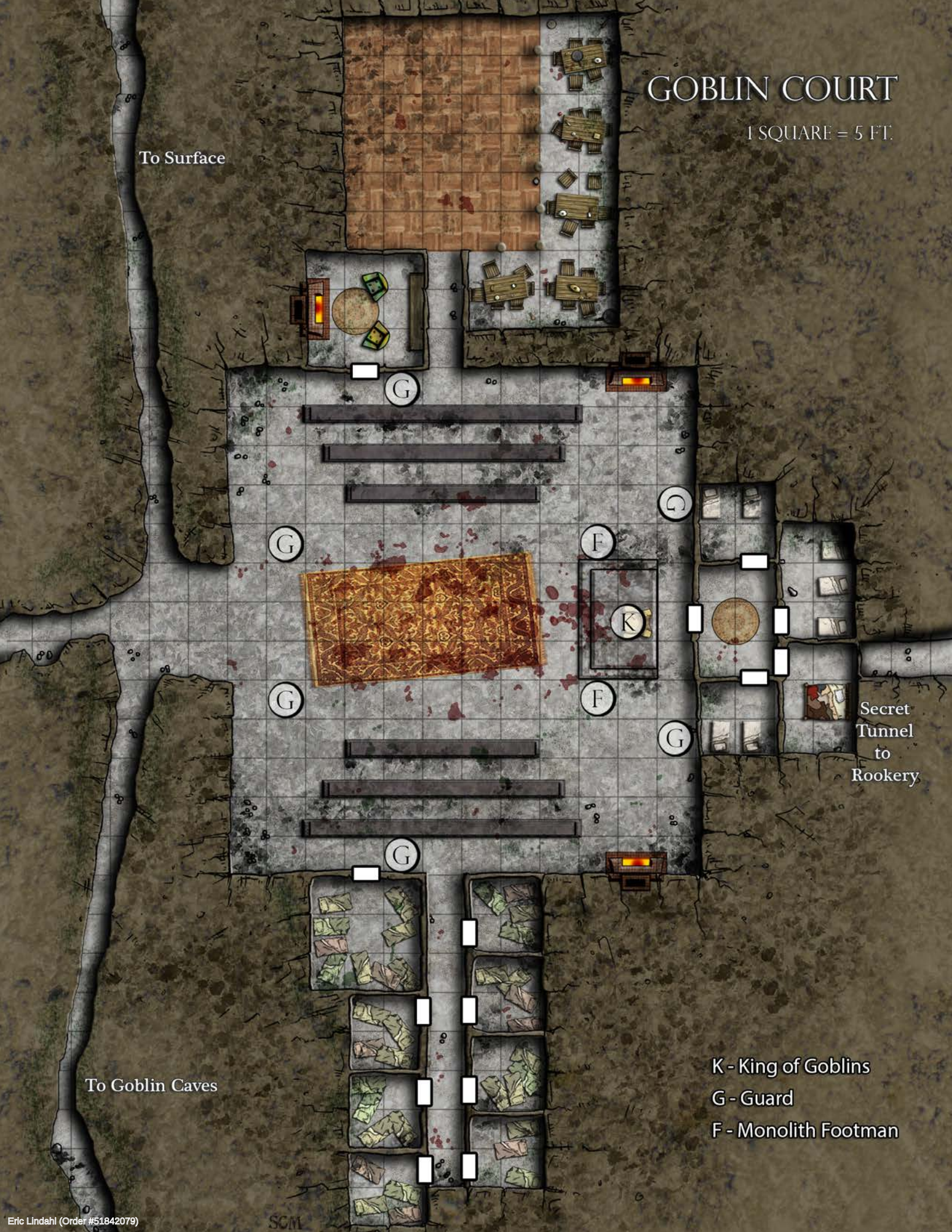

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the stables and bags of grain and root vegetables for the kitchens. In addition, Kolya the Kennel Master (see page 67) watches over the Black Prince's hounds and shadow mastiffs here, when they are not with their master on the hunt or keeping him company in the courts.

12. Guards' Hall. Lesser nobles seeking to curry favor with the royals often send a company of fey archers, soldiers, or quicksteps to the palace to serve for a season. At the moment, the guards are a company of the black shadow fey of Allosis, led by Captain Imbemerethion.

13. Stairs up to Royal Halls. These steps are wide, shallow tiers of beautiful marble. Two lantern dragonettes light the portal at the top (see area 45). This is a shadow door, and if the characters have Status of 10 or lower, opening it requires a successful DC 25 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

THE WINTER PALACE

14. Executioner's Gate. The shriveled heads of enemies and entire corpses in iron cages are displayed along the palace wall; these remains are years old, but the fey keep them in place as a reminder of their domination. The gate is made of oak banded with iron and is shut each night. It is guarded by a monolith footman; only fey or visitors with a Status of 6 or higher are allowed through it.

15. Hounds' Run. Creatures entering the Winter Palace are investigated by the Black Prince's hounds of the night (see page 70) or by psoglav demons (see page 63), both of which use this courtyard as an exercise and play space.

16. Hall of Banners. Aside from the decorations and mementos for which it is named, this room is typically empty, reserved for courtly functions and meetings.

17. Servants' Quarters. The brownies, animal-headed humans, changelings, half-elves, and other low-Status servants, exiles, and outcasts who do much of the scut work at the court live in these shared barracks (while goblins and hobgoblins live in the Lower Halls). Cots and beds are a luxury, and not all servants rate them; those who serve a particular fey noble sleep outside the noble's door. Grooms, kitchen help, maids, and footmen are not shy about taunting or mocking low-Status outsiders who have no real clout, and at the same time they are willing to cater to those who display any real sign of Status in exchange for food, magical trifles, or an interesting story.

EMPTY HALLS

When the characters are too low in Status to be shown how the halls truly look, most rooms appear dusty, abandoned, or at least neglected in some way. Old furnishings and abandoned papers fill guest rooms, wells have no ropes or buckets, doors hang askew, kitchens are cold, and larders are empty.

18. Puzzle Box Chamber. Fey send annoying guests and small children to wander here for a few hours. The room has stairs on the ceiling, and every exit leads back into the same room. Getting out is as simple (or as difficult) as traveling along a hidden bend in the stairs on the ceiling, which leads to New Moon Hall (see area 5).

19. Chamber of the Grey Ladies. This room seems twice as large on the inside as when viewed from the outside. Bright tapestries of pure gold and silver hang on the walls, and rich, woven carpets of red, black, and gray cover the floor. Three large looms are set here and are attended at all times by at least one of the Grey Ladies.

20. Chambers of the King's Players. This area is a hive of activity most of the time, as jesters, acrobats, and actors of various petty trifles amuse themselves and practice their arts. These entertainers are quite casual in their behavior and dress, often performing naked and sometimes sharing intimate secrets in public. The other fey seem to consider this behavior normal. The King's Players do not have a stage as such, but they perform in the dueling grounds or the Small Courtyard (area 46) in good weather and inside the halls when weather is poor.

21. Winter Palace Kitchens. Fat Lobbo, a half-ogre cook, presides over the work in the kitchens. The crew is made up of goblins and a few fey that are forced to serve as scullery maids and pot boys as punishment. The place contains ovens, sinks, cauldrons, and plenty of knives and other cutlery.

22. Majordomo's Chamber. The center of the servant's world is the majordomo's plain room with its two chairs and fine tapestry dividing it (and hiding the bed from the door). The major furnishing is a writing desk and an account book, where rest two inkhorns and a handful of reed pens, keeping track of stores and supplies as well as favors owed, servants gained and lost, demerits for goblins and changelings, and so on.

23. Well of Ice. The chilled water from this well is drawn up about 18 hours a day by strong goblin arms and taken to the kitchen.

24. Hall of Changelings. This hall is the court for those who don't have high enough Status to visit the Royal Halls. Nonetheless, the scheming and politicking that goes on here is no less deadly (2d6 courtiers are present at any given time). Of particular note here is Sariel, a shadow fey lady of modest Status and

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mysterious demeanor. She dresses in black, and has a curious bearing. Flighty, even by shadow fey standards, Sariel often finds it difficult to focus on the events of the moment. That's why, despite her formidable charisma and potential, she hasn't risen higher in court.

25. Shrine to the Shadow Gods. Always empty of lantern dragonettes, the shrine smells faintly of mold and shines with the glimmer of a thousand small silver treasures, each nailed to the walls as an offering in the shape of an eye, hand, foot, or heart. (Someone who succeeds on a DC 14 Dexterity check using thieves' tools can remove trinkets worth a total of 200 gp—and call down a fey curse at the same time.) The primary gods represented here are Anu-Akma, the god of death and judgment, and the Red Goddess Marena (see Chapter 12: Pantheon in the *Midgard Worldbook*); St. Charon and even the martial aspect of Perun, the god of war, have icons here as well. The walls are lined with fine marble statues of ancestral kings and queens such as the Werewolf King, the Stag King, and the Jack of Shadows, as well as the Starlit Queen of the Pixies, the Eclipsed Queen, Comet Queen, and Queen Mab (see *The Faerie Ring* from Zombie Sky Press for more details on Mab and other fey lords).

26. Buttress of the Bridge of Night. The wall leads to a bridge abutment, and a bridge connects to the royal apartments across the valley of the Lower Halls—but the substance of the bridge exists only at night and only when the king or queen wishes it. The bridge can be trod upon by visitors who have Status 11 or higher; those of lower Status can walk about 30 feet out on it, but then fall through.

27. Private Apartments of Lord Hargos the Flame-Cloaked. The elf consort Hargos wears an illusion of a cloak of fire over his bare, muscled chest; his hearty laugh is often heard when he goes on his rounds to the Hall of Changelings and the Small Courtyard. As a junior consort, he is not often allowed to visit the Royal Halls, and he makes the most of those opportunities, flattering and paying homage to the greatest of the shadow fey ladies. Most of the lords view him with deep suspicion, even though his behavior is always in keeping with shadow fey standards of decorum. His chambers are furnished in fine woods and pale leathers, scented with

SHARDS OF A BROKEN MIND: THE WAYWARD BABE

Unbeknownst even to herself, Sariel carries one of the greatest secrets in all of Midgard: She is neither of the Shadow Realm, nor is she a shadow fey.

Lady Sariel is in fact a human changeling from Kammae in the Seven Cities. She was stolen away from her basket and blankets years ago, and a female shadow fey babe was left in her place. The shadow fey lives and thrives on Midgard, unaware that she is not human. Although Sariel appears to all examination (of both mundane and magical sort) to be a shadow fey, this is a nearly impenetrable glamour. She has begun to see through the veil that conceals her life, but only in dreams and when her mind is at the edge of consciousness. That's why she's so distracted—she moves through a world that seems to move a half-second out of sync, where things often seem to be something else to her eyes. Recently she's begun to experience more vivid dreams, and if someone (say, a charming mortal) were to befriend her, she might talk about her recurring visions involving "the daughter of the moon, walking in flesh upon Midgard soil."

The truth about Sariel is a crucial clue to the reason for the Moonlit King's sanity: the king's daughter lives and breathes on Midgard in the guise of a human, and has no idea of her true heritage.

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THE BEARFOLK AMBASSADOR

Gorvalk Orsamsson is an envoy to the Shadow Court from the bearfolk inhabitants of the Moonlit Glades (see the *Midgard Worldbook*), far from the lands of the shadow fey. He wears the trophy decorations of a war leader but carries no weapons. Despite his growling voice and imposing stature, the envoy is polite and his manners impeccable. Gorvalk is a grizzlehide bearfolk, somewhat out of his natural element, and he presents an opportunity to link the characters in with the bearfolk, as well as a potentially genuine friend and ally in the otherwise duplicitous courts.

If the characters are suffering accumulated shadow corruption, Gorvalk is a good way to intrduce the bearfolk's knowledge of cleansing corruption without taking the party out of the Shadow Realm for an extended amount of time. For more information on the bearfolk's ability to combat shadow corruption, see the *Midgard Heroes Handbook*.

pine. A small fire burns at the room's center at all times; two brownie servants take turns feeding the fire.

28. Private Apartments of Lady Lishekki the Silver-Chained. The junior courtesan is an elf maiden named Lishekki. Her purple hair and extremely pale skin shows to good advantage against the black, tarnished silver chains that are her only garments. Male fey consider her an exotic beauty, and the ladies consider her a single step above a whore. Unfortunately for Lishekki, as the junior courtesan (and an elf to boot) she is in no position to do much on her own to counter that sort of talk—which is why she is currently seeking a client who's handy with blade or spell to call out her most vocal detractor: Brightspur, leader of the Ravens.

29. Captain of Guard's and Officers' Chambers. These are simple rooms for the current leader of the palace's troops. Currently occupied by Captain Imbemerethion, who was believed to be a favorite of the king's and who is rather out of favor with the queen.

30. Visiting Nobles' Chamber. Reserved for lesser knights and nobles visiting the courts, this room is furnished well with a canopy bed, chairs, writing table, dining table, and a few modest tapestries. Of note in these chambers is an oddly out-of-place individual, the hulking bearfolk emissary Gorvalg Orsamsson.

31. Private Chamber of Baron Coughspittle. The shadow fey Lord of Rotting Leaves and Watcher of the Fractured Gate has many enemies among the fey and is always attended by a monolith footman and an empty cloak. His chamber smells of the forest after a rain, and his bedding and tapestries depict autumn scenes. The baron is a great storyteller and enjoys engaging visitors in long reminiscences that sometimes last until dawn.

32. Private Chamber of Count Sammas Hollowgrin. The archmagus of the shadow fey is a force of incredible arcane power. The door leading into his chambers always announces visitors in a loud voice, declaiming their names and titles at high volume (thus alerting the count and his neighbors) no matter the hour. The chamber is a palace within the palace, with fifteen rooms around a central courtyard (not shown on the map), invisible servants, and elf maidens (his apprentices); it's much bigger on the inside than the outside view would indicate—a small pocket dimension, really.

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Count Sammas has little patience for fools, and visitors have a chance of seeing him only if they make it past his many secretaries, appointment-book-keepers, underlings, and well-wishers (requiring successful DC 16 Charisma [Intimidation or Persuasion] checks). He is also the royal standard bearer and herald, Master of Fence, and the Lord of Fallen Archways and Broken Swords, meaning he knows literally everyone at the court and their secrets. Count Sammas wants nothing to do with the issues concerning Zobeck; he's trying to restore the king to sanity and keep shadow beasts and lunar devils from overrunning things.

Portray the count not as absent-minded but simply concerned with larger problems. Count Sammas is a source for a subtle but potentially crucial piece of information; see the "Shards of a Broken Mind" sidebar.

33. Private Chamber of His Grace, Duke Rackclasp. The shadow fey Warden of the Early Frost and First Bonecarver is both an invoker and a necromancer. His chambers are strewn with chips of bone and always kept below freezing. Visitors suffer the effects of extreme cold while in his room.

34. Private Chamber of Jalennis, Lady of the Pale Gardens. The shadow fey druid Lady Jalennis is responsible for the growth and health of the forests, gardens, and labyrinth of the courts. She is found in her chamber only when sleeping.

35. Private Chamber of Lady Marrowsilk. The Queen's Counsel and Most Learned Advocate is a traitor to the fey cause, providing information to Lord Maruuk, the diabolic ambassador; she often secretly visits his chambers (area 37). Or, is you so choose, she is a loyal warlock who pretends to favor Lord Maruuk and pumps him for a great deal of information, then shares that information with the queen. She's interested in hearing from high-Status characters, yet she says almost nothing of value while hinting that she can help solve their problems. She wants the Sapphire Courtesan dead, for no reason other than professional jealousy.

36. Lord Chelessfield, Lady Sorreminx, and Sir Yngress the Red. These three elves from the River King's Court keep to themselves except during dueling season and major festivals. They are trying to arrange a marriage alliance between the River King's daughter, Ripple, and the Black Prince or another titled shadow fey noble—so far without success.

37. Chambers of Lord Maruuk. The diabolic ambassador loves the Shadow Court and the many fey of loose morals who seek power. With so many ambitious courtiers, he does pull strings in exchange for small favors all the time, and has amassed a considerable following, while keeping his corruption just mild enough not to annoy the royals. He has been exiled once for "behavior unbecoming an ambassador," but he has come back because he feels he is slowly tilting the court toward chaos and evil. Though the shadow fey are his pets and favorites, he certainly offers the characters much the same bargain. In exchange for their pledge of fealty while they are within the Shadow Realm (a paltry thing) or in exchange for a single favor (a gift, information, an important document or lies whispered in the right ear) he offers a wealth of information and gossip, and perhaps a little blood magic or one of the spells of doom (see the *Midgard Worldbook*). He especially wants to see the demon lord Akyishigal and the Lightning Lord dead, because both have foiled his rise to power at the court more than once; his own physical and arcane power is

SHARDS OF A BROKEN MIND: THE LONG SUMMER

Unbeknownst even to herself, Sariel carries one of the greatest secretCount Sammas is one of a few courtiers who hold the keys to restoring the Moonlit King's sanity. He knows that the long rule of the queen is part of the reason for the king's madness; the court's natural cycle has been stalled, and the queen's extended rule exacerbates the king's troubled mind. The courts of the shadow fey wax and wane in power according to the turn of courtly seasons, the duration and schedule of which seems random to the outside observer.

The truth is that many factors play into how long a given court's season lasts. The shadow fey tend to lose track of the passage of mortal years, one decade blurring into another—but a few who have a mind for such things, like Sammas, know that the Summer Court, and thus the queen, have held sway for over a century. That is the longest-lasting single tenure of either of the shadow fey rulers in their history. Though he might never confess his feelings to a member of the court, Count Sammas believes that it is time for a change, even though he loves the queen. He might share this prediction or theory (insofar as non-fey can understand the intricacies) with a learned character or one of high Status, and he urges them to visit the Moonlit King to change the court's position on reasserting their claim to Zobeck. He believes that the court, once the king is restored, will have other matters to tend to within the shadow realm, fighting back various undead and demons of the outer dark.

not great enough to challenge those two directly, and he'd prefer to have outsiders spill their blood while being able to deny his involvement.

38. Chambers of Baron Suvid. The Lord of Blades has a peculiar chamber, small and neat as a jeweled egg—three times the size within as it seems to be without. The walls are covered with small, neatly stacked boxes full of preserved ears and scalps from foes, and a large, well-used grinding wheel stands to one side of the entrance. The chamber has the smells of leather and metal. Baron Suvid is already drafting the queen's first proclamation for Zobeck, which is heavy on "If you do not oppose my rule, you have nothing to fear." He resents any intrusion by the characters, but he might attempt to pump them to get the "local view" of things.

39. Chamber of Mistress Gossamer. The Lady of the Mournful Gate is a banshee who apologizes for the stench of her undead servants. The floor of her chamber is made of tombstones, which always display the names of her visitors; there are no other furnishings.

40. Chamber of Princess Vailessia Graystone and Prince Loric Oakbound. The two youthful wards of the Summer Court are far from home. Prince Loric is a dreamer without power, while Princess Vailessia is a much stronger child, always tumbling about and asking whether her visitors are bringing her a puppy, know where a puppy might be found, or have heard about a puppy coming to court. They are reasonably well informed but disinclined to talk politics with strangers. The rooms are hung with bright tapestries of hills, sunrises, unicorns, and a rainbow that offers fey children an escape from visitors (as a fey door).

41. Guest Chamber. Reserved for non-fey visitors of lesser distinction, this room is furnished with a fine canopy bed, a painted chest for clothes and linens, and a wash basin behind a carved screen.

42. Hidden Stairs to Forest and Labyrinth. Three monolith footmen and six deathwisps guard these stairs from the forest side. None may pass down to the Spiral Maze below without the permission of the prince or the queen, in written and sealed form, or the queen's gift of daggers (see page 124). If the guards are defeated, the shadow door to the stairs leading down and the maze entrance can be opened with a successful DC 25 Intelligence (Arcana) check, or by casting three consecutive *knock* spells on it.

43. Rookery. A thousand rooks and crows nest here each evening. The Black Prince is fond of these animals, and they are well fed; he visits them at least once a week with his huntsmen and followers.

44. Moon-Viewing Tower. This tower is off limits to all but the nobles of the court and popular for its especially good view of the full moon three days every month. The rest of the time it is haunted by a dozen deathwisps, which violently discourage visitors. The stairs within the tower are moonlight stairs: invisible and insubstantial except when viewed by moonlight, when they are solid and useful for climbing to the viewing platform at the top.

DESIGN NOTE: THIEVERY IN THE COURTS

The courts are filled with treasures large and small, and the characters can steal a lot of silver if they decide to make a job of it. Most of these treasures, however, are either illusory or made of shadowstuff and have no substance outside the palaces. Even so, gross thievery is frowned on by the fey as uncouth, and anyone caught stealing more than 1,000 gp of real or illusory silverware, paintings, candlesticks, necklaces, and so forth is brought before the queen or the Goblin Court, depending on the criminal's Status. Most of these miscreants are exiled or transformed into goblins and forced to work as servants. All thieves suffer a −3 deduction in Status if convicted, and a fine of an equivalent gp value might be levied.

For this reason, most treasures and ornaments are not given gold piece values in their descriptions. They can be acquired, but they have no value in the long term.

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THE ROYAL HALLS

45. The Open Portal. The doors to this section are always flung open, although two monolith footmen guard them. If an alarm has been raised in the castle, opening the shadow door here requires a successful Intelligence (Arcana) check (DC 27 from the outside, DC 22 from within the Royal Halls). The Royal Halls are barred to those who have Status of 10 or lower; others can walk in freely, and can bring in a guest of lower Status by making a successful DC 18 Charisma (Deception) or Charisma (Persuasion) check. In general, a high-Status character can enter with lower-Status friends if the friends are described as servants, followers, or hangers-on of some kind; the shadow fey certainly understand that high-Status people need servants and toadies, and make exceptions on that basis.

46. Small Courtyard. The courtyard is dominated by stairs leading up to the east, a view to the north over the forest through battlements, a tower to the west, and a bubbling fountain of pure cold water. Servants from the kitchen draw from it, and nobles drink it; the runoff is piped down to the kitchen in the Lower Halls.

47. Long Hall. This 5-foot-wide hall provides access to more than a dozen doors leading into the chambers of various nobles and courtesans.

48. Kitchens. These kitchens are the best equipped in the palace. On feast days, a shadow portal here opens directly into the Chamber of the Huntsmen (area 50), allowing dishes to travel to their destination more swiftly. The head chef is the shadow fey Elasstriel (called "Mistress Chopper" by her underlings).

49. Chamber of the Black Mirror. This room, dominated by a black mirror in a golden frame, is used by lesser courtiers to plot and scheme. The chamber is empty, unless a hand of cards is being played or courtesans are engaged in debauchery. The mirror is an 8-foot-tall slab of polished black marble with mithral and tarnished silver-gilded edging. It connects to all the shadow doors in the palace, but only those of royal blood or those who make a successful DC 30 Intelligence (Arcana) check may pass. Failing the Intelligence check alerts the nearest monolith footman or empty cloak to throw a trespasser out of the royal wing of the palace.

50. Chamber of the Huntsmen. A salon used for appointments with visiting nobles, scholars, and clergy who have gained a brief audience with one of the major figures of the court. It is also sometimes reserved for the courtship or more intimate appointments of the royals and their followers, because visiting it does not require traversing the Great Hall (area 62). It is named for the tapestries that adorn its walls, though courtly wags claim that the place is where the prince hunts various beauties and the queen judges the suitability of paramours and admirers.

51. Tower of the Lords of Light. This tower is the home and refuge of the court's sorcerers, warlocks, and wizards. It is always lit by a large group of lantern dragonettes—the beasts are bred and fed here, although they sleep in the Spiral Maze (see Act IV, Scene 2). The halls of the tower are unornamented and stripped of illusion, showing only bare stone. This is itself, of course, an illusion: the stones are thickly covered with layers of runes and wardings, preventing the use of any divine magic within the tower. This includes both spells and magical features (such as Channel Divinity).

Spells that produce light or deal radiant damage are automatically cast at one level higher than the expended slot's level, even if that level is normally beyond the caster's ability. Similarly, cantrips that produce light have their illumination radius doubled, and those that deal radiant damage deal an extra die of damage.

52. Black Well of Night. This is the pit of the demon lord Akyishigal. A deep, magical darkness at the bottom of the descent (about 50 feet below the floor) keeps the chamber in a state of perpetual gloom; some refer to this as "elder darkness," as if it were a living thing, though it neither speaks nor eats, and yet it makes the skin crawl.

The cave at the bottom contains solid black pillars of an unearthly chill, and the chamber is always occupied by servants of the demon lord (such as roachlings, psoglav demons, or tiefling courtiers). The pit below is crawling with millions of roaches and guarded as well by Akyishigal's roachlings and other servants. No light shines here unless the elder darkness is destroyed by a *sunlight* spell or *dispel magic*. Spells that produce light or deal radiant damage are cast at one level lower than the slot expended to cast them (minimum 1st level). Cantrips that produce light create only half their usual radius of illumination, and cantrips that deal radiant damage deal one less die of damage (minimum 1 die).

53. Chamber of the Black Prince. Decorated with hundreds of antlers, boar tusks, and wings, these rooms are a shrine to the chase and the kill. The beds are covered with bearskins, the chandeliers are made of antlers, and the floors are inlaid with scenes of falconry and boar, fox, bear, and deer hunting. The Black Prince's servants are all deathwisps and favored nobles of the court, most of them young shadow fey rakes. Those who visit him here are offered a cup of black wine or green ale; those who refuse to drink are challenged to a duel.

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54. Private Apartments of Ulara of the Seven Veils. Filled with dozens of diaphanous silk banners and hanging tapestries, this chamber blocks line of sight beyond a single square in any direction. The courtesan Ulara is rarely here unless she is entertaining an admirer. She wears silks and flowing capes in bright colors, knotted and draped enticingly.

55. Private Apartments of Mora Moonwater the Rain-Cloaked. A small fountain of stone and water burbles quietly in a corner, and the chamber has a warm, wet atmosphere filled with scent: pine, rose, plum, or whatever suits the courtesan's fancy that day. She wears blue garments meshed with pearls, solid raindrops, and shimmering scales and necklaces of mithral. The fountain contains small fish, and the furnishings display an aquatic theme: mother-of-pearl and lapis inlays, table legs carved in the shape of fish, and so forth.

56. Private Apartments of Songemesha the Raven-Haired. The courtesan Songemesha is a drow of mixed blood; her charms are peculiar ones, for she has both black hair and black skin, and her eyes glow like molten gold. This chamber is decorated in white silk wall hangings with a rug of pale yellow spider silk. The room is guarded by a half-dozen swarms of spiders at all times; a single goblin maidservant named Spinner is also here to scream a warning when admirers go too far.

57. Private Apartments of Ballandrine the Frost-Eyed. The consort's room is decorated in furs and fine wall hangings of woven silk in pale green and gold, with a white bearskin rug before the window and ermine blankets on the bed. Ballandrine is the most powerful of the human changelings at the courts, and he helps his fellow humans when he can; as a result, the servants feed him information and provide help in his schemes among the fey. He secretly favors the cause of the Moonlit King, hoping to return him to favor.

58. Private Apartments of Maraya the Sapphire. These rooms seem to be decorated in precious stones and rich dyed and gilded wallpaper. The courtesan Maraya is always here during daylight hours, and prowls the courts and halls by night. She is attended by four maids who are also bodyguards. The creature is a succubus; in male form, he calls himself Marek the Sapphire (see page 56).

59. Waiting Salon. Those who seek entry to the Great Hall must wait here. A painting of the queen hangs on the eastern wall; servants and lesser nobles always bow to it as they enter or leave the room (kitchen staff bearing dishes might nod instead). Visitors are expected to avert their gaze; staring at the painting is considered impossibly rude and might be cause for a challenge to duel. Those who do stare, however, can learn a few things: 1) the queen wears diamonds and carries a glowing wand; 2) she is stunningly attractive but with a sort of cruel beauty, cold as the stars; and 3) she is surrounded by wisps of fog and constellations unlike those seen elsewhere.

60. Old Duke's Chambers. Often used by the court's secretaries and by lovers seeking a tryst, the Duke's Chambers have not been anyone's quarters since the death of the old duke (the Black Prince's uncle, Gallasphear Trimordian, who was the queen's younger brother) some years ago. The chamber is decorated with thick tapestries, has a writing desk, and boasts a splendid view of the bridge and the Western Gate.

61. The King and Queen's Chambers. Furnished in silver, gold, ebony, and mahogany, the King and Queen's Chambers are a maze of gauzy silk dividers and beautiful tapestries of spun glass, spun moonlight, and spun silver and bronze. There are bright pearl perches for two ancient lantern dragonettes the size of hounds. The room has chests, wardrobes, black carpets woven with constellations and abstract patterns, and a dozen maidservants who wait on the queen.

62. The Great Hall of the Shadow Court. This is a high-ceilinged hall with several niches and hidden chambers for the prince's men and for ladies-in-waiting. On the main floor, black wallpaper hangs from the walls around a dozen columns of alabaster set with perches for lantern dragonettes; the floor is made of alternating black and white parquetry, and glowing jewels in the shape of unfamiliar constellations hang from the ceiling. Courtiers visit here only when invited by the royal family, but the Black Prince's friends, dogs, and archers are always present. The archers stand at the ready on the hall's small balcony, keeping their eyes on visitors but not interfering with court business. The dogs stay close to their master. Shadow doors lead from here to most sections of the Royal Halls; activating one requires a successful DC 30 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

63. Royal Audience Chamber. Not technically part of the Royal Halls, this chamber rests atop a cloud of shadowstuff beneath a sky sparkling with a million stars. This is one of the few places in the Shadow Realm with an unclouded view of the sky. The king and queen are always illuminated in soft, dim light by a train of lantern dragonettes, and a trio of birds watches over each throne when it is occupied (owls for the queen, ravens for the king). A cloudy mist envelops the room's floor, and the ceiling is open to the heavens. The whole place seems to be constructed on a cloud far above the courts proper—

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and it is. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) check reveals that the air is cold and thin enough to correspond to an altitude of at least 1 mile, perhaps more. Visitors are often cowed by the majesty of the site, which is its intended purpose.

64. The Red Princess's Chamber. This room is a largely empty chamber, once reserved for an ambassador from the ghouls of the Twilight Empire. Its scarlet wall hangings are neatly kept, and a single goblin named Miletta Nichtowls often lurks here, shirking her duties elsewhere in the courts. She fears discovery and might offer directions or a half-gnawed lamb shank as a bribe to anyone who stumbles across her hiding spot.

65. Chamber of Ermine the Jongleur. Offering a view of New Moon Hall (area 5) through a small spyhole, this chamber is decorated in excellent tapestries of what the shadow fey call "dappling"—entirely abstract and yet leafy shapes that seem to move on their own.

66. Storage. Various chests of clothes and linens, as well as currently unfashionable furnishings, are stored here. The contents are clean, yet an astonishing number of white and lilac spiders emerge and begin crawling around if the chests are disturbed.

67. Maids' Chamber. Several ladies' maids gather here for sewing, gossip, and minor arcana. The two balconies give it a breezy air, and the queen can call the maids easily enough from the solarium if she desires company.

68. Solarium. Her Majesty often spends days or nights here, looking through the enormous crystal skylight at various stars or cloud formations of interest. The chamber's furnishings are all fashioned of ebony and silver, worth a fortune—but prone to shout out warnings if carried out of the room. This is one of her Majesty's favorite places for dressing down disobedient courtiers, lazy cooks, or nosy adventurers.

Gossip and Rumors

The characters can try to gather information as often as you decide the opportunity presents itself, using Intelligence (Investigation) or Charisma (Persuasion) checks. What they get for their efforts depends on their Status and the individual they interact with. The entries vary for characters with Status of 5 or lower, Status 6–10, Status 11–15, and Status 16 or higher. When the characters make a check, refer to the appropriate section below and give them the information associated with the check total (but not any lower results). As the lists indicate, not everything they might learn will ultimately do them any good.

Status 5 or Lower: Servants' Gossip

1–5	The cook owes money to Fordin of the East, the changeling Master of Horses. (true, but irrelevant)
6–8	The cook puts saltpeter in the Master of Horses' meals. (false)
9–11	Don't step on spiders, they are royal children. (false)
12–14	Laurian the Wine Butler was caught tasting the King's Brew. (true)
15–17	You will be respected for imitating a donkey. (false, but it will make goblins laugh)
18–20	True nobility is found downstairs as well as up. Visit Moggo the Chamberlain in the Goblin Court, and you might be granted an audience with the Goblin King. (true . . . though it's more likely that the characters will be tested to perform servants' tasks like fetching water or peeling potatoes)
21–22	An all-seeing angel lives in the Tower of Light. Its name is Revich. (true)
23–24	The goblin soup chef Amaryllis Amra is wildly in love with Princess Vailessia Greystone. (improbably true!)
25–26	The glowing light from a lantern dragonette's body is a key ingredient in a more powerful raise dead ritual. (true, but you better not try it!)
27–28	Lantern dragonettes are a particular mark of royal favor. (true)
29–30	There are no "natural" creatures of the Shadow Realm. Mundane animals are all servants of the Fae in one way or another. (false; some creatures do live in the forest, such as white deer, gray moles, and black mice, but they are infused with the essence of shadow)
31–32	The underlings of the cook Blazing Barda and other servants are children stolen from the mortal world and spell-cloaked to look fey. (mostly true, though many are goblins as well)
33+	Princess Vailessia wants a puppy. The soup chef would love to sneak one to her room. (true!)

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Status 6–10: Low Gossip

1–5	At twilight on the night of the waxing moon, the shades come back for their due. (false)
6–8	Never touch your nose among duelists. It's a deadly insult. (false)
9–10	Mortal wines and spirits are more than just vile to shadow fey—they're toxic. (false)
11–12	The Grey Ladies secretly worship Mammon, the Archdevil of Greed. (false, and likely to give offense to the Ravens)
13–14	Akyishigal's roachlings work among the master cook's underlings and cook the food for diners of low Status. (false, and likely to result in a challenge to a duel if repeated)
15–16	The noble Lady Sariel has been cursed to wander, lost in the halls of the courts, not for having relations with the kennel master but for snubbing his dogs while she did. (false, and cause for a challenge to a duel if repeated)
17–18	The Moonlit King is a creature allied with dark forces: dwarves and death. He always kills mortals who have seen his true form. (false)
19–20	Stealing a glass of King's Cordial and offering it as a refreshment before a duel grants great Status to its bearer in the event that they win the duel afterward. (true; +1 Status for sheer bravado)
21–22	Whitemist, the goblin servant in charge of the dueling grounds, is addicted to ale and enchanted moments of bliss. He can easily be bribed to permit a duel out of season, or to overlook a hit. (true; ale or *philters of memory* win his favor)
23–24	The king's mad half-brother is confined to the Tower of Light, and the angel is his guardian. (almost true)
25–26	The Rain- and Flame-cloaked courtesans are plotting together with servants of the Moonlit King to supplant the Sapphire Courtesan. (true, but then it is always true)
27–28	The Sapphire Courtesan adores strawberries. (true, and grants advantage on the next attempt to woo her)
29–30	The Shadow Court has caught and imprisoned the firebird at least a dozen times . . . but it always reappears outside the court within the week. (true)
31–32	The firebird lives in the forest outside the palace, and the Black Prince has never caught it himself. Anyone who does becomes his deadly enemy. (true)
33+	Princess Vailessia wants a puppy. The soup chef would love to sneak one to her room. (true!)

Status 11–15: Courtier Gossip

1–10	The Moonlit King assassinates all those who dare visit his wife the queen; dozens of mortals have been slaughtered in his name. (false)
11–12	The queen doesn't really care about the mortal city of Zobeck although her courtiers have theories. Some say she considers the gear goddess Rava a rival. (false)
13–14	The Grey Ladies are compelled not to leave court for more than three days, or the court's power will fade. (false)
15–16	The king and queen exchange the power of the throne on a schedule only they fully understand. Each holds a piece of the Shadow Realm's power. (true)
17–18	One Lord Chelessfield from the River King's realm is visiting here. (true, and a possible ally)
19–20	The viceroy or lord that the queen intends to send to Zobeck will grind it under his boot heel, sooner than anyone thinks. The Black Prince did the same when the shadow fey conquered Corremel. (true, though the viceroy's appointment is still a distant event)
21–22	The queen visits the king but rarely; more often, she sends those who displease her into the Spiral Maze to amuse the Moonlit King or to die at his hands. (true)
23–24	All the court fears meeting the Moonlit King in his winter season. His moonlight devils destroy fey souls, and his maze is a place of horrible suffering. (true)

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25–26	No one is really sure whether the queen really wants to seize the mortal city; some think her husband made her swear to press the claim. (true)
27–28	Other courtiers believe that Zobeck is the place where the queen and the king first kissed. (true)
29–30	Some believe the queen sets the firebird free each time it is brought to her. (true)
31–32	The Moonlit King is as much a title as a person, but his word is the one that will make or break the claim to Zobeck. If he disavows the claim, the city faces no more threat from the shadow fey. (true, but rather incomplete)
33+	The queen sorrows over the king's wrath and his growing bloodlust, which make him dangerous to the entire court. She's starting to let the king go and perhaps considering a replacement. (true)

Status 16 or Higher: Royal Gossip

1–10	The queen finds "cynicism" and corrupted "purity" to be heady drinks and forces the children of the courts to serve Akyishigal in its rituals to harvest them. (false)
11–12	The king and queen are blackmailing each other for the power of the throne; each secretly despises the other. (false)
13–14	The king always consults with the queen for all decisions. (false, and likely to annoy the Black Prince or Baron Suvid)
15–16	Akyishigal is the king's lover. It's the only reason the demon lord is tolerated in the court. (juicy, but not true)
17–18	Among the queen's closest advisors, there is a fashion for wearing dried lavender tied to the left ankle. (true, but not very helpful; doing so grants advantage on a Charisma [Persuasion] check, once)
19–20	Princess Vailessia Graystone is a pawn at court, but she is also one of the few truthful and honest fey of royal blood. Surely she knows a few secrets. The servants all say she is mad about a puppy. (true)
21–22	The queen and the archmage Count Sammas Hollowgrin are having an affair. (true, though no one minds at the fey court, since affairs are common practice)
23–24	The king turns a blind eye to the affair because he fears he could not win a duel with the court's fearsome archmage and swordsman. (false; the king has no idea)
25–26	Baron Suvid is the queen's assassin and spymaster. (false, though she does sometimes confide in him)
27–28	Both the Demon Lord of Roaches and the Black Prince have aspirations to the throne. The queen plays them against one another, but it's not clear whether she can continue to do so without exiling one of them. (true)
29–30	The princess is a crucial pawn in the courts; she might marry either the Black Prince or the Demon Lord of Roaches, and her dowry would be the City of Corremel. (true)
31–32	Marrying off the princess might be the queen's best solution to resolve rivalries at court, since it would remove one of the dark pair from further politicking. However, she fears marriage to either of them might also embolden them to seize power. (true)
33+	The king is quite mad in his winter season and is only exiled as long as his madness remains. These periods have grown longer and longer. (true)

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Act II, Scene 1: Suit at the Door

A single type of enemy seems to live at the courts: an enormous, glowing suit of armor, the Queen's Champion, who defends the Western Gate and the gates to the Royal Halls as a sort of monstrous footman. This is a monolith footman, and its name is quite appropriate: the thing is 10 feet tall, and the armor is empty. When it is approached, read:

> The armor is made for an ogre or similarly sized creature: about ten feet tall, tarnished silver on steel, and apparently empty. A voice as echoing as the bottom of a well speaks, saying, "Who has invited you to the shadow courts?"

Unless the characters respond immediately with "the queen" or the title of any fey noble and also succeed on a DC 25 Charisma (Deception) check, the monolith armor realizes they are uninvited guests, and it tries to throw them out. Its sword lights up with blue flame, and it strikes to remove them as quickly as possible. Vanquishing a monolith footman is purely temporary and provides no XP, but each victory does result in a +1 increase to Status, and as Status improves, additional creatures gradually become visible to the party.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Easy—1 monolith footman

Easy (after 2–4 victories)—1 monolith footman, 1 empty cloak

Easy (after 5+ victories)—2 monolith footmen, 2 empty cloaks

The first time the characters defeat a monolith footman in combat, they gain a +1 increase to Status, and other shadow fey appear (see Table 2–6). Most creatures arrive in their animal forms: bats, birds, mice, rats, and cats will watch the party often, and they might be described as animals living in a clearly abandoned set of halls.

Alternatively, if the party avoids the footman, consider letting the characters use Intelligence (Investigation) and some combination of Intelligence (Arcana) and Intelligence (Nature) checks (all DC 18) to view the courts proper. A distillation of moonlight applied to the eyes or a few mystic passes might part the illusion for an exceptionally talented wizard or druid.

Monolith Footman

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 60 (8d10 + 16)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Damage Immunities poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't adamantine

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Blatant Dismissal. While in the courts or castles of the fey, a monolith footman that scores a successful hit with its longsword can try to force the substitution of the target with a shadow double. The target must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma saving throw or become invisible, silent, and paralyzed, while an illusory version of itself remains visible and audible—and under the monolith footman's control, shouting for a retreat or the like. Outside fey locales, this ability does not function.

Table 2–6: Defeating Monolith Armor

Number of Victories	Fey Appearing
0	Ravens, owls
1	Mice, rats, foxes
2	Silent Billoc, mute and cowardly goblin potboy
3	Eracen the court musician, Ulrika the court painter
4	Cook, brownies, goblin servants
5	Human changelings with animal heads, ogres, goblin smith
6+	Shadow fey and courtiers of low Status, such as members of the Ravens faction (see page 68), as well as the guards and their captain, the seer, and the various other creatures of the Lower Halls.

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Empty Cloak

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (10d8)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	1 (–5)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +2

Skills Stealth +4

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Resistances bludgeoning

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands Elvish and Umbral but can't speak

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Fey Flame. The ritual powering the monolith footman grants it an inner flame that it can use to enhance its weapon or its fists with extra fire or cold damage, depending on the construct's needs.

Simple Construction. A monolith footman is designed with delicate fey construction. It bursts into pieces and is destroyed when it receives a critical hit.

ACTIONS

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) cold or fire damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 9 (2d8) cold or fire damage.

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Diligent Sentinel. The empty cloak is designed to watch for intruders. It has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks.

Shadow Construction. The empty cloak is designed with delicate shadow construction. It bursts into pieces, then dissipates into shadows on a critical hit.

Wrapping Embrace. The empty cloak can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. It has advantage on attack rolls against any creature in the same space with it.

ACTIONS

Razor Cloak. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Shadow Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Shadow Snare. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* Large or smaller creatures are restrained. To escape, the restrained creature or an ally within 5 feet must make a DC 14 Strength check as an action. On a successful check, the creature is no longer restrained. The shadow snare has AC 12 and 15 hit points.

Development

After the characters have scored two victories over monolith footmen, the queen's minions call up empty cloaks to further ward the halls. The guards then attack in pairs: one cloak and one footman. Once three of these pairs are defeated, a defeated minion's last shout calls to the psoglav demons for help. A horrible baying sound is heard echoing through the halls. Proceed with Scene 3, Unleash the Hounds.

Treasure

The armor left behind from a vanquished footman is ordinary elven plate mail (albeit Large). It could be resized to Medium with a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using smith's tools, and the robes it wears might help an attempt at disguise or infiltration. In addition, the footmen and the cloaks have treasure in the form of 1,800 gp worth of mithral inlay, gems worth 5,700 gp, and two *potions of greater healing*.

Act II, Scene 2: Tripping and Thievery

As they wander and explore, the characters feel the frequent brush of invisible hands. This is the work of the goblins and lesser fey who can see the party perfectly well and enjoy taking advantage of their invisibility.

INVISIBILITY AND FOES

The illusions covering the courts are extremely powerful and impede all vision and much sound. This makes the characters blind with respect to the invisible fey. The cloaked courtiers do their best to remain hidden, forcing characters to choose spaces randomly to attack (hoping the foe is there), and the characters cannot make opportunity attacks. In addition, this invisibility grants advantage on certain actions that the fey might take, especially shoving to trip an unsuspecting character or on Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) checks to pick pockets or steal accessible items.

See invisibility does not pierce this glamour; only *truesight* reveals the actual nature of the courts' occupation.

TRIPPING AND PUSHING

If the characters are loud and annoying or if one wanders off to the stairs alone, they are likely targets for harassment, such as thrown rocks, trip attempts on the stairs, and so on. Most of these acts deal little damage, but a +5 bonus to hit is typical for the lower-class goblins, human changelings, and lesser fey. If one of these attacks hits, the target takes 1d4 bludgeoning damage and must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw or fall prone. If the target is on the stairs when it falls prone, it falls 1d2 × 10 feet down the staircase, taking 1d4 bludgeoning damage per 10 feet fallen.

THIEVERY AND ARSON

The main thief among the many servants is a goblin potboy and sneak thief named Silent Billoc (Sleight of Hand +7); he gains advantage for being invisible. The DC for one of his thievery attempts depends on how accessible the desired item is. Stealing something from a simple pouch or pack is DC 15, while something being worn (such as a ring) is DC 25. If he succeeds, the goblin potboy takes either something small and shiny (like a ring, scarf, amulet, or holy symbol) or something he recognizes as powerful (a spell component pouch, small weapon, or potion). He cannot take a held item. Whether or not he succeeds in stealing an item, if his check result fails to exceed the target's passive Perception score, the target notices the theft (or attempted theft).

If the attempt is noticed, Billoc's first course of action is to run off. The characters can try to take precautions to prevent this, but the thief likely gets away.

Reporting Theft. If the party reports the thefts to a monolith footman or an empty cloak, the construct does not speak but nods in response and glides off. The reporting character's goods are returned under their pillow the next morning.

Attempting Arson. Foolish characters might attempt to start a fire (with a spell or otherwise), perhaps as a diversion. Doing so in the courts is a serious offense, even though normal fire does not burn properly outside

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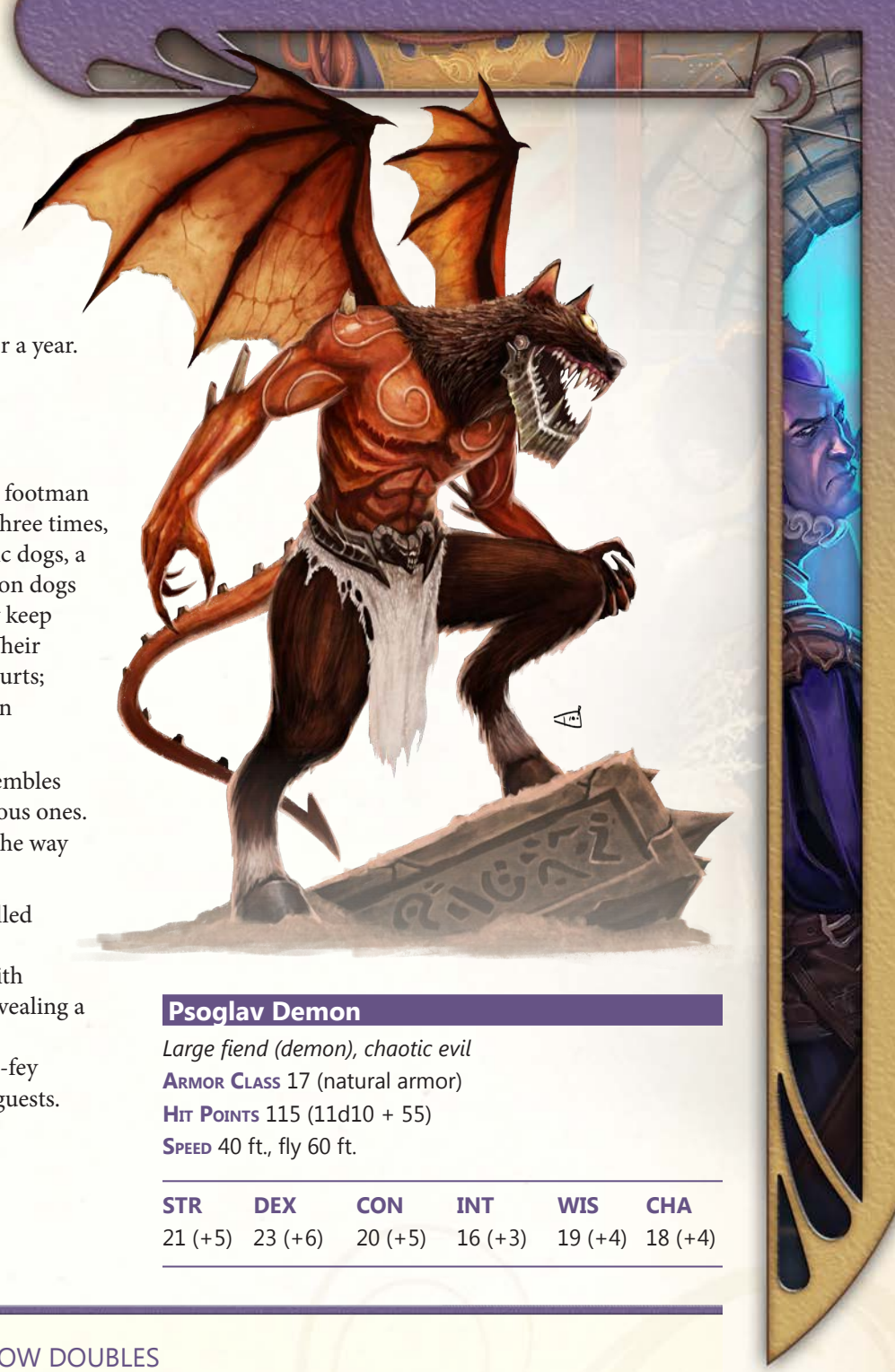
of kitchen ovens or the many hearths in the chambers and apartments. A monolith footman or other servants will arrive and attempt to put out any fire, while various nobles will try to apprehend the arsonist. Punishment ranges from setting fire to the perpetrator, to banishment from the courts for a year.



Act II, Scene 3: Unleash the Hounds

After the characters have defeated a monolith footman twice and the partnered cloaks and footmen three times, they draw the attention of the queen's demonic dogs, a gift from evil allies of long standing. The demon dogs are among her favorite creatures because they keep so many visitors away—by devouring them. Their attentions test the bravery of visitors to the courts; most run away when they hear the howls, even before seeing their source.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 20—The baying resembles the sound of dogs, but they must be enormous ones. Their deep howls sound like they come all the way from Hell.

An enormous pack of black dog-demons called the psoglav serve the queen. Each has a dog's head with iron teeth and a humanoid body with hooves for feet. Each one's helmet has a slit revealing a single large eye.

The psoglav sometimes work with the raven-fey known as the malphas to drive off unwanted guests.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Easy—1 psoglav demon
Medium—1 psoglav demon, 1 malphas
Hard—1 psoglav demon, 2 malphas

Psoglav Demon

Large fiend (demon), chaotic evil
Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 115 (11d10 + 55)
Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	23 (+6)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	19 (+4)	18 (+4)

STEEP DROPS IN STATUS AND SHADOW DOUBLES

If the characters' Status drops below the minimum of 16 to be allowed into the Royal Halls and the courts themselves, they get more than just dirty looks. Every day, the queen's champion arrives in the form of an empty cloak or a monolith footman and seeks to drive out the party—or at least the party members with low Status. Each time the champion hits, a character is teleported from the courts to the prince's hunting lodge in the Shadow Realm. The character might visit distant keeps and lodges and receive invitations to falconry and demon fox hunts, but remains away from the courts for a few days. Tell the player that his or her character has been replaced by a changeling, and to act accordingly; the real character will return at some future point.

Shadow Doubles. Behind the scenes, the missing character is replaced in the combat at the start of the next round by a fey shadow double. The usual player can be informed of the switch if you see fit; the real character returns 1d4 days later.

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Saving Throws Dex +9, Con +8, Wis +7, Cha +7
Skills Acrobatics +9, Perception +6, Intimidation +7, Stealth +9
Damage Resistances cold, lightning
Damage Immunities fire, poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal, telepathy 60 ft.
Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The psoglav's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). It can innately cast the following spell, requiring no material components:

1/day: *greater invisibility*

Magic Weapons. The psoglav's weapon attacks are magical.

Shadow Door (4/Day). The psoglav can travel between shadows as if by means of a *dimension door* spell. The magical transport must begin and end in an area with at least some dim light. The shadow door can span a maximum of 90 feet.

Actions

Multiattack. The psoglav makes three bite attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d12 + 5) piercing damage.

Steal Shadow (Recharge 5–6). The psoglav emits a beam from its single eye. One target it can see within 60 feet is pushed back 20 feet and must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone. The target's shadow stays in the space the target originally occupied, and acts as an undead shadow under the command of the psoglav.

If the creature whose shadow was stolen flees the encounter, it has no shadow for 1d12 days, after which the undead shadow fades and the creature's natural shadow returns. The undead shadow steals the body of the original creature if the creature is killed; in that case, the creature returns to life with half its maximum hit points, its alignment shifts to evil, and it falls under the command of the psoglav. The original creature regains its natural shadow immediately if the undead shadow dies.

A creature whose shadow is stolen by this ability can't have its shadow stolen again by any psoglav for the next 24 hours, but it can still be pushed back and knocked prone.

Malphas (Storm Crow)

Medium fey, neutral evil
Armor Class 16 (studded leather)
Hit Points 120 (16d8 + 48)
Speed 40 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +6, Wis +4, Cha +5
Skills Perception +4
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Giant, Ravenfolk, Sylvan
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The malphas's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *magic missile*
1/day: *haste*

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Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the malphas has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Night Terror. As a bonus action immediately after hitting with a melee attack, the malphas can cast *magic missile* through its weapon at the same target.

Swordtrained. Malphas are trained from youth in combat. They are proficient with all martial melee and ranged weapons.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The malphas makes three longsword attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) slashing damage if used with two hands.

REACTIONS

Shadow Call. A malphas can cast *magic missile* as a reaction when it is hit by a ranged weapon attack.

Development

If a shadow double has been conjured up by a monolith footman (see the "Steep Drops in Status and Shadow Doubles" sidebar, page 63), the real character returns from the forest within 1d4 days (and is again played by the player). The shadow double was a servant of the Moonlit King, and when the real character returns, the shadow double mocks the party, saying:

> "You cannot see through the simplest trickery, so I go to report what I have learned to my master, the Moonlit King. Farewell, fools!" The figure's skin peels away, leaving only a core of mist and shadows that fades to nothing.

The shadow double is as good as its word, teleporting away unless the party takes extreme measures to hold the shadow double in place. In that case, the double is revealed as a member of the court, one of the Ravens, who protests his treatment and demands an audience with someone "of proper noble blood" or offers a payment of ransom.

THE PSOGLAV

Human mythology is filled with thousands of demons, a sign of just how many things we—or our ancestors—feared. One of these, from Serbian mythology, is the psoglav: a one-eyed dog demon with iron teeth. With that description, it seemed like a good fit for the pack that serves the Queen of Night and Magic.

Treasure

The "dogs" and "crows" have treasure in the form of gemstones on their collars. These are five emeralds (each worth 1,000 gp) and one blood-red carbuncle (worth 700 gp). In addition, gathering a few hairs from the tails of the dog-demons can help the Grey Ladies (see page 71) in their weaving and spinning of a magical tapestry and complete a minor quest. The dogs are unwilling to give up their hair; doing so requires either killing a psoglav and taking its hair, making a successful attack with a slashing weapon against a grappled psoglav, or making a successful DC 25 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check.

Act II, Scene 4: The Blue Horse and the Kennels

In this scene, the horse and hounds become visible to a character who has a Status of 3 or higher. Other characters can see them if they are pointed out and those characters make successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) checks.

THE BLUE HORSE

> You enter the stables, and you see a blue horse in the largest stall. The animal has a white mane and silver shoes.

The Black Prince rides the blue horse, Lazulin, whenever he travels to his hunting lodge, hunts in the Margreve Forest, inspects the nearest shadow fey villages, or gambles and carouses two days' ride away through the woods in the Hidden City of Corremel (his major fiefdom). Contrariwise, the horse is a much gentler steed when carrying Princess Vailessia Graystone.

Riding the horse is difficult, whether mounting it successfully (DC 20 Dexterity [Acrobatics] check) or getting it to obey even simple commands (DC 25 Wisdom [Animal Handling] check). Riding the horse without permission is an insult to the prince and results in a –2 deduction to Status for the rider. Gaining permission is rare and happens only for one of the prince's favorites (see "The Hunting Lodge: Catching the Firebird," page 116). In addition, riding the blue horse without permission leads to a challenge to a duel by one of the Ravens (see page 68).

The horse listens intently when anyone attempts to quietly converse in the stables, and the prince occasionally learns secrets from it.

Eric Tomlinson (Order - 5183207)

THE HOUNDS OF THE MARGREVE

About a dozen large black dogs are sleeping in a large pile in a room behind the stables, snoring softly. A collection of enormous and well-chewed bones is scattered around them.

Befriending the Hounds. Befriending the shadow hounds is a skill challenge or a roleplaying encounter. It requires three successful DC 17 Wisdom (Animal Handling) checks before three failures. Each failure increases the DC of subsequent checks by 1. An offering of freshly killed meat (at least the size of a Medium creature) grants advantage on the checks. A character who can speak to the hounds (such as with a *speak with animals* spell) can substitute Charisma (Persuasion) checks instead.

Alternatively, if the characters bring the hounds a freshly killed deer each day for a week, the hounds come to trust them. Hunting deer in the forest requires a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Survival) check. Each hunt takes five hours to complete.

Gaining the favor of the hounds grants advantage on interactions with Kolya, and shifts his attitude to friendly. The characters gain 2,000 XP.

Taunting the Hounds. Teasing the shadow hounds brings no Status penalty, but it is very foolish: 2d6 hounds are present in the stables at any time, and they attack the teaser en masse if any of the hounds take damage. Killing one of the prince's hounds results in an immediate –2 deduction to Status and a challenge from Kolya the Kennel Master to "bows at 5 paces," although he hates dueling.

THE KENNEL MASTER

Kolya is in charge of the hunting dogs and the kennel boys. Although a minor noble, he is rarely found in the courts proper, having a great disdain for the duels and games of the courtiers. Kolya appears as a tall shadow fey with wolfish features. He dresses in black hunting leathers and carries several heavy knives about his person. In more formal circumstances, he adds a fine feathered hat to his ensemble. Kolya comes across as blunt and unrefined.

Though unlikely to challenge a character to a duel, Kolya could face the party in direct combat; the prince has often arranged hunts in which his enemies become the prey. Kolya can also be a source of information, since he is an ally of the prince and he is aware of gossip that takes place in the presence of the kennel boys (too low in Status to be noticed, secrets are sometimes discussed around them as though they weren't there). It is even possible to gain Kolya as an ally—he pines for Maurelle, one of the queen's ladies in waiting. Characters who play matchmaker would earn a great boon by helping the lonely kennel master.

VOICES IN THE DARK

The courts might be empty, but they aren't necessarily quiet. If things grow dull or the players are unsure what to do, send them on a wild goose chase with voices of shadow fey mages: whispering voices tease and lead them directly into an encounter with some of the shadow hounds (see page 35) of the Invisible Court.

Not all voices need be hostile. Singers praising the queen or the prince and princess make a perfect accompaniment to the Invisible Court, confounding the characters' ability to find them. The same trick could be used later in the adventure with a chorus of lantern dragonettes during Act III. It could be very annoying for the heroes to be serenaded while they're trying to sneak around.

Eric Lindahl (Order #3154079)

Kolya the Kennel Master

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +7, Cha +6

Skills Arcana +5, Perception +5, Stealth +8, Survival +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Fey Ancestry. Kolya has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. Kolya's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. He can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components.

3/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Kolya deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Kolya that isn't incapacitated and Kolya doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Kolya has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. Kolya has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Kolya makes two attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Act II, Scene 5: The Court Musician

Eracen is an elf from the mortal world who has—much against his will—become the mournful court musician to the Shadow Realm. Eracen might become an ally of the characters, but he demands some show of competence before truly befriending the party:

> The thin elf's smile is wholly unnerving: not because any malice or cruelty lurks beyond his perfectly straight-toothed grin, but because of its unnatural intensity. The pale man looks as if he were posing for some portrait, waiting for a painter to capture him. Even in a painting, the fellow would be somewhat disquieting. His pale blue eyes peer out wildly from beneath his blond locks, most of which are gathered in a long ponytail. His snow-white skin lacks any of the flush or blooded hue of health.

Eracen longs for something rare in the courts of the shadow fey: a reprieve. Not native to the Shadow Realm, Eracen found long ago that he lacked the stomach for the treachery and cruelty of his hosts. Still, the elf knows he must play along or face the shadow fey's punishment. He often wonders if this imagined penalty could possibly outstrip the torture of his virtual imprisonment. Eracen is imprisoned because he is a violinist without peer. With his face pressed against the violin's cool wood, the haunted elf occasionally finds peace. In his hands, the bow ignites the string with fiery notes that stir whatever embers still glow in his heart.

Ultimately, this warmth is an illusion; his majestic, mournful music becomes a court favorite, as necessary to a social event as the royal family itself. If it was only his spirit being crushed, Eracen might still rail against his lot, but his body grows weak as well. The Master Summoner, Count Sammas Hollowgrin, regularly takes Eracen's blood to fuel his rituals; these rituals use his non-native blood to fuel portals to, in Count Hollowgrin's words, the "lighted planes." As long as Eracen remains strong enough to perform, this torture is allowed and even praised by the court.

Despite all this, Eracen attempts to display an upbeat persona. He laughs. He bursts into song and dance. He tells jokes and regales with stories. He does it all with a smile etched into his face and a hollow feeling of self-betrayal gripping his heart. In his own time, he often drinks himself into oblivion, desperate to escape.

Dealing with the Characters. Outwardly, Eracen is humorous and gregarious. His jokes are bawdy, and his stories are gossipy. The slender elf often touches others when he talks: a soft tap on the back, a slight

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grip of the shoulder, a lean into the personal space of another. When spoken to, he laughs loudly at even the smallest hint of comedy, and follows it up with overzealous compliments. He fawns over the characters' accomplishments and lavishes attention on them.

In other words, Eracen quickly grows annoying. He does have his uses, though. He is a storehouse of information and has no qualms about discussing the court with the characters; of course, even when he doesn't know something, he does not hesitate to offer gossip in its stead.

Most important, his standing as Chief Entertainer allows him and those he vouches for access to some of the lesser functions and locales with minimal hassle. Serving as guide, informant, and confidant to the characters offers him no end of pleasure. He doesn't bother hiding this enjoyment, often speaking in a conspiratorial tone when regarding their shadowy hosts. Eracen strives to nurture a love of music, especially the violin, within the characters. He will spend time, often gossiping about the shadow fey and the court, teaching the characters how to play the violin. It is only during these lessons that Eracen displays any anger (and even then, it seems clearly a slip from his usual demeanor). He responds to repeated failure or disinterest with sharp, biting retorts, although he often apologizes profusely afterward and blames these outbursts on his passion for music.

Motivation. Eracen's offer of friendship and aid to the characters is born out of his desperation to leave the court. He believes that if he helps the characters grow more popular than he is, he would be granted an escape from the woeful work of playing for his captors. Though he pins his hopes on teaching the characters to become musicians, Eracen takes any measure of popularity they gain in any discipline and promotes it. This could be demon fighting, dueling, arcane mastery . . . to Eracen each endeavor represents a possible escape.

Development. Becoming too closely associated with Eracen might cost the characters something eventually; the courtesans are not fond of him, and the duelists consider him largely beneath contempt. Over time, the characters might realize that their elf guide is but a minor cog of the court—and they might abandon him as well, moving on into higher social spheres. At that point, his hopes dashed, Eracen might grow desperate enough to attempt a kidnapping or assault of some kind—and if that fails, perhaps even suicide.

Treasure

Befriending Eracen and keeping him living in hope eventually pays off. The character who invests the most time and effort in befriending him, by playing music and such, is rewarded with the gift of an appropriate uncommon magic item. Ideally, this is a miscellaneous item related to music, rather than armor or weaponry, but the idea is simply that Eracen gives one of his greatest treasures to the characters in return for the friendship they have shown.

Act II, Scene 6: The Ravens in the Court

The young duelists and rakes of little Status often hang out in the dueling grounds (1d8 – 3 of them are present there at any given time). The duelists all share the same statistics and are, frankly, both curious about visitors and spoiling for a fight with anyone who seems willing to give them one. Their dueling skills are formidable, but otherwise they are variously spoiled, vain, and self-centered. If the characters spend any time questioning them (or even just practicing their martial skills in the courtyard), one of the Ravens named Josha Migallisti approaches them and challenges them to a test of skill at arms. Read the following:

> A young shadow fey approaches, his hand on his hilt, and sneers. "This is our court, and not for visitors. You carry a worthy blade and are a man of honor. And yet you have acted dishonorably, poking your nose where it does not belong." He draws his sword.
>
> "Defend yourself, or be proved a coward."

Wisdom (Insight) DC 15—The challenge is clearly to a formal duel; you are not expected to fight to the death, but there are probably rules about what is a "proper" duel.

If the player asks, describe the dueling rules briefly. If the character agrees to the duel, use the dueling rules on page 99. The opponent is a shadow fey duelist (AC 17, 117 hp, *Rapier*. +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage; *Parry*. The shadow fey duelist adds 3 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, it must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon; see *Tome of Beasts* for full statistics).

At the end of the duel, the character gains or loses Status as described on page 99. Read the following if the character did not cheat:

> "You fought well." Your foe bows to you. "Join us in the Ravens, the noble society of the blade. None shall oppose you with our support."

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If the characters decide on a general brawl rather than a duel, they each suffer a −3 deduction to Status and take part in the following encounter. As the fey say, when the prince smiles, the queen herself is pleased. When the prince whispers a word of complaint, the queen frowns and the court weeps.

BRAWLING, NOT DUELING

The rakes stand in the arcade. They shout and taunt the characters while fighting, and a crowd of goblins, half-elves, low-Status shadow fey, and human changelings quickly gathers to watch the duel. The crowd fills most of the space in the arcade and around the open central area where the Ravens flash their weapons and boast.

Crowd. Entering the crowd requires a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check to push through or a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to slip through. Failure means that the moving character ends their movement in the first crowd space. A character affected by *pass without trace* or similar magic can move through the crowd without a check.

Regaining Status. If the characters win the brawl without killing anyone, they gain a +3 increase to Status (regaining the points lost from brawling in the first place), but they gain no additional Status.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Hard—Brightspur, 2 shadow fey rakes

Hard—Brightspur, 3 shadow fey rakes

Deadly—Brightspur, 4 shadow fey rakes, 1 hound of the night

Brightspur, First Knife of the Ravens

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Int +3

Skills Arcana +3, Acrobatics +7, Deception +5, Perception +3, Stealth +9

Damage Resistances poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Elvish, thieves' cant, Umbral

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Assassinate. During his first turn, Brightspur has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit Brightspur scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Evasion. If Brightspur is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, Brightspur instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

Fey Ancestry. Brightspur has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. Brightspur's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. He can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

2/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Brightspur deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advanrage on the attack roll, or when the

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target is within 5 feet of an ally of Brightbpur that isnt' incapacitated and Brightspur doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Brightspur has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. Brightspur has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Brightspur makes two rapier attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 34 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 8) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 34 (7d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Brightspur is a boastful, preening sort who laughs as he cuts enemies down. His richly decorated weapon is difficult to see clearly, and he wields it with confidence. A cosmetic alchemical treatment makes the weapon opaque.

Shadow Fey Rake

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Cha +4

Skills Acrobatics +6, Arcana +2, Intimidation +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The shadow fey has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put it to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The shadow fey's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

2/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow fey has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. The shadow fey has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow fey makes two melee attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. The shadow fey rake adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the rake must see the target and be wielding a melee weapon.

Hound of the Night

Large monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d10 + 30)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	9 (–1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +5, Wis +5

Skills Intimidation +3, Perception +5, Stealth +6

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Immunities cold

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages understands Elvish and Umbral but can't speak

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Blood Scent. A hound of the night can follow a scent through *phase shifts*, ethereal movement, *dimension door*, and *fey steps* of any kind. *Teleport* and *plane shift* are beyond its ability to follow.

Innate Spellcasting. The hound's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom. It can innately cast the following spell, requiring no material components:

At will: *dimension door*

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d10 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Frost Breath (Recharge 5–6). The hound exhales a 15-foot cone of frost. Each creature in the cone must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 44 (8d10) cold damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

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Brightspur opens up by using Sneak Attack against lightly armored spellcasters.

The shadow fey rakes constantly press their advantage. Their greatest trick is to use *misty step* to achieve a flanking position and attack an unassuming target.

Brightspur and the rakes will happily accept the voluntary surrender of any foe and might even offer this way out to a clearly bloodied and beaten enemy. They never strike to kill unless one of their own party has been killed first; they strike to subdue or incapacitate, leaving their foe down and out rather than down and dead. The hound works to continually provide Brightspur a flanking opportunity.

Development. Winning in a brawl without killing anyone cancels out the Status loss, but the party makes enemies of the Ravens permanently. The characters must find someone else to duel for Status; the Ravens won't have it unless a profound and sincere apology is forthcoming—requiring either a successful DC 23 Charisma (Persuasion) check from the character they challenged to the proper duel, or a bribe in the form of a token from some other faction member or a miscellaneous magic item of uncommon or greater rarity.

Treasure

If a character fights the duel and wins, the winner gains a +4 increase to Status if during dueling season—or a +6 increase to Status if not during dueling season (see Table 3–2: Status Changes from Duels, page 99) and is offered membership in the Ravens. A character who accepts this offer is given a *+1 magic weapon* as a sign of the Ravens' respect. If the character does join the faction, Brightspur shares some information about possible other duels to fight (avoid Baron Suvid if possible), about the Bridge of Night (see area 26), and about the finest courtesans. He offers two minor quests:

- Lose a duel with him in front of the courtesan Lishekki, his current flame (thereby taking a –3 deduction to Status in the cause of love); award each character 600 XP if completed.
- Bring him the albino raven from the Moon-Viewing Tower; award each character 900 XP if completed.

Whether the party joins the faction or not, winning a duel makes them less of a target for the Ravens' attentions, and the other party members are accepted as worthy of the Ravens' conversation and perhaps a little swordplay.

Act II, Scene 7: The Grey Ladies Spin

When the party has one character with a Status of 11 or higher, the group is invited to visit the Grey Ladies, a coterie of elderly shadow fey noblewomen and former courtesans who gossip, knit, and weave various items of finest silk and shadowstuff. They are hardly power players in the court, but they are a faction with at least a little influence, mostly because of the respect that the shadow fey pay to their elderly. Many fey nobles remember their former courtesans very fondly, a fact that the Grey Ladies exploit rarely but ruthlessly.

If the party accepts the invitation, read the following:

> The room is well lit with gentle yellow light; two lantern dragonettes seem to watch the knitting of the elderly ladies of the court carefully. Two white-haired men work an enormous loom together, the shuttle flying so fast it cannot be seen. The threads of the tapestry they are creating seem to sing a song of power, strengthening the sense of potent magic in the air. Flakes of shadowstuff drip from the loom.
>
> In addition to the men, ladies in dresses and shawls of soft gray mouse fur are sitting on tall chairs, knitting long, complicated . . . nets? Veils? It's difficult to tell.

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 17—The song of the tapestry is indeed arcane but not yet at full strength.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 19—The knitters are working on neither a net nor a veil but a long, strange cloak. At its intersections hang small silver stars; the threads themselves are made of black yarn.

If a character has accepted the *ritual of true sight* from Revich the Blind Seer (see page 75), read the following:

> Of the fey here, the ones weaving on the loom are just as they seem. The knitters, though, are not quite what one might think. Their needles are made of bone, the black yarn they use seems oddly metallic, and the knitting elderly ladies of the court are . . . spider-like, at the very least. Each has mandibles and four arms, a bit like a more refined ettercap.
>
> "Stop staring," says one of them. "Your eyes might fall out."

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Let the characters introduce themselves, and then read or paraphrase the following:

> "We are pleased you have come to us. Give us a portion of your courage and your strength, thirteen threads from one of your heads. We shall weave it into the loom, and your prestige among the court will rise, for you will be numbered with us, the ladies whose weaving gathers shadow and light and makes them into the turning wheel of Fate."

Wisdom (Insight) DC 18, if suspicious—The offer seems remarkably generous for the fey. There might be more to it.

The characters are well advised to tread carefully and ask questions before saying yes. Any character who gives up thirteen hairs from their head also loses 10 from their hit point maximum or loses one of their highest-level spell slots for the rest of the adventure—but making this sacrifice means they are permitted to join the Grey Ladies faction.

If a character agrees and joins the faction, the Grey Ladies speak again:

> "We are glad you have chosen wisely, and we are pleased to see you rise in the court's esteem. But remember us, or else we will most assuredly remember you when the time comes. So it is woven, so will it be done."

As a member of the faction, the character gains a +4 increase to Status and is awarded a badge of woven gray silk as well as a boon (see "Treasure" below) while losing the hit points or the spell slot. This penalty is lifted (and membership in the faction ends) when the character leaves the realm and returns to the mortal world. If the character has been respectful, however, the ladies fondly recall the character's association in future dealings.

FIGHTING FATE

Intelligence (Investigation) DC 16—These fey are cloaked in thick illusion, but underneath, they are not normal fey at all; the women are six-armed creatures with compound eyes, and their clacking knitting needles are made of bones and steel.

A character who succeeds on this check sees through the illusion that the Grey Ladies maintain about themselves, and realizes that the women among them are six-armed arachnoid fey.

Chaos ensues when it becomes clear that a mortal has seen through their disguise, and the Grey Ladies demand an immediate, sincere apology (which requires a successful DC 20 Charisma [Persuasion] check from the offending speaker), or they demand the characters leave and never return. If the characters make a fuss, the quicksteps attack to force them out.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Medium (8th-level characters)—2 quicksteps, 1 Grey Lady fatespinner

Hard (8th-level characters)—2 quicksteps, 2 Grey Lady fatespinners

Hard (10th-level characters)—2 quicksteps, 2 Grey Lady fatespinners, 2 shadow fey rakes

Grey Lady Fatespinner

Medium fey, neutral

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	18 (+4)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)

Skills Deception +8, Perception +5, Stealth +7

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Glamour Veil. As an action, the Grey Lady can cloak herself in an illusion of a Medium humanoid. The illusion is nearly perfect, and even fools the sense of touch. A creature inspecting the Grey Lady can make a DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check as an action. On a success, the creature can see through the illusion to glimpse the Grey Lady's hazy true form. The illusion fades if the Grey Lady falls unconscious or if she dies.

Spider Climb. The Grey Lady can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Touch of Fate. The Grey Lady has advantage on all saving throws.

Web Sense. While in contact with a web, the Grey Lady knows the exact location of any other creature in contact with the same web.

Web Walker. The Grey Lady ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

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Quickstep

Small fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 110 (20d6 + 40)

Speed 120 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (–1)	21 (+5)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +8

Skills Acrobatics +11, Perception +8, Sleight of Hand +11, Stealth +11

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Umbral

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Evasion. If the quickstep is subjected to an effect that allows it to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, it instead takes no damage if it succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if it fails.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The quickstep deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the quickstep that isn't incapacitated and the quickstep doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Grey Lady makes three attacks: one with her bite and two with her claws. If her Web action is available, she can make one web attack in place of a bite.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage. The creature must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Web (Recharge 5–6). *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one Large or smaller creature. *Hit:* The creature is restrained by webbing. As an action, the restrained creature can make a DC 13 Strength check, escaping from the webbing on a success. The effect also ends if the webbing is destroyed. The webbing has AC 10, 5 hit points, vulnerability to fire damage, and immunity to bludgeoning, poison, and psychic damage.

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Speed Blur. Attack rolls against the quickstep have disadvantage unless its speed is reduced to 0.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The quickstep makes three shortsword attacks.

Shorsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage.

Invisibility. The quickstep magically turns invisible until it attacks, or until it loses concentration (as if concentrating on a spell). Any equipment the quickstep wears or carries is invisible with it.

Shadow Fey Rake

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Cha +4

Skills Acrobatics +6, Arcana +2, Intimidation +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The shadow fey has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put it to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The shadow fey's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

2/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow fey has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. The shadow fey has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow fey makes two melee attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. The shadow fey rake adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the rake must see the target and be wielding a melee weapon.

The fatespinners use their webs to lock down the strongest foes, leaving them hampered for the quicksteps to cut with sneak attacks then step away.

The quicksteps attack the weakest foes while mocking the strongest. They slip past enemies using their speed and attack old, unarmored, or slow foes while flanking either with each other or with the rakes. They count on their high movement rate to get around a group of foes.

Development. If the characters do join this faction, they might be asked to undertake a minor quest or two, and when they make a Charisma (Persuasion) check while at court, they can roll a d4 and add the result to the total. Leaving the Grey Ladies without permission can be fatal; the faction's patron, the powerful duelist Baron Suvid (see page 106), challenges the unfaithful member of the faction to a duel.

Treasure

If the characters defeat the Grey Ladies in combat, the characters find an uncommon wondrous magic item. The suggested item is a cloth or woven item, such as a *bag of holding*, a *cloak of elvenkind*, a *cloak of protection*, or *slippers of spider climbing*. However, if the party decides to join this faction, they gain that treasure without combat, requiring only the completion of a minor quest (which gains each character 700 XP). These minor quests might involve any of the following:

- Fetching twenty strands of horsehair from Lazulin, the royal horse (see page 48)
- Finding a puppy for the princess (see area 40, page 54)
- Challenging Sir Yngress the Red (see page 102), an elf from the River Court, to a duel (winning not required)

Act II, Scene 8: The Blind Seer

The blind seer Revich is the leading power of good among the fey, serving the Lords of Light, and is the sworn enemy of Akyishigal, the Demon Lord of Roaches (see page 109). Sometimes called the Fiery Angel, his gaze burns away illusions, and if a character joins his faction, the angel might teach that individual a valuable spell.

Revich serves the harsh god, Khors-Amon, Lord of the Sun, and seeks to purify and convert those members of the courts who will listen to him. It is a difficult burden to bear, and his faction is a small one. Though he is the sworn enemy of all demons and night creatures, Revich's services as a soothsayer and sage are much in demand, and his time is largely spoken for. Two monolith footmen, the shadow fey duelist Anya, and the witchlight (see *Tome of Beasts*) Krasnaya guard the door to the tower—they try to prevent most visitors from passing, and they are immune to threats and bribery. A character must have a Status of 11 or higher to gain a

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legitimate appointment with Revich on his own; those with lower Status are ignored.

If a character has a Status of 15 or higher, however, the tables turn, and he or she is invited to an audience with the seer, who seeks to evaluate this rising star for himself. The seer has no intention of answering many questions or providing help immediately, but he might offer an extremely helpful spell, the *ritual of true sight* (see page 76).

The members of the Lords of Light faction keep Revich in the Tower of the Lords of Light (see area 51), at the top of the tower where the lantern dragonettes rest and where they are fed. This chamber is relatively quiet and well guarded by shining radiance; most of the shadow fey avoid it for that reason. Others believe that Revich is the one who is reluctant to confront the many shadow fey outside the tower, and that he remains a hermit by choice rather than being secluded because of the various lords' pressures or wardings. Neither side is telling much.

AN AUDIENCE WITH REVICH

Before he answers any questions, Revich demands that the party wait for a little while in the lowest chamber of the Tower of the Lords of Light (area 51). He uses this time to privately investigate a candidate by casting *commune*. He asks whether the character has committed evil deeds in the mortal world. If the character has a shady reputation, this fact will surely come out. Unless such deeds were extremely bad, Revich moves on to cast the next spell.

Once his communion is complete, he returns to question the characters for 5 minutes, using Divine Awareness to automatically detect lies. Each lie is a mark against them. If the party passes, well and good. If not, the servants of the Lords of Light ask the party to step out, and inform the highest-Status character of the reason why. The party is welcome back to try again in a week or a month, depending on the severity of their lies.

DESIGNER'S NOTE: LORDS OF LIGHT

These arcanists and priests are half secret society, half snooty Illuminati who kill demons. They are a bit of a personality cult, dropping "as the Seer says" into every conversation as they do, but they are also valued for their talents within the courts. Most of all, they are not beholden to the royal family, or at least their interests are tangential to what the royals want, and so the Seer and his followers are often a thorn in the side of the queen or the Black Prince.

Any character fortunate enough to be accepted into the society enjoys partial protection from the rage of the fey, because of the special status of the lords and ladies.

Revich, the Blind Seer

Large celestial, lawful good

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 200 (16d10 + 112)

Speed 40 ft., fly 120 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	20 (+5)	24 (+7)	19 (+4)	22 (+6)	25 (+7)

Saving Throws Con +12, Wis +11, Cha +12

Skills Perception +11

Damage Resistances radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses truesight 120 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 21

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Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 16 (15,000 XP)

Angelic Weapons. Revich's weapon attacks are magical. When Revich hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 5d8 radiant damage (included in the attack).

Blinded Sight. Revich's natural sight doesn't function while he is in the Shadow Realm. His truesight allows him to navigate and sense creatures, but it doesn't allow him to read script, determine color, or any other function other than knowing where creatures and objects are within its range.

Divine Awareness. Revich knows if he hears a lie.

Innate Spellcasting. Revich's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 20). Revich can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect evil and good, invisibility* (self only)

3/day each: *blade barrier, dispel evil and good, flame strike, raise dead*

1/day each: *commune, control weather, insect plague*

Magic Resistance. Revich has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Revich makes two melee attacks

Crozier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage plus 22 (5d8) radiant damage.

Healing Touch (4/day). Revich touches another creature. The target magically regains 30 (6d8 + 3) hit points and is freed from any curse, disease, poison, blindness, or deafness.

Shards of a Broken Mind: The Root of Madness

The most crucial piece of information the Lords of Light possess is the true source of the Moonlit King's madness.

Revich knows that Akyishigal, the Demon Lord of Roaches, is responsible for driving the Moonlit King insane. It was one of the demon lord's many festering plagues that shattered the king's unstable mind into splinters. The Blind Angel will share this information with the characters only if they join his faction and agree to oppose the Demon Lord of Roaches. The Lords don't know why Akyishigal went through the trouble to drive the king mad.

This particular secret can also be learned by entering the service of Akiyishigal himself (see page 109).

JOINING THE LORDS OF LIGHT

The Lords are looking to recruit allies to hunt down the Demon Lord of Roaches and remove its evil influence from the courts. They are somewhat particular about who they'll take; they prefer good-aligned and lawful good-aligned heroes who have access to divine power. They accept somewhat less than that, however.

Joining the Lords of Light Skill Challenge

Overall Success Requires: 5 successes before 3 failures.

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 20—The lords value wizardry and arcane knowledge in all its forms, but they are no pushovers for amateurs.

Intelligence (Religion) DC 15—Most fey hold Intelligence (Religion) in relatively low esteem; the Lords of Light, with their close ties to the angel Revich, think otherwise.

Wisdom (Insight) DC 13—What the lords value most is understanding and the ability to both empathize and (when required) manipulate, so demonstrating understanding of their difficult position is hugely worthwhile.

Charisma (Persuasion) DC 13—Smooth talk has its place. The lords appreciate it as a tool.

Intelligence (Investigation) DC 10—The lords may pretend to have great wisdom, but secretly they love gossip or (as they call it) "intelligence and advance warning."

Intelligence (History) DC 20—The lords have access to an angel who tells them how it was. A historian must be very sharp indeed to prevail around those who have access to a font of Truth.

Dexterity (Sleight of Hand)—The lords dislike thievery and trickery in all its forms. Using this skill results in an automatic failure.

Charisma (Deception)—The Lords of Light can detect lies (as per *zone of truth* [Will DC 18], and they detest liars. Any attempt to use Charisma (Deception) results in an automatic failure.

Using Divine Power—Demonstrating any spells or magical effects that harm fiends results in an automatic success.

Necromantic Effects: Demonstrating any necromantic effect results in 2 failures.

Overall Success: The applicant is recognized as a master of the arcane or divine, a wise creature to be respected and valued among the fey and blessed by the light of the blind seer. The character is immediately inducted into the faction in a resounding ceremony: while standing atop the tower, his or her name is shouted to the heavens while light streams forth from every window

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and every door of the tower. The shadow courtiers buzz about the spectacle for some time after this event.

The character gains a halo of dim light that shines out to 5 feet and can't be quenched without using magical darkness, and is given a lantern dragonette as a mark of Status. The character learns the *ritual of true sight* (see the sidebar) over the next 3 days, if he or she wishes to do so, and gains a +3 increase to Status (accounting for the acquisition of the dragonette, the halo, and the ritual; if the dragonette gift is refused, the character gains +1 Status from the halo and the offer of the ritual alone).

Overall Failure: The Lords of Light cast the applicant out of the tower and make it known that he or she is not welcome. The character gains a +1 increase to Status among the fey and will be approached by a servant of Akyishigal with a counteroffer that very night. In addition, the lords will consider the character an enemy; Baron Suvid is likely to challenge the character to a duel on some pretext, or might attempt to intimidate him or her if their Status is too low to permit dueling.

Act III: The Honored Guests

Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness, Leave the gloomy haunts of sadness, Come into the daylight's splendor . . .
—Johann Franck, Schmücke dich, O liebe Seele

. . . amongst the upper classes extreme politeness is merely the most highly refined expression of one's scorn for others.
—Arturo Pérez-Reverte, The Flanders Panel

Once the party gains prestige and Status, the Invisible Court comes to life with bustle and laughter, and it is, if anything, a little crowded; bystanders are common, combat is rare, and characters must be on their guard against snoops and spies. The empty, echoing spaces of the courts suddenly become bright, visible, and filled with creatures; everyone is superficially friendly.

In fact, the change is more than friendliness in this season. At some level, after the characters defeat Akyishigal's champion roachling or other contenders in duels and gain sufficient prestige through other means, the characters are feared. At that point, the fey seek to get rid of them, politely or through violence. Combat is rare in this section of the adventure, because no one will fight the party except in a formal duel or (and this is quite likely to be entertaining if handled skillfully) in the form of a devilish courtesan "fighting" a naked character. In bed.

Teleport and Illusion. At the same time, the players might think that just because not every monster here is trying to have them killed immediately, they have the run of the place. Be very clear about this: they don't.

RITUAL OF TRUE SIGHT

5th-level divination (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a small prism; ointment for the eyes that costs 250 gp, which the spell consumes)

Duration: 8 hours

During the hour of sunrise, or sunset, you chant the ritual, catching the light in the prism and focusing it toward the eyes of the target. At the end of the casting time, you must make a DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check. If you succeed, you anoint the target's eyes with the ointment, and the target gains the benefit of *true seeing* (as the spell) to a distance of 30 feet for the duration.

The characters' actions can be constrained by illusion and teleport magic, and characters who visit private areas can and should be bewitched and be-mazed and returned to the Lower Halls dizzied and subject to the mockery of sniggering goblins. Stealth and politics will be better than combat if the party wants to make progress toward the goals of greater Status and to meet the power players of the court. Those players, on the other hand, are not entirely eager to meet the characters.

Which isn't to say the various rooms are dull. Certainly, finding a demon summoning room or the librarium is exciting, but the characters can't do much about the locations. Meeting the devils and demons who stride the halls is worthwhile for future reference—some of the devils might even treat the characters with courtesy, assuming that they speak Infernal or some other exotic language. The characters can learn some crucial information, gain a valuable spell, and discover both gossip and various plot points throughout this section.

Many of the threads are complex enough and the design is open enough that it's up to you to make the days pass swiftly and in a style of danger and illusion. If all else fails, declare the start of dueling season when characters grow twitchy, and make it clear that Baron Suvid is in a foul mood.

Fey Names and Types

The courts are constantly in flux, and many fey pass through its gates. Here's a list to choose from when an NPC wanders in or when the characters ask a person for directions or basic information. The list also includes most of the court's major NPCs and can provide a sense of what sorts of creatures inhabit the courts.

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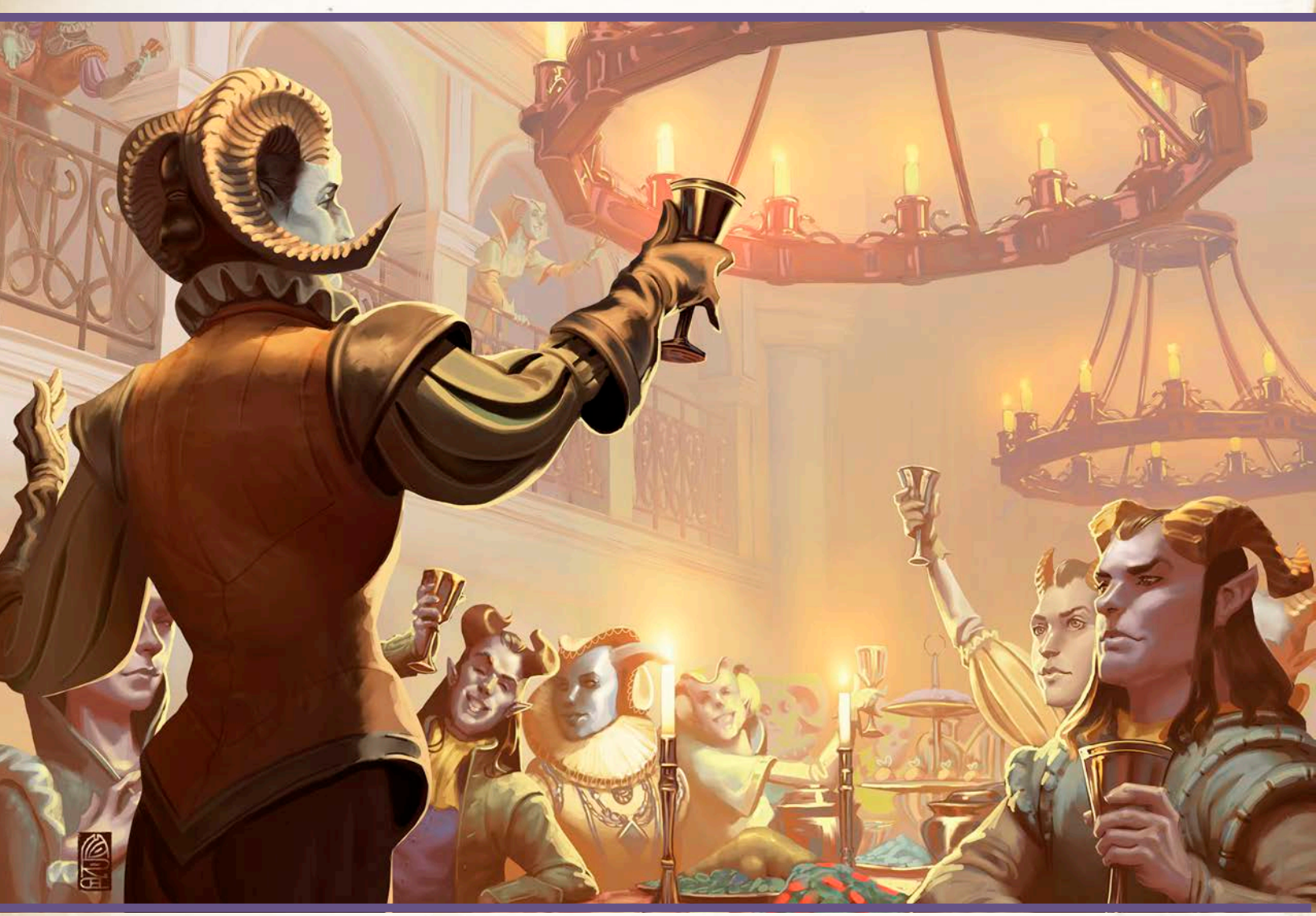
This list is not exhaustive by any means; more than two hundred fey live in the courts at any time. Fey wander in and out daily; only the titled and older fey can be considered permanent inhabitants. To choose randomly, roll d% and add the investigating character's Status. The list runs roughly in order of the Status of the individuals described.

Creatures tagged with TB can be found in *Tome of Beasts*, and CC indicates that details can be found in *Creature Codex*.

Servants, Scullions, and Orphans (Status 0 to 4)

1	Dazog, a goblin who tallies scraps
2	Karrunk, a shaggy-furred ogre slave
3	Yolksbeard, a sprite egg-thief
4	Pattypan, a sprite squash-monger
5	Thumbless Rottentusk, a troll pariah seeking his captured thumbs
6	Feardorcha, a snotty goblin pageboy
7	Puzzletooth, a goblin with a candle melted to his head
8	Stiefelmesser, a sprite who tries to steal shoes and boots
9	Crow, a ravenfolk TB bandit informer
10	Gentle Bluestem, a fortune-telling goblin cult fanatic
11	Silent Billoc, a mute goblin potboy and sneak thief
12	Yowling Marej, a 35-pound, talking, tone-deaf awakened calico cat
13	Floppy and Bop, sisters and chambermaids, two shadow fey TB triplets along with Cottonwing
14	Melantha Darkflowering, an unwanted tiefling child of a shadow fey mother



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15 Erlanna, makeup artist and wigmaker, a shadow fey[TB] spy
16 Flippant Fanderol, a barbed devil tailor
17 Firinn, a faceless goblin concubine
18 Orwin, a talking hedgehog, one of the erina[TB] and a gardener
19 Cinder, a bullying shadow fey[TB] servant
20 Olva, a human commoner child
21 Velvet, a quickstep (see page 73) knife sharpener
22 Laurian, a cobweb-winged pixie and wine butler
23 Whitemist, an incompetent servant and drunk goblin master of the dueling grounds
24 Tenpound Hammer, a goblin thug smith (better known by his nickname "Nails")
25 Amaryllis Amra, a goblin soup cook for the Goblin Court
26 Blazing Barda, a goblin, the master cook of the Lower Halls, assisted by Skrazag the Meek, an orc butcher
27 Fat Lobbo, the half-ogre cook for the Winter Palace
28 Elasstriel, head chef of the Royal Kitchens, a shadow fey[TB] ("Mistress Chopper" to her underlings)

Thieves and Tricksters (Status 5 to 9)

29 Sixes, a shadow fey[TB] gambler (proficient with three gaming sets)
30 Ilnas Larack, an ogre bandit captain
31 Bever Eyginly, a shadow fey[TB] master thief
32 Dappled Hand, a tiefling spy, keeper of lost property
33 Fenny the Hat, a shadow fey[TB] whose head is entirely engulfed by his hat
34 Heron, a goblin thief lord[CC] and messenger
35 Shay, a shadow fey vampire warlock[TB], ruler of her own shadow

Monsters (Status 0 to 10)

36 Knifeflick, a (justifiably) bitter gelding painted-horse centaur courier
37 A rubezahl demon[TB] who seems to enjoy long conversations—counting the words
38 Trundlefilch, a hag-like lamia with a taste for baby boys
39 Hoarfrost Driga, a heartbroken ice maiden[TB] seeking a lover—she freezes them to death

Entertainers (Status 10 to 14)

40 Ananuriel, a shadow fey[TB] bard, singer
41 Vale, a shadow fey[TB] noble, dancer
42 Caterwaul Buckleburr, a gnome bagpiper wearing a necklace of ears
43 Puddingbottom, a gnome spy, jester
44 Zwarosic, a goblin, Keeper of Whimsy

Rakes, Assassins, and Duelists (Status 15 to 19)

45 Phays, a doppelganger assassin
46 Poseymuddle, former goblin spy cat torturer, now looking for a position
47 Amelio, a shadow fey[TB] mage, the Royal Arsonist
48 Mirasto the Skin Tailor, a shadow fey[TB] assassin[CC]
49 Silver, a shadow fey[TB] ambassador[CC], demon handler and friend to the House Stross of old
50 Caleb (see page 100), a tiefling spy with a vicious wit
51 Gadflit, a shadow fey forest hunter[TB] who instigates duels among others, but avoids them himself
52 Josha Migallisti, a shadow fey rake (see page 9), junior duelist among the Ravens
53 Jurok (see page 101), an unorthodox although successful goblin duelist
54 Brightspur (see page 69), a young shadow fey assassin and leader of the Ravens faction
55 Sir Yngress the Red (see page 102), an eager elf knight of the River Court
56 Yikrugrak, the Crawling Knight (see page 102), a roachling duelist and servant of the demon lord Akyishigal

Doormen, Guards, and Wardens (Status 10 to 14)

57 Dunsnip the Curt, a gargoyle doorman
58 Halgomel, a bitter shadow fey guardian[TB]
59 Old Socket, the troll sheriff, and Banesniff, his iron-smelling shellycoat[TB]
60 Targomel, an obstinate shadow fey guardian[TB] door guard
61 Marjest the Snide, a shadow fey rake (see page 9) doorman
62 Odifiyi Sangazarotti, a shadow fey[TB] veteran, master at arms
63 Imbemerethion, a shadow fey[TB] knight, captain of the guard and possible former lover of the king

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Rangers and Huntsmen (Status 10 to 14)

64	Courrant, a goblin bird catcher
65	Prickles, a goblin hunter
66	Fordin of the East, a doppelganger, Master of Horses
67	Kolya the Kennel Master (see page 67), Keeper of the Royal Hounds, a shadow fey
68	Mongo the Lesser, Warden of the Moonlit Forest, a shadow fey forest hunter[TB]
69	Kynthalig Lickshadow, Master of the Hunt, a shadow fey[TB] scout

The Passage of Time

Players almost always resist the passage of time. I call it the "nothing happens" problem. They seek to advance the story every minute, even when the people they want to talk to are not always available, the places they want to visit are closed, or the work they hope to do requires helpers who are sleeping or otherwise engaged. Ideally, you can make this time pass smoothly with a few tricks and tips.

Fey Time. Describe the season as summer during one game session, and autumn the next. If no one notices, so be it. Time passes strangely in the fey realm. If someone does remark on it, tell them that time has gone by without the characters noticing.

The Long Challenge. Not every skill challenge need pass quickly. Let one of the factions take a month or more to decide whether to admit an applicant to their ranks. Checks happen weekly.

The Weekly Duel. Combats are not fought daily during dueling season (see Act III, Scene 4). The combatants meet only once a week, perhaps due to slower healing in the Shadow Realm (see Slow Healing, below).

The Lovers. If a character woos and wins a courtesan or consort, the character is inevitably spending time with that lover and not on the party's other goals. Roll a 50% chance that the character is missing for any particular day or scene—or simply say that the lovers are off at a cabin somewhere, fishing on an emerald tarn, or giggling behind a locked tower door.

Slow Healing. Force things the old-fashioned way; say that a full night's rest in the Shadow Realm takes a week, no exceptions. Then let the players set their own pace.

Scholars, Sages, and Graybeards (Status 15 to 19)

70	Narin Poolcryer, a dwarf diviner and sage extraordinaire
71	Niccela, a shadow fey[TB] apprentice wizard, bookbinder and junior scribe
72	Grey Essicar Goose, a shadow fey[TB] mage, tutor of black knowledge
73	Rhanshinau, a deva herald of truth and friend of Revich the Blind Seer (see page 75)
74	Thorngrip, a sprite docent
75	Thistledown, a white-haired gnome noble, codger and complainer
76	Holmfirth, a shadow fey crone and wise woman, leader of the Grey Ladies (see page 71)

Royal Appointees and Keepers (Status 20 to 22)

77	Moggo, a goblin boss, Chamberlain and Keeper of the Goblin Court
78	Achingfast, Royal Corpsehanger and Skullpolisher, a swarm of sluagh[TB]
79	Yllohbur, a gnome druid, master herb gardener and gatherer of nightsoil
80	Blistersoot the Royal Glassblower, a grimy and vindictive hobgoblin
81	Tarrin Voleslayer, a kobold scout, Royal Owl Keeper
82	Avaniel, a shadow fey forest hunter[TB], Keeper of the Rookery and Owlery
83	Aileelia, a shadow fey enchantress[TB], Keeper of Mirrors
84	Halamath Greenleaf, a gnome assassin[CC], Royal Druggist
85	Grizden Threeblade, a shadow fey[TB] veteran, Royal Armorer, in charge of keeping minions running
86	Ladra, a shadow fey illusionist, Royal Gloomier and Trainer of Shadows
87	Lady Katya Hollyoak, a dryad, Royal Oathmaker
88	Lunggristle, Royal Mead Brewer, a quickstep (see page 73), stitcher of errant shadows
89	Mashfinger, a troll, Keeper of the King's Ghoul Warrens
90	Spindletwist, a gossamer-winged pixie, Queen's Haberdasher and Lapidary, Keeper of Her Majesty's Personal Adornments
91	Winged Elvesta, a shadow fey[TB], Keeper of Lanterns (meaning the lantern dragonettes)
92	Yarrow, a shadow fey[TB] assassin[CC], Keeper of Locks and Spymaster to Her Majesty

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Courtesans and Consorts (Status 23 to 25)

93	Lord Hargos Enderran the Flame-Cloaked, an elf consort (see area 27)
94	Lady Lishekki Almandrine the Silver-Chained, an elf courtesan (see area 28)
95	Ulara of the Seven Veils, a shadow fey[TB] courtesan (see area 54)
96	Ballandrine the Frost-Eyed, a human changeling consort (see area 57)
97	Mora Moonwater the Rain-Cloaked, a shadow fey[TB] courtesan (see area 55)
98	Songemesha the Raven-Haired, a drow enchantress courtesan (see area 56)
99	Maraya/Marek Laccrystae, the Sapphire, a succubus courtesan (see page 97)

Courtiers (Status 16 to 20)

100	Cottonwing, a rising shadow fey[TB] noble and triplet with Floppy and Bop (who are mere chambermaids)
101	Gwathion Everglade, a shadow fey duelist[TB], courtier with a temper
102	Meltathraiel, a shadow fey[TB] assassin, advisor with a deep-seated hatred of all non-fey
103	Saulena, a shadow fey[TB] noble, Mistress of Daunts and Dares
104	Hulda Wisenhazy, a malign shadow fey[TB] gossip
105	Moongallow, a questing high elf knight
106	Sariel, a mysterious shadow fey[TB] lady in black (see area 24)
107	Sir Rujan, Knight of the Barnacle Tree (see page 105), a shadow fey duelist[TB] and bully
108	Hawksblood, a high elf spy, dancing master
109	Despoiling Jon, a philandering shadow fey[TB] courtier seeking naive maids
110	Lady Sorreminx (see page 104), an elf sorcerer from the Court of the River King
111	Revich the Blind Seer (see page 75), angel of truth and leader of the Lords of Light

Titled Nobles (Status 20 and Higher)

112	Baron Coughspittle, Lord of Rotting Leaves, Watcher of the Fractured Gate, a deathwisp (see page 21) who rules a barony to the north
113	Count and Archmagus Sammas Hollowgrin, Master Summoner, Royal Standard Bearer and Master of the College of Heraldry, Master of Fence, Lord of Fallen Archways and Broken Swords, and consort of the queen, a shadow fey[TB] archmage

Option: Shadow Passages

As an added twist, you might add shadow passages connecting certain rooms. Choose twelve rooms to connect in this way but keep the record to yourself, so players have to learn the connections slowly.

The shadow passages are usable as part of movement by any creature that has shadow magic, teleportation, or related abilities to move instantaneously from one of the locales to the other. Any shadow passage might be locked by the nobles of the courts (and all are automatically locked during any alarm), but they are generally left open for all to use.

Additionally, any creature that has a little arcane training can open one as an action with a successful Intelligence (Arcana) check. The DC varies depending on the user. If the creature is fey-blooded, including a fey, elf, half-elf, or gnome, the DC is 15. For any other character, the DC is 20.

Design Note: Sandbox and Plot

This arc of the adventure is much less linear than the city and Shadow Road, and much less exploratory than the Invisible Court; it presumes the characters are 9th level or very close to it. There's no driver of the action, and you should feel comfortable letting the characters get into trouble on their own. (Depending on your players, you might be able to just tell them, "It's up to you to decide what to do here.") If the party feels uncomfortable without an obvious set of directions, the challenges to duel and the feast gives them a hook, as does enticing characters with courtesans and consorts.

Avoid giving characters the ability to approach the upper echelons of royalty directly (for instance, the royals are always stepping through a shadow door, leaving just as the characters arrive). Indeed, whenever possible, gradually build up the power of the queen and the danger of the king, so those two meetings in the finale have maximum impact.

For more information on sandbox design, see the *Kobold Guide to Game Design*.

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114	His Grace, Duke Rackclasp, Warden of the Early Frost and First Bonecarver, a sluagh[TB] necromancer
115	Jalennis, Lady of the Pale Gardens, a shadow fey[TB] druid
116	Lady Marrowsilk, the Queen's Counsel and Most Learned Advocate, a shadow fey enchantress[TB]
117	Lord Chelessfield (see page 105), Master of the Alpine Marches, high elf of the River King's Court
118	Lord Maruuk, a tiefling swashbuckler, diabolic ambassador (who wishes never to go home)
119	Akyishigal (see page 109), Demon Lord of Roaches, with attendant roachlings
120	Baron Suvid (see page 106), Lord of Blades
121	Mistress Gossamer of the Mournful Gate, a banshee (see area 39)
122	Prince Loric Oakbound, a youthful high elf noble ward (hostage) of the Summer Court (also known as the Cloud Prince and Lord of Daydreams)

The Blood Royal (Status 25 and Higher)

123	His Serene Highness ("Durchlaucht"), Prince of the Blood Hander Svenk, Baron of the Lantern City of Corremel, Waldgraf of the Margreve Forest, the Black Prince of Balefire (see page 112)
124	Hidden Princess Vailessia Graystone, a shadow fey noble (cousin of the Black Prince), Lady of the Hounds (see area 40)
125	Her Celestial and Royal Majesty, Sarastra Aestruum, Queen of Night and Magic, Duchess of the Heavens, Countess of Thorn, Mistress of Air and Darkness, Lady of the Summer Palace, and Bride of Shadows (see page 120)
126	His Lunar and Royal Majesty, Ludomir Imbrium the XVI, the Moonlit King of the Shadow Fey, Lord of the Shadow Realm, Lord Protector of the Black Elves, Duke of the Elf Ironcrags, Baron of Bratislor, Earl of Zobeck, Master of the Winter Palace, and Count-Palatine of Salzbach (see page 141)

Conditions in the Court

The courtiers, servants, and hangers-on of the court all have their codes of behavior and their own concerns; most of the time, they ignore strangers unless they find some advantage in not.

ALLIANCES, COURTESANS, AND DUELING

The characters will need to claw their way up the social ladder here; they might question courtesans and lovers for information, strong-arm servants to gain access to important NPCs, and generally find their own most successful road to make progress in meeting the court's lords and ladies. There's a limited supply of available fey lovers and allies, and there's a price for keeping them happy, in gold, vitality, magic, memories, and so on (see courtesans on page 84, dueling on page 99, the Ravens faction on page 68, the Grey Ladies faction on page 71, the Lords of Light faction on page 76.

INVISIBLE SERVANTS

Servants are present but not always visible in every room of the Royal Halls. They hide in the shadows of the room, motionless, until their presence is required. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals some sign of an invisible servant.

Any character who has a Status of 20 or higher can call up a servant by speaking and asking for one (this is not an action). The servants will fetch and carry, offer assistance, answer simple questions—though never about Intelligence (Religion), Intelligence (Arcana), or politics!—and generally make themselves useful to their betters.

There is only one servant available for each small room, with proportionally more in larger rooms. The Small Courtyard (area 46) has five servants, and the Great Hall of the Shadow Court (area 62) at least a dozen.

ILLUMINATION AND ILLUSION

Illusions cloak every room of the courts, even after the Invisible Court illusions have faded. Some are friendly, some are perplexing. Choose from among the following if the party ventures into territory they should leave alone, or even when they visit familiar ground (like their own bedchambers).

GUARDS AND WARDS

The courts are reasonably well guarded, at least at every major hall and at the gates linking the three main sections of the courts. Many of these guards are monolith footmen; a few others are shadow fey of one

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Table 3–1: Twenty Dangerous and Luring Illusions for Fey Chambers

1	Chickens with dozens of zealously guarded nests and eggs. Characters might be overcome with the urge to guard these nests against foxes.
2	Gigantic spiders discussing the making of soup. Characters might see themselves liquefied into soup, waking up in their own chambers fatigued.
3	An open pit with no apparent bottom. Falling drops the visitor into the Well of Night (area 52) covered by roaches.
4	Her Majesty the Queen in full royal garb, accompanied by a variety of cavorting dryads, satyrs, and naked elves. She invites the characters to join her; those who do wake up hours later with their armor missing for a few days. Missing bits can be found at the smith's (area 6).
5	Two young deer nibbling a grassy sward. Characters who enter are transported to a distant quarter of the forest.
6	Storm clouds and rain. Characters are drenched.
7	Gray and utter silence. All who enter are dusted with gray powder.
8	Scrolls of ancient lore, crumbling before the viewers' eyes.
9	The tide is coming in. Opening the door releases an (illusory) wave of salt water.
10	A black-walled chamber of blood and howling souls; a group of goblins prepares a blood sacrifice to a demon lord.
11	A chamber of 100 mice in urgent consultation on legislation before the Murine Chamber, devoted to a bureaucratic apportionment of available resources. Quite hypnotic.
12	A small hidden palace-within-a-palace where the servants pretend to be nobles and the courtiers fetch and carry. Beheadings held at noon and sunset daily.
13	Stairs to the upper level of the palace, which is really the palace's rooftop. The illusion makes it seem that there are walls where none exist: The character must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall 30 feet.
14	Stairs to a wine cellar, which is really the Goblin Court, where an intruder might be held for trespass.
15	A line of beech trees stretches into the distance on one side of a dusty trail. On the other, a long and placid stream or canal. Frogs croak and herons wander. Good fishing here, surely: if the character fails a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, then the character remembers a fine day fishing but is missing from court for a day or week.
16	An inferno of dwarves and derro toiling ceaselessly on some horrific contraptions of brass, steam, and iron. Rather like the Ironmonger's Hall back in Zobeck, really.
17	A garden in full bloom. The flowers are soporific, and those who enter sleep for days.
18	A parade! Goblins strike drums, shadow fey throw rose petals, quicksteps zip along with flags and batons. Sound the trumpets, here come the unicorns!
19	A mountaintop shrine full of icy wind and with absolutely no exits. The area is extreme cold. Finding the exit requires a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Survival) check. A failed check can be repeated, but it takes 1 hour of searching for each retry, requiring Constitution saves from the cold.
20	An adult red shadow dragon's lair. And a very, very unwelcoming dragon: Every character here must make a DC 20 Constitution or Dexterity saving throw of their choice. On a successful save, the character narrowly escapes the fire breath and returns to the courts in safety. On a failed save, the character awakens 1d6 hours later somewhere in the courts, covered in burns and soot, with one level of exhaustion.

stripe or another (if statistics are needed, use the rake and the cutthroat from Act I, Scene 1). The fey and the hulking brutes don't fight much but, instead, use warding magic to keep characters out (DC 20 Will save; character is be-mazed and "loses" 1 day while wandering among illusions).

SNEAKING IN AS A SERVANT

It's entirely possible to sneak into the courts disguised as a servant: doing this results in a –2 deduction to Status if infiltrating the palace over the walls or a –4 deduction if sneaking into a restricted wing. The disguised "servant" will be recognized by most of the fey, but the disguise is an accepted if disreputable way to visit the Royal Halls for lovers and desperate commoners, so they are usually ignored.

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Table 3–2: Courtesans and Consorts

Consort/Courtesan	Character Minimum Status	Successes Needed	Status Gained	Maintenance (GP)	XP
Hargos Enderran, the Flame-Cloaked Consort	10	4	+1	50	700
Lishekki Almandrine, the Silver-Chained Courtesan	11	4	+1	50	700
Ulara of the Seven Veils	13	6	+2	100	1,400
Ballandrine the Frost-Eyed	14	8	+3	200	2,100
Mora Moonwater the Rain-Cloaked	15	8	+3	200	2,100
Songemesha the Raven-Haired	18[1]	10	+5	400	2,800
Marek the Sapphire (M)	20[3]	12[2]	+8	1,000	3,500
Maraya the Sapphire (F)	22[3]	12[2]	+8	1,000	3,500

[1] Will not speak to those with Status lower than 14
[2] All ability check DCs for wooing are 2 points higher than normal
[3] Will not speak to those with Status lower than 16

Servants and those disguised as servants are not allowed to carry weapons or arcane implements or to wear armor (Stealth DC 23 or Charisma [Deception] DC 26). For those breaking the rules, the guards are summoned and the trespassers quietly but firmly escorted to the Lower Halls and given to the Goblin Court for judgment (usually expressed as a number of days spent scrubbing pots and hauling water).

Note that the roof and the windows are warded just as the Open Portal is (see page 55). It's not possible to climb into the Halls through these routes without some ability in the Intelligence (Arcana) skill. Even then, the lantern dragonettes report trespassers, and within a few minutes the visitors will be escorted out, to their shame.

STATUS INVITATIONS

If the party negotiates well and gains Status in the courts, they might be invited to meet the Blind Seer, the Black Prince, or the Sapphire Courtesan, as shown in Table 3–3: Status Rewards.

Winning a Courtesan or Consort's Favor

… A dread trembling o'erwhelms me, paler than I, than dried grass in Autumn, and in my madness, dead I seem almost.

—Sappho, "Hymn to Aphrodite"

A character who has a Status of 10 or higher can woo and win the favor of a courtesan or consort, as long as their status is greater or equal to the courtesan or consort. This costs 50 gp in grooming for the character, plus 10 gp times the courtesan's or consort's minimum Status (as shown in Table 3–2: Courtesans and Consorts). Once favor is won, the character gains the XP indicated as a one-time award; if favor is not won, the character suffers a –2 deduction to Status.

Winning and Wooing. Winning over a courtesan or consort is a skill challenge, of sorts, and the character involved must make the ability checks required (see Table 3–2: Courtesans and Consorts); a friend can help with only a single check, or else the friend might instead inadvertently win the courtesan or consort's attention, not the wooing character. Attempts to help by friends are always allowed.

Courtesans and consorts can be wooed with a wide variety of skills and even won through dueling and other activities. Favor is not won if 3 failures are achieved before the required number of successes. This process can be lengthened, if desired, with no more than 1 or 2 successes permitted to occur per encounter. This extends the time spent in the courts and mirrors the gradual development of the relationship.

Strength (Athletics) DC 15—The life of an adventurer is awash with danger and excitement, and a physical demonstration of prowess can impress. Such displays lose their charm quickly, however, and any further attempts after a successful Strength (Athletics) check are automatic failures.

Dexterity (Acrobatics) DC 18—Feats of acrobatic daring: running over rooftops, climbing the Silver Tree to pluck its highest flower, and so on, can be impressive.

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Table 3–3: Status Rewards

Status	Privilege Extended
11	May attend the Swan Festival as standing-room-only servants
11	Allowed to visit Revich the Blind Seer to ask for appointment (see page 74)
13	Invitation to meet Akyishigal, the Demon Lord of Roaches (see page 109)
15	Invitation from Revich the Blind Seer to dine (see page 75)
16	Invitation to enter the Royal Halls (see page 87)
16	Invitation to the Swan Festival to drink and dine (see page 88)
19	Invitation to go hunting with the Black Prince (see page 116)
20–22	Invitation to woo the Sapphire Courtesan (see page 84)
23	Invitation to capture the firebird for the queen through an intermediary (see page 118)
26	Audience with the Queen of Night and Magic (see page 120)

Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) DC 15, + 5/additional attempt—Gifts stolen from rivals are always sweet ones. However, gifts grow tiresome with time, especially if questions about provenance come up.

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 23—The courtesans and consorts are easily bored by occult esoterica, although a character might interest them with sufficiently bizarre, original, or practical advice.

Intelligence (History) DC 25—The consorts and courtesans are easily bored by history, even more so than by arcana. Though it is possible to impress someone in this fashion, such an occurrence is rare.

Intelligence (Investigation) DC 20—All courtesans and consorts love gossip, the juicier the rumor, the better. A check total of 25 or higher grants advantage on the next check made to woo the courtesan or consort.

Intelligence (Nature) DC 10 + courtesan's Status, + 1/additional attempt—Flowers, greenery, feathers from rare birds, sweet berries, robin's eggs, and distilled sap are all welcome gifts among the courtesans and consorts. However, the more sophisticated consorts find these things a little beneath them: for instance, merely ordinary flowers are not enough to sway the Sapphire Courtesan. The DC is increased by the Status of the courtesan or consort: for example, impressing Hargos (Status 10) in this way is a DC 20 check, while Maraya (Status 22) requires a DC 32 check. As with flattery, little gifts do eventually grow tiresome, so the DC also goes up on each attempt.

Intelligence (Religion) DC 22—The courtesans and consorts find most religion unimportant, since the fey's goddess rules them, and thus, to them every other religion is a form of heresy or wasted effort. But sometimes a story about one divinity or a bit of dogma is especially amusing or shocking, satisfying their jaded sensibilities.

Eric Lindahl (Order #51842079)

12 Strange Tricks of the Courtiers

1	**Twin Spiders**. Two spies are lurking on the ceilings of the halls, using their spider-climbing abilities to learn about the characters. The two spies serve two different fey factions.
2	**Spotlights and Darkness**. The character with the highest Status is always well illuminated by a pair of lantern dragonettes (see page 47). The character with the lowest Status is always cloaked in shadows and gains concealment as a swift action.
3	**Locked Room without Doors**. This hall of six doors seems unconnected to any other part of the palace. Visitors sometimes hear a light laugh or running water. No matter what door they go through, they always come out one of the other doors in the room. Materials in the room look like clues for which doors to go through in what order: a tapestry, an enameled box, a carved wooden set of chessmen. The whole is an elaborate illusory trap, which ejects visitors after a few hours or with an Intelligence (Arcana) or Sleight of Hand check (DC 30) to puzzle out the clues.
4	**Stairs Up**. The characters enter a room with stairs on the ceiling. With the right password or ritual, they can reverse gravity here to visit a secret room, such as the gathering place of one of the factions or the site for an assignation with a high Status courtesan or consort.
5	**The Doubles**. If a character splits from the rest of the party, he or she returns and seems normal—but the others might notice that the character casts no shadow (passive Perception DC 30). Eventually, the other "real" character returns. Which is real?
6	**Animal Servants**. The party finds a room with humanoid servants, each with an animal head. These heads are illusions, but the servants are convinced they are real punishments for failing to obey shadow fey law. They weep beneath these illusory masks—and obey.
7	**Living Furnishings**. The furniture in this room—chairs, lounging couches, even a pendulum—are all people, goblins, or other servants.
8	**Seconds and Doubles**. If the characters challenge a fey much above their station, the fey lord or lady sends back a double to a duel as an insult to the characters.
9	**Shadow Memory**. There is a ritual that allows one to absorb the memories of the double. The fey consider this perfect for illicit assignations or crimes requiring a strong alibi.
10	**Death Butterflies**. A sphere of force rolls down the hall, filled with a mass of butterflies. If a character picks up the sphere or pokes at it, the force bubble evaporates and the death butterflies within are released to attack for 2d3 rounds, before scattering (see page 117 for stats).
11	**The Starchild**. An illusion of a star-elf descends from the heavens one night to ask the characters to do something that will make them appear truly, truly foolish: this might be spitting in the presence of the queen, challenging the Black Prince to a duel, and so on.
12	**A Door Home**. The characters open a door and step into Zobeck. They might come and go as they please, visiting familiar places and people, purchasing goods and so on. If they ask around, the fey chuckle and say the Shadow Road is only one way into and out of the Moonlit Court. At some point when the characters are resting at home after a particularly taxing encounter, they wake up in the fey court, with all they accomplished or gained in Zobeck gone and the shadow fey all laughing at them for falling for the illusion (–2 penalty to Status).

Individual Modifiers

The DCs given in this section for various ability checks should be considered baseline figures, not absolute values. A myriad of modifiers can come into play that increase or decrease any character's chances of winning favor. For instance, a character with fey blood (an elf, half-elf, or gnome) might receive a minor bonus on certain checks but also take a greater penalty for a failed attempt ("You should know better."). Conversely, a member of one of the uncouth races (such as dwarf or gearforged) might take a minor penalty on checks but receive a greater benefit for succeeding ("You can suppress your natural oafishness for the sake of impressing me?").

Beyond those possibilities, you might award bonuses or penalties on certain checks because of a character's class, class features, feats, or other characteristics.

Eric Lindell (Order #3154079)

Wisdom (Insight) DC 15—Understanding what a consort wants is crucial. A successful Wisdom (Insight) check does not count as a success in the skill challenge, but grants advantage on all of that week's wooing attempts by the character. A failed Wisdom (Insight) check does count as a failure in the skill challenge, as the character fatally misreads some wish or trait of the consort and commits a faux pas by revealing this lack of sensitivity.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 20—Just viewing something rarely impresses a courtesan or consort; after all, the whole point is that the thing is meant to be seen. Sometimes a character notes something of particular interest, however, such as a clever bit of sewing in their garments or the way a ring is inscribed with a motto. Keen eyes and sharp ears have their moments of usefulness.

Wisdom (Survival) DC 23—The courtesans and consorts are creatures enamored of civilized comfort and have little interest in outdoorsy concerns, so the bar for impressing one of them in this way is quite high.

Charisma (Deception) DC 18—Lies, braggadocio, and purest flattery are welcome. However, lies that fall flat to the ear of a consort or courtesan (indicated by a check that fails by 5 or more) are especially sour and count as 2 failures in the skill challenge. No one likes excessive ego in a suitor.

Charisma (Intimidation) DC 14—Of all the courtesans and consorts, only Lishekki the Silver-Chained can be wooed with Intimidation checks. Against any others, using this skill results in an automatic failure.

Charisma (Performance) DC 18—An evening of dancing, song, poetry, or some other method of creative expression can have lasting benefits.

Charisma (Persuasion) DC 13, + 2/additional attempt—Sweet words are the courtesans' and consorts' bread and butter, and they expect to hear them as well as speak them. However, too much of a good thing can soon become an annoyance. The DC increases by 2 for each attempt after the first.

Dueling—Winning a duel fought on behalf of a courtesan or consort counts as 2 successes in the skill challenge. This declaration of intent must be made as part of the challenge issued to an opposing duelist. Losing such a duel counts as a failure in the skill challenge, and the character also suffers the loss in Status that comes with losing the duel and possibly also losing the affection of the courtesan or consort.

Overall Success: If a character succeeds in the skill challenge, the courtesan or consort takes the character as a lover, and the character gains Status (as shown in Table 3–2: Courtesans and Consorts) as long as the character continues to provide gifts and attention (as reflected in the "Maintenance" column on the table) every month. Either party can break off the affair; the courtesan or consort typically does so only if the character is negligent or takes up with a rival.

Overall Failure: If a character gets a failure in the skill challenge, the courtesan or consort publicly or privately tells the character that she or he is not interested in further advances. The character takes a –2 deduction to Status as word gets around than the suit has been rejected.

Once a suit has failed, any further attempts by the character to woo the same consort or courtesan for at least 1 month are automatic failures (with an additional –2 deduction to Status for each one). Continued attempts to win over a consort or courtesan when the character's advances have clearly been declined will result in a visit from a duelist champion.

Act III, Scene 1: Entering the Royal Halls

Minimum Status: 16

Once the most diplomatic or boldest member of the party has achieved a Status of 16 or higher (or the characters have all disguised themselves as servants and snuck into the Royal Halls), the characters might receive an audience with the lords and ladies of the Shadow Court. Or, at the very least, they might visit (in disguise) the wing of the palace that has thus far been closed to them.

This is a small occasion in the Status-obsessed courts. Read the following when the party first approaches the Royal Halls:

The lantern dragonettes perched at the top of the white marble stairs lift their heads; their tarnished silvery scales shake, and the orange light of the dragons shines out like a beacon, parting the darkness and revealing a small courtyard with a fountain, a white tower, and stairs leading up past more armored footmen.

Once up the second stairs, there is a long hallway filled with lantern light and many doors. Laughter and music float down from the far end of the hall, and a few servants bustle to and fro.

To the character with the highest Status:

The footman in his silvery armor speaks to you in a pleasing, slightly echoing voice. "Ah, milord, much joy and welcome! You are invited by their Majesties to enter the Royal Halls. Please, the courtiers will surely be delighted to meet you! How shall we announce you?"

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If the character gives a title, there is a fanfare of invisible trumpets, the character's name and title rings out—and that's about it. A few servants come over, looking to ingratiate themselves.

Once they are inside, give the characters time to react, quiz a servant, and so on.

If they do enter the Great Hall, read the following:

> More than forty guests mingle in the Great Hall; servants move among them, preparing a feast. Most of the guests are fey or elves of some type, but there are a few humans and a single figure that appears to be a cross between a gigantic insect and a horned man dressed in red silks, and who is not a member of the court. Three demon-dogs roam the hall as well, slinking around under the tables.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 20—At least half a dozen archers stand on an upper balcony.

Intelligence (Investigation) DC 16—Illusions cloak many of the guests; at least six of them are not fey at all, but demons or devils of some kind. It's hard to track them, but clearly, bound or conjured demon lords are serving in the queen's retinue and devils are acting as her advisors.

Act III, Scene 2: The Courtesans' Dance

Minimum Status: 11 (servant) or 16 (invited guest)

Many fey specialize in being beautiful, smart, charismatic, or insanely sexy. These courtesans and consorts are power players in their own right, as well as being prizes and tokens of Status among the fey. Nobles and ladies who can afford the chase woo these courtesans and consorts with magic and lavish gifts, and the courtesans and consorts bestow their favors only rarely.

Their willingness to take a new noble as a lover is always a sign of Status and prestige. This winter, the consorts and courtesans are throwing a party called the Swan Festival, and characters who have Status of 11 or higher are able to attend as servants or bystanders—but they are not seated. Characters who have Status of 16 or higher will receive an invitation and are invited to dine.

Armor is not permitted at the dance, but weapons and implements certainly are (but are expected to remain sheathed unless there is good cause). Give the characters time to arrange whatever special garments, favors, and arrangements they require, such as attending with a favored fey, or wearing faction colors, or whatever else they dream up. The event is held in the Great Hall of the Shadow Fey (area 62) just after moonrise.

THE SEATING, SOUPS, AND SPOONS

The seating at the feast is done strictly by Status, and characters with lower Status are seated much farther from the royal presence. Characters with Status of 16 or higher are close enough to make eye contact with the queen and her inner circle, and perhaps gain their attention for a moment. Conversely, characters of extremely low Status are treated as children or distant relatives, and seated in a separate hall entirely.

If no character has Status higher than 15, none of the party are invited to the high table. Characters with Status of 12 to 15 are seated at lower tables or far from the head of the high table.

Status changes that occur during the feast can be tracked right away by the character. However, even the fey are not so demanding as to immediately reseat blundering, foolish mortals during a royal feast. The effects of falling or rising fortunes and increases or deductions in Status are taken note of when they occur, but these changes affect future interactions at the courts only after the feast ends.

For Characters with Status of 11 or Lower:

> Two servants bar your way at the entrance. "Please, come this way," they say. "There's a party in the guest hall for visitors; this ball is only for those invited."

Crashing the party after the servants ask you to leave is a boneheaded move, and all heads turn to see who is making a fool of themselves. The characters immediately suffer at least a –4 deduction to Status. Those who follow the servants are taken to the Goblin Court for a much rowdier feast.

For Characters with Status of 12 to 15:

> A beautiful shadow fey and a grinning goblin look at you and consult a list. "Hmm, yes, you may observe the festivities from the hunter's hall, balcony, and adjoining chambers. The hall itself is full, I fear."

Those who wish to do so can sit outside and watch from a distance; they are given water or mundane ale to drink for the queen's toast but, otherwise not fed or waited on. Many of the junior keepers and a few low-Status visitors make up the majority of this "outside festival."

Attempts to crash these seating arrangements are dealt with fairly brutally (keep it brief), and a character who simply sits down in the main hall without an invite suffers a –4 deduction to Status. Such a brute is ignored, served no food and offered no refreshments.

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For Characters with Status of 16 or Higher:

A beautiful shadow fey and a grinning goblin look at you and consult a list. "Ah, yes, follow this dragonette down the long hall, and bow when you enter. The feast is almost ready to begin."

The dragonette leads them to a squire, who takes them to their seats—except for the highest-Status character.

For the Character with the Highest Status:

You are led to the high table, above the salt, where the fey lords and ladies are seated. They look you up and down once; then they return to their conversations, ignoring you. A servant steps forward with a basin and a towel; the lady next to you seems to be eating a bouquet of flowers. Your friends are all seated farther down the table in a group. At the far end of the table sits the queen, surrounded by lantern dragonettes, sprites, and a cluster of servants.

Wisdom (Insight) DC 16—The fey lords seem to think you are purely a temporary distraction. They probably think you don't even speak Elvish.

A character who succeeds on a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check has engaged his or her neighbors in conversation and can attempt further checks (also DC 20) using Intelligence (Investigation) to gather gossip or using Charisma (Persuasion) to ask a question and have it answered. At some point, of course, the fey's sufferance for this visitor grows thin, and they turn away to discuss more important matters with other courtiers. Increase the DC by 5 after a number of successful checks equal to the character's Charisma modifier, unless the topic of conversation is of particular interest to the fey.

THE FEAST BEGINS

Once everyone is seated, read:

After you take your seats, the dishes begin to arrive immediately and come in an unending stream, each announced by a herald or servant: first a bell soup, a snowflake soup, and a sparkling stew called goblin stew. Surely, there is no goblin in it. Or is there? Do you choose the stew, or one of the other soups?

Each character must make this decision. Those who eat the stew gain a +1 increase to Status; those who decline suffer a −1 deduction to Status for rudeness.

THE WINE AND THE TOAST

Those who ate the stew are offered wine; those who declined it are offered none:

As you finish the first course, the dishes float away, carried by invisible hands. Goblins and animal-headed servants step forward with pitchers of liquid, perhaps wine or water. The servants ask each diner, "Queen's Wine, King's Cordial, or Prince's Ale?"

Ask each player whether his or her character will choose one of the three beverages or decline all three. Make a note to yourself of each decision. Allow characters a chance to make ability checks to see what they might discern.

Intelligence (Nature or poisoner's kit) DC 20—The Queen's Wine is liquid starlight, unfit for human consumption but safe for the fey to drink.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 15—The Queen's Wine is inky black with flecks of something luminous, the King's Cordial shimmers like moonlight, and the Prince's Ale is pale green, like spring leaves.

Wisdom (Insight) DC 17—The fey courtiers and visitors are asking mostly for the queen's and prince's beverages. Only the queen and a few senior nobles request the King's Cordial.

Successfully using Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) or Charisma (Deception) to pretend to drink is remarkably difficult, given the number of servants, keen-eyed

King's Cordial

Non-fey who drink the King's Cordial might be in for a wild ride; fey suffer no ill effects beyond a mild intoxication, but others begin to hallucinate and might be overcome by paralysis.

King's Lunar Cordial (Ingested). Drinking the Moonlit King's cordial offers strange visions of celestial realms and leaves its imbibers weak-kneed and faint. A non-fey creature that ingests this poison must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) poison damage and become poisoned. While poisoned in this way, the creature's speed is reduced by 5 feet. The poisoned creature must repeat the saving throw every minute, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save. A creature whose speed is reduced to 0 in this way falls prone and becomes incapacitated. While incapacitated, the creature can only rave madly in the grip of hallucinations. After three successful saves, the effect ends.

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courtiers, and others who are eager to observe the newcomers. Such efforts should be treated as skill contests against the +8 Perception and +7 Wisdom (Insight) modifiers of a nearby crowd of courtiers that are watching the characters at any given time.

Consequences

Those who decline all three drinks suffer a −2 deduction to Status for refusing to toast the Blood Royal.

Those who accept the Queen's Wine and drink it gain a +2 increase to Status. Any drinker that is a fey, elf, half-elf, elfmarked, or gnome character immediately gains 2d10 temporary hit points; all others take 5 (1d10) radiant damage and gain one level of exhaustion.

Those who accept the King's Cordial and drink it gain no Status. Any drinker that is a fey, elf, half-elf, elfmarked, or gnome character suffers no ill effects; others are poisoned and suffer hallucinations until the effect wears off (see the "King's Cordial" sidebar).

Those who accept the Prince's Ale and drink it gain a +1 increase to Status—as well as the notice of the queen, who is always interested in those who signal alliance to her son in this way. This attention is not entirely a good thing, and might be a factor in the Queen's Audience later (see page 120), since she has a sharp memory for these sorts of things. The ale has no other effect, aside from the ordinary.

THE QUEEN'S TOAST

The queen proposes the first toast of the night, taking special notice of her most impressive guests.

> "We greet our cousin the River King and his ambassadors, Lord Chelessfield and Lady Sorreminx. We regret that young Lord Flax could not join us. We greet the fiery Lord Maruuk and return the greetings of his masters, the archdukes. And we welcome our visitors from our ancient lands in the Lighted Realms as well, led by [name of character with highest Status]. To the Shadow Realm and all who rule it!"

Menu

A repast to celebrate the arrival of guests at the Winter Halls of Her Celestial and Royal Majesty, Sarastra Aestruum, Queen of Night and Magic, Duchess of the Heavens, Countess of Thorn, Mistress of Air and Darkness, Lady of the Summer Palace, and Bride of Shadows.

Seating and Musical Divertissement

Seeds and Flower Bouquets

1st Course: Bells, Flakes, and Sparks

Choice of Bell Soup, Snowflake Soup, or Sparkling Goblin Stew

Arrival of the Royal Presence

All rise, proclamation
Toast
Choice of Queen's Wine, King's Cordial, or Prince's Ale

2nd Course: Fire and Snort

Wild boar reduction over golden lamb stuffed with firebird eggs
Fresh lamb
Lamprey pie with galantine sauce of cinnamon and sugar
Stone goblets of fire wine

Interlude: Three Dances

Fire, Tears, and Veils

3rd Course: Birds of the Air

Raven's Pie with archery
Stork legs and sparrow's tongues
Beet foam, apple darts, and hatching eggs
Silver goblets of cloudberry liquor

4th Course: The Underworld

Cocooned badger a la drow with fish sauce
Memorial beef
Varied mushroom accompaniments
Root vegetables
Golden goblets of skull wine

Jewels and Speech

5th Course: The Swan Thieves

The Silver Swans and their Lunar Jewels
Shaved goose eggs with Saffron Crust
Flying Swan with Falling Crowns
Spun glass goblets of gooseberry wine

Dessert

Candied roses
Smoke puff pastry with gold center
Castle pastry with inhabitants and orchards
Chocolate egg
Spun glass goblets of iced cinnamon pear wine

The Royal Presence Retires

Dances and music until dawn
Orange punch with children's tears
Ginger beer with blood shot

Eric Lindell (Order #3154279)

Wisdom (Insight) DC 11—Refusing to drink when the toast is made is a serious breach of etiquette. Those who do not drink with the queen suffer a –6 deduction to Status.

THE FEAST

The second and following courses arrive with fish, meats, and much stranger things. Read the following:

> Servants bring in at least twenty dishes—so many it's impossible to see them all at one time or hear them announced. A wild boar reduction over lamb stuffed with firebird eggs, and so forth. Your bowls and plates of blue glass are heaped high. Do you eat?

Eating confers no Status unless a character refused the stew earlier. If someone did decline but now eats the rest of the meal, they gain a +1 increase to Status (better late than never, for a net change of 0).

DETAILS OF THE MENU

The menu is meant to be a minefield, and the characters will try to figure out what is what. The primary checks available to them, all DC 19, are Wisdom (Insight), Intelligence (Nature), and Wisdom (Perception)—and possibly even Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (Religion)—to find out a little about each dish. Easier is a DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check to ask one's neighbors—though the fey might lie just to amuse themselves. Much of the cutlery and plates, as well as cups and glasses, are edible: drinking vessels of spun sugar, plates made of various sliced breads, and shadow-stuff for cutlery.

Fresh Lamb. The "fresh lamb" is cut from a live animal, of course.

Raven's Pie. Consuming the "pie with archery" involves shooting down one's supper when the pie is opened. Doing so requires a successful attack against AC 14 using a bow and a single arrow, which are provided (and retrieved after the course). Success earns a +1 increase to Status, a very tasty bird, and some applause from neighboring diners. A critical hit indicates two birds are struck and provides an additional +1 increase to Status.

Drow Cuisine. The "badger a la drow" is a spun silk cocoon around a jellied badger liquefied by spider venom (and then heated to neutralize the venom). Anyone who eats it must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw against poison, since it tastes vile and the badger's skeleton hasn't entirely dissolved yet. On a failed save, the eater is unable to keep the food down, and the resulting upheaval brings a –1 deduction to Status. Drow need not make the saving throw and can eat the dish normally, but they gain no increase to Status for doing so.

Memorial Beef. This maggot-ridden food for the dead is rotting under an illusion. Once it is requested, it must be eaten, because failing to eat and thereby honor the dead is a grave insult (–3 deduction to Status). This dish is generally avoided by the members of the court, because those who eat it must succeed on a DC 19 Constitution saving throw to eat it without gagging or vomiting (taking a –2 deduction to Status on a failed save, for insulting the shades of the departed).

Skull Wine. This beverage is made from fermented brains. It is best avoided. If it is drunk, this poison induces visions of death while chilling the blood and slowing the heart. A drinker must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or take 5 (1d10) poison damage and become poisoned. The saving throw is repeated at the end of every

Romance and Lust among the Fey

The fey are casual lovers: easy come, easy go, not too many broken hearts. Perhaps their long lives make them less passionate—or at least less inclined to grieve over a "lost love"— but for whatever reason, the characters are a novelty at the court and nothing more. That could change if a character wants to pursue a romantic relationship, or if you want to present the characters with the opportunity to take the game in this direction.

To get the ball rolling, describe one or two of the courtesans and see whether any of the players express an interest. If not, it's not something that can be forced. If a character is interested, avoid running a romance as a series of ability checks (you might do so covertly, but never make it clear that successes and failures are involved). Smooth-talkers might get shot down, but they should at least be having fun—and remember that any attempt at romance might be one long look away from causing a duel, if the characters hit on the wrong courtesan in front of the wrong noble. Even a failed romance can lead to an entertaining adventure.

In general, this part of the play experience isn't about long-term relationships; it's more like *Dangerous Liaisons* with each side maneuvering for advantage. For more information on running a successful romantic subplot in a high-fantasy game, see the "Character Love Interests" chapter in *Kobold Guide to Gamemastering*.

Eric Tomlinson [Order - 5/18/2019]

minute, and the drinker takes an extra 5 (1d10) poison damage on a failed save. The effect ends after the drinker has made two successful saving throws.

Jewels and Speech. The jewels might be illusions or not, but either way, attempting to steal them is a bad idea, resulting in an immediate –2 deduction to Status. The queen displays her power by conjuring the jewels together into a necklace and then asks Lord Chelessfield, Ambassador Maruuk, and the character with the highest Status to say a few courteous words to the assemblage. This event is a contest involving Charisma (Persuasion) checks (Chelessfield's modifier is +8, Maruuk's is +6). The winner gets the necklace and gains a +4 increase to Status. The second-place finisher loses or gains nothing. The third-place finisher takes a –3 deduction to Status for a dull, insufficiently flattering, or otherwise unworthy speech.

Fire Wine. This is a vile, burning liquid that churns the guts. A drinker must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, or else leave the table abruptly to relieve themselves. This outcome entails no loss of Status.

Swans and Crowns. The swans are enchanted to appear alive, fully feathered, and singing while they are being carved. The flying swans drop tiny crowns down upon the diners, who can earn the queen's current favor (a +1 increase to Status) by catching the crowns on their heads without using their hands. A character who moves quickly can catch a crown by succeeding on a DC 17 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

Smoke Puff Pastry. The "gold center" is molten gold, which burns the tongue of anyone who tries to eat it (the pastries are meant as offerings to the departed, or are cooled down and used for their monetary value). Eating one means the diner has a burned tongue for the rest of the feast, and cannot speak but must communicate in gestures and facial expressions (using DC 14 Charisma [Deception] checks to convey simple meaning).

Castle Pastry. The castle is indeed full of tiny inhabitants who scream and flee as the diner eats, and the "orchards" are tasty fruit morsels.

Chocolate Egg. The chocolate-covered egg has a boiled duckling inside. Those who are put off by this get an odd look: "What did you expect to find inside an egg?"

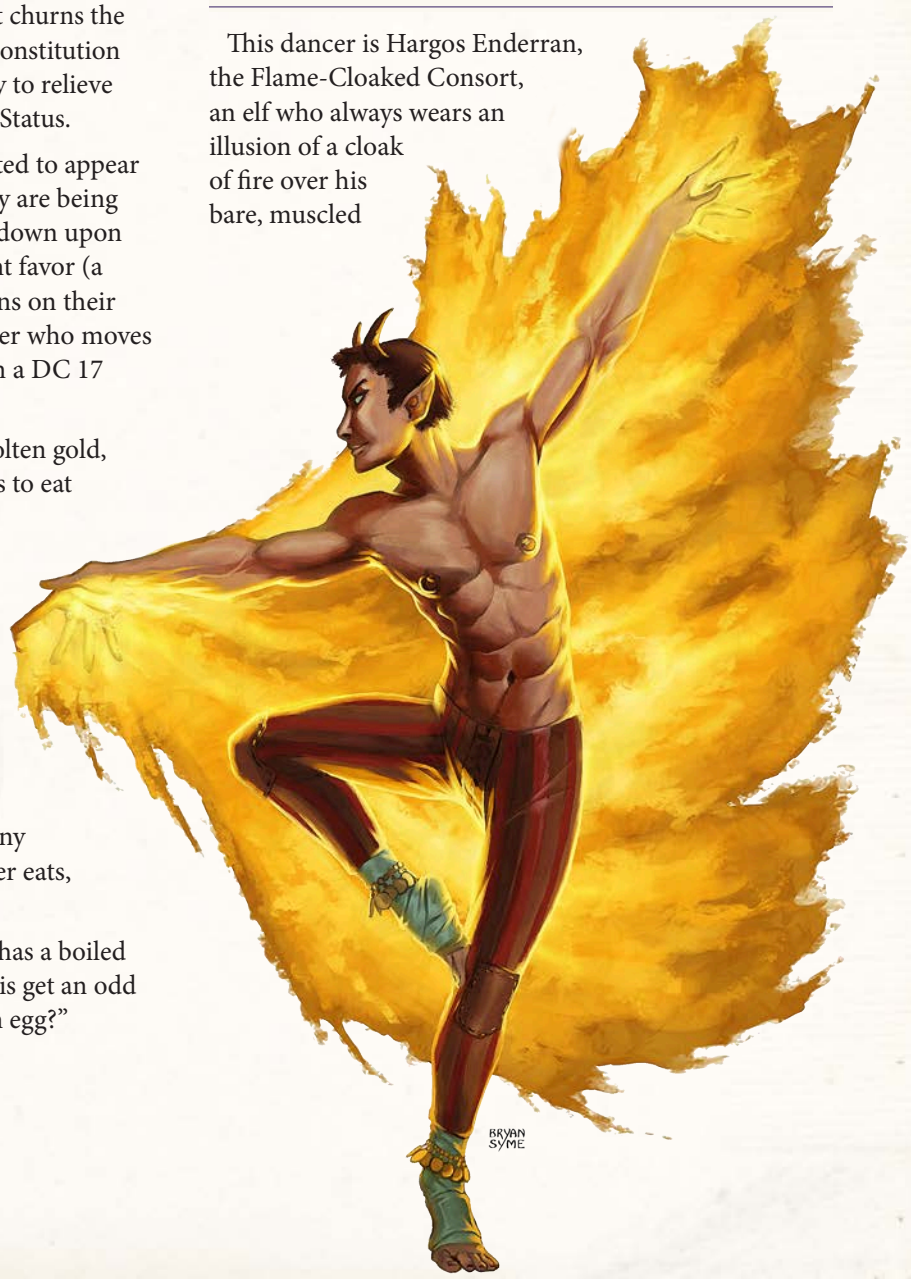
TWO DANCES AND THE THIRD

The dances begin as soon as the wine comes out. Being chosen to dance is a mark of favor among the courtesans and consorts; those who are not chosen to dance at three feasts in a row are clearly in disfavor, so they compete behind the scenes between feasts to gain an invitation to dance at the next one.

Read the following:

> The hall grows silent except for the roar of the fireplace, and then a male elf steps out of the fireplace wreathed in flame. The ladies of the court applaud and shout, "Hargos, Hargos!" as he dances, leaping among the tables and leaving puffs of purple smoke every time he lands. The dance ends with a final puff of smoke as he stands beside one of the ladies-in-waiting, and then he's gone.

This dancer is Hargos Enderran, the Flame-Cloaked Consort, an elf who always wears an illusion of a cloak of fire over his bare, muscled



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chest. His hearty laugh is often heard in the Hall of Changelings (area 24) and the Small Courtyard (area 46). As a junior consort, he is not often allowed to visit the Royal Halls, and he is making the most of this opportunity, flattering and paying homage to the greatest of the shadow fey ladies.

Most of the lords view Hargos with deep suspicion, although his behavior is always in keeping with the shadow fey standards of decorum. Two brownie servants attend to him after the dance. He shows off in front of any female character, although he leaves it to the character to show interest before further pursuing them.

Read the following:

Music plays quietly for a while, then steadily builds, and a second dancer appears in a cloud of mist, bringing a quick shower of raindrops that soaks the lower table. The dancer is Mora Moonwater the Rain-Cloaked, a stunning shadow fey woman wearing a cloak of liquid water. The cloak swirls and disappears into fog, and she dances in a watery garment of blue silk meshed with pearls, solid raindrops, and shimmering mithral scales. She moves as smoothly as a stream, her hips swaying like a tide, and her dance seems to be directed at every man in the room.

When the music stops, one of the elf visitors bows to her and presents a pink lily to her. She smiles, but takes her seat elsewhere.

Wisdom (Insight) DC 17—This courtesan seems eager to make an impression, but she's also quite sad.

Intelligence (Investigation) DC 15—Mora is one of the less notorious courtesans and has recently moved up from the junior courtesan's post. Rumor has it she is the new lover of the Black Prince or perhaps of Imbemerethion, the new Captain of the Guard (or both).

Like Hargos, Mora shows off in front of the male characters, but she leaves it to them to show interest with a gift, toast, or other sign before pursuing things any farther (see "Winning a Courtesan's or Consort's Favor," page 84).

THE THIRD DANCER

The third courtesan who might dance is Ulara of the Seven Veils, but she seems disinclined to show herself. Sometime after Mora's dance ends, a character can overhear muttering about the lack of a third dancer with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check, or can learn about it firsthand with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check.

If the highest-Status character has Status of 18 or higher, the Black Prince or another antagonist might ask the party to go fetch her. If they do go to room 54, convince her to talk, and persuade her to return to the feast with a DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check, that character gains a +1 increase to Status; continue with the Fire Dancer: Ulara of the Seven Veils section below. Failure to bring her back is a failure to obey the prince and brings a −2 deduction to Status. If the characters do not go to fetch Ulara, she is missing the next day—a fate that happens to courtesans rather often when they fall from favor.

None of the fey want to talk about it, and all the servants will say if pressed strongly enough (a successful DC 14 Charisma [Intimidation] check) is that "She's gone to the labyrinth, or else to visit her mother in Corremel."

FIRE DANCER: ULARA OF THE SEVEN VEILS

The dance of Ulara of the Seven Veils is a magical one, a form of pyrohypnosis that uses flames and movement to dominate its viewers. The fey are accustomed to this form of trickery, but the characters might not be.

A brazier ignites in the center of the hall—the flames roar, and smoke fills the air. A shadow fey maiden dressed in gray veils of smoke dances into the hall, cinders falling from her black hair, her golden eyes shining. Her bare feet scatter the coals of the brazier, and the smoke slowly starts to fade—her breasts and hips shake and push waves of rippling heat outward as the courtiers ring their glass goblets, shouting "Ulara, Ulara!"

The light of the brazier starts to pulse like a heartbeat, and the smoke veils the eyes of some.

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 13—The Black Prince seems to shout the loudest. And the eyes of the ambassador Lord Maruuk devour the dancer.

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 18—The brazier's light is part of some fire spell or charm.

Unless the characters pointedly do not watch or some of them are not sitting with their friends in the Great Hall, require each of the characters who views Ulara to make saving throws against the following effects.

Dance of Fiery Lust. Every creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of Ulara's dance and can see the courtesan must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become utterly charmed by her glamour for 10 minutes, and treat her as a dear friend or the object of a massive crush. You should encourage the player to decide what form this behavior takes: clapping madly, stomping one's feet, shouting encouragement, and generally carrying on would be appropriate.

Eric Tomlinson [Order - 5184207]

COURTLY COMMENTS AND CUTTING REMARKS

The fey can be insufferably arrogant bastards and cruel, bitchy gossips. You can use the bits of dialogue below to get across this attitude, and invent a few other slights and put-downs of your own that you can use during chatty scenes when characters interact closely with denizens of the court.

Note that some of the more snobbish shadow fey do not address mortal characters directly, but instead address their shadows. The flesh they consider uncouth, for those not born in the Shadow Realm.

Table 3–4: Snobbish Courtier Comments

Did you hear something? Noisome bother. Just anyone seems to get in these days.
Budgy, I see animals. Their lips are moving, almost like speech. Will her Majesty have them defanged?
You there, fetch me more wine! (If spoken repeatedly to the lowest-Status character, it might motivate them to earn Status. Or to smash something.)
Your friend appears to be talking. You should deal with that. (A courtly warning from a noble to the party leader.)
[To a servant, while ignoring the characters.] *Was there a breeze ruffling the curtains? Tend to the windows.*
You wait here.
As I was saying . . .
[Stonewalling.] *I understand.*
These annoying beasts are only good for lighting. Wish we still had a Royal Rat Catcher.
Courtesans
By a melancholy or often drunk courtesan: *There are darker things than shadow in this place.*
You do not seem to bear anything upon or below your belt sufficient to accomplish any task I would set you . . .
What pretty eyes you have—a shame they do not see better.
Servants
Goblin: Phew. *Smells like the Light in here.*
Butler: [An eyebrow raises, turns, and wags itself like a finger at the characters.] *Shhh.*
Servant: [A tip about its master.] *Some elves love music, women, the skill of the blade, but I've never seen any elf love anything as much as Dae Tyrnin loves his suits.*
Goblin proverb: Better a rat in the pot than a hog at the trap.
Goblin proverb: Better copper today than silver tomorrow.
Duelists
So many men have fallen to my blade . . . and so many women to my bed.
There is a place you can cut a mortal that will paralyze it, leaving it to watch its own blood pour out like the last drops of wine. I hope to show it to you sometime.
Draw steel, and I swear I will gut you where you stand.
My sword's enchantments are older than your mewling language. Prepare to face true power.
Make your words count—they may be your last!
Whoreson, impudent, emboss'd rascal! Have at thee!
Her Majesty's Mercy! (Exclamation and joke.)
Hunter
What has become of us brothers? We still allow the bird of flame to mock our hunts and now . . . now we must accept these lumbering cows in our keep? (Looking at the characters.)
As I was saying, the hunting is very poor. Some new game is needed desperately. (Glancing at character.)

Eric Lindell (Order #3154279)

Kiss of Fiery Lust. Ulara kisses a charmed or willing target. The creature must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by her for 24 hours. Ulara can cast *suggestion* (requiring no components) on a creature charmed in this way. Typical requests include going to fetch things from the kitchen, carrying messages to her various friends and allies, or even insulting her enemies (potentially inciting a duel or cruel gossip). In some cases, if she is bored with a charmed character, she simply sends them out of the courts and into the damp woods, naked but for a thin and ragged cloak. "Wearing Ulara's cloak" is a bit of an inside joke among the fey, at the expense of visitors.

If Ulara succeeds in charming a character or two right away, she continues dancing while a charmed character makes additional saving throws each round. In the third round (when a character with 3 levels of exhaustion has disadvantage on saving throws), she uses her Kiss of Fiery Lust on a charmed character, securing the character's obedience and bringing a –1 deduction to the character's Status. The character in question has not won the courtesan—quite the contrary, she is likely to take all those she entraps that evening back to her chambers for her own amusement.

If none of the characters succumb to the kiss, the victim is likely the young Raven leader Brightspur. If any of the characters are members of that faction, Brightspur approaches them in the morning asking for their help as his seconds in a duel. He intends to recover his lost Status by challenging Ulara's champion to a duel to show his devotion to her. This need not be a standard duel; to make his point, he might even call for a cliffside duel (see page 99), expecting to be talked out of it or to have the challenge declined.

Development. Although Ulara wins some followers through magic and cruelty, a character can turn this encounter to his or her advantage. Returning to Ulara and attempting to woo her later on is much more likely to succeed for a previously charmed character; the character gains an automatic success in the endeavor. Even if the character fails in the attempt, the fey appreciate this courageous behavior, and no Status is lost.

COURTESANS WHO DO NOT DANCE

Two other courtesans attend with their admirers, followers, and lovers: Songemesha the Raven-Haired (Status 18; she will not speak to characters with Status lower than 14) and Maraya Laccrystae, the Sapphire (Status 23; she will not speak to characters with Status lower than 18). Lishekki and Ballandrine both do not attend, and rumors swirl that they somehow insulted Baron Suvid or one of the elder fey recently.

Songemesha and Maraya feast, joke, and enjoy the dances, but they do not take part in the festivities beyond keeping their own coteries amused and choosing one of their retinue to walk them back to their chambers. Unless a character intervenes and succeeds in courting one of them (see page 84), these two courtesans leave with their primary admirers. In the case of Songemesha, this is Lord Chelessfield, the elf. For Maraya, this is Lord Maruuk, the diabolic ambassador.

DANGEROUS WOMEN

Many of the women at the Swan Festival are dangerous. They include the succubus/incubus Maraya, who dotes on the ambassador of Hell (and who is all too willing to prey on mortal lusts); the courtesans, who keep some psoglav demons nearby to send after characters who stray from protocol; a noblewoman who asks the characters to do just one little favor (gathering some hairs from the prince's brush or comb while he attends the ball); and an equally dangerous noblewoman who seeks a tryst in the Moon-Viewing Tower (area 44).

This last individual seeks a character willing to meet her alone at the forbidden Moon-Viewing Tower; if a character agrees (and the characters defeat the deathwisps there), a goblin servant appears bringing the noblewoman's regrets, and the characters are instead ambushed at the tower by Akyishigal, the lesser demon lord who is striving to pick off good-aligned members of the court. The demon had sought to ambush the Lady Jalennis, Lady of the Pale Gardens, but she is a member of the Lords of Light and was warned of the danger. Thus, the characters got caught in the middle of a failed ambush, and after the fact, Lady Jalennis feels she owes them at least an explanation, and perhaps a favor. If they seek her out after the Swan Festival, she helps them with a bit of lore or gossip, or heals an injured party member.

Eric Tomlinson (Order - 5183207)

CLOSING THE FEAST AND CLEANING UP

Near the end of the festivities, Akyishigal and its minions swarm the feast to bring it to a close. With roaches suddenly everywhere, the feast ends in chaos as courtiers flee in all directions:

> A round of dancing has just gotten under way when one of the servants lets out a shriek. A dozen roaches are scampering up the goblin's legs, and he is trying to shake them off. Then, in a flash, roaches are everywhere, coating the food, floating in the wine goblets, and crunching underfoot.
>
> A clacking, hissing voice says, "How is it that no one invited your fourth guest and the King's Favorite, Akyishigal? How is it that I was spurned? Now my followers shall have their feast!"
>
> Everyone starts running for the exits. The party's over.

The following day is a period of rest and recovery throughout the courts. Almost none of the fey are interested in receiving visitors, and most are calling on their servants to bring them chilled wines, simple squash soups, and the like. Hard-charging characters might find this a good occasion for a healthy rest (and they find that studying or praying for spells is effective this day). Anyone who makes too much noise might be the target of harsh words or even an invitation to a duel.

Act III, Scene 3: Winning the Sapphire Courtesan Maraya

The most beautiful of the courtesans of the Shadow Court is the blue-haired Maraya, better known as the Sapphire Courtesan. The various princes, knights, and duelists all vie with one another for her favor and her kisses, and generally one or more of them are always in her company. If the characters defeat her current paramour in a duel, however, she transfers her affections to the new (and, in her eyes, more powerful) member of the court. Her fickleness seems not to bother most who pursue her.

Winning her favor is quite difficult (see "Winning a Courtesan's or Consort's Favor," page 84), and once she is won, things might only get worse. Maraya is a demanding courtesan, dictating what days each of her suitors may visit and becoming peevish if they fail to show up with gifts and flattery. If someone does show up on time and with gifts on their first visit, Maraya grants a token of her esteem—a small bauble and her Profane Gift (see her stat block), which the character retains until Maraya rescinds her favor.

Treasure

As a gift from the Sapphire Courtesan, a character might receive a *choker of eloquence*. This item is a magic necklace of uncommon rarity that requires attunement, and raises the wearer's Charisma to 19 it's not already higher than that.

COMBAT WITH THE SAPPHIRE COURTESAN

Receiving Maraya's favor is a bit of a poison pill; when a character wins her over and the scene might normally fade to black, you have the option of starting a rather unexpected combat.

Important Note. This is an optional scene that you should discuss with the player before starting the session. If the player is not comfortable with his or her character fighting tangled in the sheets with an impossibly sexy fey creature, drop it and move on. If the player seems comfortable with this sort of scene, run it.

After judging a new lover's Status and suitability, Maraya might attack, choosing a moment when her paramour is most vulnerable (unarmored and without a weapon immediately to hand), gaining surprise and attacking with her life-draining kiss. Once that succeeds, she charms her new companion, causing the poor soul to follow her like a puppy until it can shake off her influence; the character takes a –8 deduction to Status for falling prey to her (which is offset if the character later wins her favor or defeats her in combat).

If the victim resists her charm, normal combat ensues. Maraya won't give chase out of her chamber, but she might block the way. A character who escapes takes only a –2 deduction to Status (instead of –8), but also loses a magic item (player's choice) or other item of extreme value that was left behind.

If the Sapphire Courtesan is slain, the entire court is rather bitter about it; she was well liked despite her arrogance and abusive ways, and the character who struck the fatal blow takes a –4 deduction to Status. The diabolic ambassador, Lord Maruuk, will take it very poorly if Maraya is assaulted by the characters and lodges a complaint with the prince and the queen if she is wounded or killed. The ambassador then makes sure that the characters must fight a duel at the first opportunity, likely with Baron Suvid.

Of course, even while she is alive, Maraya is perfectly willing to send Baron Suvid as a challenger on her behalf if a suitor fails to appear when required. In short, she's in a position of power and takes advantage of it; if Suvid fails to win a duel against one of her former lovers, she begins a duel of gossip to destroy the foe's reputation through whispers.

Eric Lindahl (Order #3154079)

Maraya/Marek, Ancient Succubus/Incubus

Medium fiend (shapechanger), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 110 (17d8 + 34)

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	22 (+5)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	22 (+6)

Skills Deception +12, Insight +7, Perception +7, Persuasion +12, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning, poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Abyssal, Common, Elvish, Infernal, Umbral, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Telepathic Bond. Maraya ignores the range restriction on her telepathy when communicating with a creature she has charmed, or one that has received her Profane Gift. The two don't even need to be on the same plane of existence.

Shapechanger. Maraya can use her action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid, or back into her true form. Without wings, she loses her flying speed. Other than her size and speed, her statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. Maraya reverts to her true form if she dies.

Actions

Multiattack. Maraya makes two claw attacks.

Claw (Fiend Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 14 (4d6) psychic damage.

Charm. One humanoid Maraya can see within 30 feet of her must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed for 1 day. The charmed target obeys Maraya's verbal or telepathic commands. If the target suffers any harm or receives a suicidal command, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on a success. If the target successfully saves against the effect, or if the effect on it ends, the target is immune to Maraya's Charm for the next 24 hours. Maraya can have only one target charmed at a time. If she charms another, the effect on the previous target ends.

Draining Kiss. Maraya kisses a creature charmed by her or a willing creature. The target must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw against this magic, taking 32 (5d10 + 5) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the

Optional: Duels of Words and Slander

Blades and spells aren't the only weapons drawn in Shadow Court duels—words can cut into one's Status even more deeply than tangible wounds. A duel of words and slander is similar in form to a standard duel (see page 99), in which three passes are made by each of the duelists, who select a particular form of social "attack" as their weapon each time. The objective in a duel of words is not to gain Status for oneself, but to erode a rival's standing.

Unlike with a normal duel, no formal challenge need take place, and the combatants needn't even be in one another's presence! Often the first indication someone gets that one is engaged in a duel of words are sidelong glances and half-hidden snickering from those nearby.

To resolve these duels, ability checks can be used in contests in a form of riddle game or match of wits. You'll want to make note of various passive scores beforehand, which set the DC of various approaches in a duel of words and slander. The common forms of "combat" are listed below.

Threats and Extortion: Attacker's Charisma (Intimidation) check contested by defender's Charisma check.

Protocol and Toadying: Attacker's Charisma (Persuasion) check contested by defender's Wisdom check.

Gossip and Slander: Attacker's Charisma (Deception) or Charisma (Persuasion) check contested by defender's Charisma (Deception) or Charisma (Persuasion) check.

Verbal Mockery and Insults: Attacker's Charisma (Deception) check contested by defender's Charisma (Deception) check.

Theft and Trickery: Attacker's Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check contested by defender's Wisdom check.

Physical Mockery: Attacker's Dexterity (Acrobatics) check contested by defender's Charisma check.

Note: the simultaneous attacks in this kind of duel can take different forms; one party might make threats against the other, and the other might respond with a slanderous attack. A roll of 1 or a check that fails by 5 or more allows the opponent an unanswered follow-up attack.

The loser in any of these contests takes a −1 penalty to Status, or a −2 penalty if the roll on the attacker's check was a 20.

Eric Tomlinson (Order - 5183207)

damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

Etherealness. Maraya magically enters the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane, or vice versa.

Profane Gift (1/Day). Maraya grants a profane gift to a willing humanoid she touches. The target increases one ability score of its choice by 2, or two different ability scores by 1 each. A single creature can have no more than one profane gift at a time. A profane gift is removed by a *dispel evil and good* spell or more powerful magic. Maraya can remove one of her gifts as a bonus action, and doing so causes the target's Charisma score to be reduced by 2d6 until it finishes a long rest. If this reduces the target's Charisma to 0, the target falls unconscious until it regains at least 1 point of Charisma.

Development. Those who woo and win Maraya are in for a world of hurt; her lovers always disappear for a week or two, then are generally thrown back into the courts fatigued, exhausted, without a stitch of clothing—and with their hit point maximums reduced to half normal.

The fey know about this behavior and are not put off by it, such that it takes a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check for a character to find out what has happened when their friend disappears. If the party decides to mount a rescue operation rather than wait for the return of their companion, Maraya does not oppose them directly—but the characters find their friend besotted, enchanted, and willing to defend the Sapphire Courtesan to the death. If they subdue the victim, Maraya flees her chambers and spends a few days hiding in the form of a goblin or a shadow fey, plotting some sort of revenge.

If the characters wait, their friend does return after 2d6 + 2 days—naked (without clothes or armor), shaved, and otherwise a mess. The strange thing is that, even in their naked and embarrassed state, most of her lovers still want to win her back.

Treasure

Beyond the profane gifts Maraya gives out, if she is defeated in combat and her rooms are searched with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check, the party finds locked coffers that hold jewelry and gemstones. There are six pieces of gold jewelry, two necklaces, two bracelets, and two rings, each worth 3,000 gp and set with sapphires.

Act III, Scene 4: Dueling Season

Dueling season is a special time in the courts. It can occur whenever the reigning monarch decrees it to be so. Typically, it is a period of 1–4 weeks during which dueling is permitted as a means of improving one's Status. When the characters experience their first dueling season, they will discover that it's impossible to get the kind of rest that's needed to recover one's spells. Also, any magic items they possess that normally regain uses every day do not recharge in this way until after the season. Both of these measures are imposed to prevent would-be duelists from taking unfair advantage by unleashing a spell or a magical effect during the combat.

STATUS FROM DUELING

The fey place great importance on dueling properly, meaning that one must challenge the correct sort of foe, the challenge must be duly accepted, and the duel must be fought with proper decorum and ceremony. Table 3–2 provides deductions and increases to Status that apply after a character takes part in a duel, depending on the conditions under which the duel took place and what its outcome was.

Eric Lindell (Order #3154279)

Table 3–2: Status Changes from Duels

Status	Event/Outcome
−8	Dueling the Black Prince and losing
−6	Caught cheating in a duel
−5	Caught dueling outside dueling season
−4	Declining a challenge from a fey whose Status differs from yours by 5 or less
−3	Challenging a fey whose Status differs from yours by 6 or more
−2	Attacking a courtier (a fey with Status of 11 or higher) without issuing a challenge to duel
−1	Losing a duel (whether in dueling season or not)
+0	Declining a challenge from a fey whose Status differs from yours by 6 or more
+0	A duel that results in a tie
+1	Issuing a proper challenge that is declined
+1	Winning a duel (whether in dueling season or not)
+2	Issuing or accepting a challenge outside dueling season
+6	Winning a duel outside dueling season
+7	Accepting and winning a cliffside duel
+8	Dueling the Black Prince and winning
+9	Dueling Baron Suvid and winning

The Status changes from dueling are not cumulative; only the greatest positive modifier and the greatest negative modifier from any duel apply when the outcome of the duel has been determined.

DUELING RULES

Duels can be fought with royal sanction during dueling season, but such a request is rarely granted to commoners or lesser fey (for whom dueling remains illegal). These challenges are commonly fought either on the dueling ground (area 2) for duelists of Status 15 or lower, or in the Great Hall of the Shadow Court (area 62) or on the Bridge of Night (area 26) whenever either individual has a Status of 20 or higher. A bribe of goods or gold equal to 10 gp for every rank of Status convinces the disreputable groundskeeper Whitemist to allow the illegal use of the dueling ground.

Outside Dueling Season. Challenging someone outside dueling season is possible but risky. These duels are fought outside the palace, either in a forest clearing at dawn (ideally far from prying eyes) or along the cliffside path leading up to the Western Gate (see "Cliffside Duels" below). A duelist caught in the act is taken before the king or queen to receive a royal reprimand, which invariably involves the surrender of the offender's sword. The king or queen then shatters the sword and gives the duelist a wooden sword instead as a mark of shame.

Cliffside Duels. Duels fought outside dueling season must be contested away from the palace to avoid discovery by one of the guards or senior nobles. Fortunately for the combatants, such events are immensely popular with both duelists and spectators. As such, they are rarely reported to the footmen, the captain of the guard, the archmagus, or others who might be inclined to arrest the participants. The cliffs near the Eastern Gate are a popular dueling site for this reason but also quite dangerous. If either participant scores a critical hit during a cliffside duel, the foe might be forced off the path by the blow, taking falling damage from a fall of around 70 feet or so (7d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and battering on the rocks).

The falling participant is deemed the loser. The winner gains Status normally, but the loser does not lose Status. Surviving a fall from that height makes one a celebrity of sorts.

Challenges and Status. A duel requires a challenge and an acceptance; anyone can challenge any adult fey to a duel, although traditionally courtesans and consorts neither issue nor accept challenges. Declining a duel results in a −1 deduction to Status, unless the challenger's Status is higher than the challenged party's by 5 or more (in which case no Status is lost by the challenged party). Particularly dramatic challenges and acceptances are a wonderful opportunity to award inspiration.

The Crime of Cold Iron

A cold iron weapon (as explained in *Tome of Beasts*) is treated as magical when used against any fey creature, and is the only sort of weapon that has any hope of harming the most powerful fey lords and ladies.

Whether the characters are aware of this fact or not, they might try to bring such weapons to a duel—in which case they are quickly made to realize that "carrying cold iron in court" is an egregious felony. On the first offense, a mortal is sharply informed that possession of cold iron weapons is forbidden and entirely outlawed in the courts, and most particularly in dueling. A second offense results in the immediate execution of the wielder and the destruction of the weapon.

Eric Fairlaht (Order #51842079)

How Combat Works. No initiative rolls are required. All attack rolls are simultaneous. Each participant makes three attacks in a standard duel, although special rules might increase a duelist's number of attempts. The winner is the duelist who scores the most hits.

The attack rolls in a duel use the character's attack bonus and features against the defender's AC. Note that most fey duels are fought "without a coward's armor," meaning that only Dexterity, natural armor, and magical protections are permitted—shields and suits of armor are not allowed unless by specific (and unusual) arrangement beforehand. A roll of 1 or a miss by 5 or more allows the opponent one unanswered follow-up attack (effectively, an "extra pass" during the duel). Otherwise, the combat proceeds normally with duelists moving and attacking for three turns.

Damage, Healing, and Resolution. For each successful hit in combat, the target takes damage normally. Healing, however, is impeded somewhat. Over the course of a season, duelists who compete frequently become exhausted and worn. The Shadow Realm seems to prevent healing for those who overexert themselves during this time. Hit points lost in a duel can't be regained by spending Hit Dice or by finishing a long rest during dueling season. Instead, they are regained at a rate of 1 hit point per day spent resting, with a bonus each day equal to the wounded character's Constitution modifier. A duelist with a 16 Constitution can thus recover 4 hit points per day of rest during dueling season.

Cheating. Either duelist can attempt to cheat by making two attacks in a single pass of combat. If both attack rolls miss, the cheating goes noticed.

If one or both of the attack rolls are successful, the foe might notice that the attack involved cheating. The higher result is the actual attack roll; the lower result is the cheating roll. If the opposing duelist's passive Perception score + 5 is equal to or greater than the cheating roll, the opponent notices the breach of protocol.

For example, a trollkin attacks a shadow fey sorcerer in combat dueling and decides to cheat. He makes two attack rolls and gets results of 26 and 13. The 26 becomes his attack roll, and it hits; the 13 is his cheating roll, and it is lower than the sorcerer's passive Perception score + 5. She spots the half-orc's cheating and might call him on it. If an attempt to cheat is noticed and called out, the cheater suffers a −1 deduction to Status, and the duel is over. The non-cheater is declared the winner and gains a +1 increase to Status accordingly.

Winning. A duel takes three simultaneous checks, and the duelist with the most successes wins; ties are always possible. The winning duelist gains a +1 increase to Status; the loser suffers a −1 deduction to Status. If both duelists have the same number of successes, the duel is a tie and Status does not change.

Length of Dueling Season. The season ends when the reigning monarch says it ends, usually after two or three weeks or when most of the interesting duelists have been injured and no other significant challenges are expected.

CHALLENGERS AND DUELISTS

Anyone can be a challenger in a duel. In addition to Brightspur (see page 69), four shadow fey, three elves, and one roachling are the most active potential challengers during the dueling season, although you might well introduce others. This section provides details on a number of potential adversaries.

Caleb, Celestial-Blooded Duelist

Medium humanoid (elf), chaotic good

Armor Class 17 (studded leather)

Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +5, Wis +4, Cha +6

Skills Arcana +4, Deception +6, Perception +4, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances fire, radiant

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Celestial, Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Fey Ancestry. Caleb has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. Caleb's spellcasting ability is Charisma. He can cast the following spells requiring no material components:

At will: *light*

3/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

1/day: *cure wounds*

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Caleb has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. Caleb has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

Eric Lindahl (Order #3154279)

Jurok

Small humanoid (goblin), lawful evil

Armor Class 18 (breastplate, shield)

Hit Points 110 (17d6 + 51)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	15(+2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +5, Con +6

Skills Athletics +10, Stealth +8

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Goblin, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Brave. Jurok has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Jurok hits with it (included in the attack).

Nimble Escape. Jurok can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of his turns.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Jurok makes three melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Vicious Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage. On a roll of 20, the target takes an extra 7 piercing damage. The spear is magical.

Shield Bash. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

REACTIONS

Parry. Jurok adds 3 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, he must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Caleb makes two rapier attacks. If he has a dagger drawn, he can also make one dagger attack.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage, and a target creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. A poisoned creature can repeat the save at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) cold damage.

REACTIONS

Parry. Caleb adds 3 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, he must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

SIR YNGRESS THE RED

The youngest and most eager—and most ignorant—of the elf visitors from the River Court, Yngress pretty much agrees with whatever he heard last. Gullible enough that he doesn't quite realize he was brought along to be the entertainment, Yngress is the best hunter at the courts other than the Black Prince and will frequently visit the woods and return with remarkable things such as unicorn foals, white bear pelts, a singing squirrel, or an eagle with two heads.

Yngress keeps a longsword and a dagger tied neatly to his saddle, which he uses to fight any duel as needed. His steed, Estoile (an awakened heavy warhorse),

Eric Lindahl (Order #51842079)

occasionally whispers some advice in his ear. It is by far the smarter of the pair.

Sir Yngress the Red

Medium humanoid (elf), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 19 (half plate, shield)

Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	15(+2)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +5

Skills Athletics +7, Intimidation +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Elvish

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Action Surge (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). Sir Yngress can take an additional action on his turn.

Fey Ancestry. Sir Yngress has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Second Wind (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). As a bonus action, Sir Yngress can regain 1d10 + 6 hit points.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Sir Yngress makes two attacks.

+2 Silvered Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 11 (1d10 + 6) slashing damage if used with two hands. If a target is hit by two longsword attacks in one turn, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed 5 feet away from Sir Yngress and knocked prone.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Development. Sir Yngress is a good sport about dueling and bears no grudge against those who defeat him. He has a tendency to bring up his victories to rub them in, although it's done with a smile and a wink rather than smugly.

Treasure

Sir Yngress will insist that the victor in a duel against him take an item of value. The suggested default item is a *+2 silvered longsword*, which Yngress calls Heartsilver. He will, however, part with his spider silk *boots of elvenkind* or his wolf-skin *cloak of elvenkind* as well (but not both).

YIKRUGRAK, THE CRAWLING KNIGHT

Maximum Status: 12 (will accept any duel from lower Status)

A favored roachling gifted with great power, Yikrugrak is a nightmare foe who tears into her enemy with abandon. She accepts all challenges from those of lower Status and none from those of higher Status.

Yikrugrak, the Crawling Knight

Small humanoid (roachling), neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (studded leather)

Hit Points 150 (20d6 + 80)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	22 (+5)	19 (+4)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +7

Eric Lindahl (Order #51642079)

Skills Acrobatics +8, Perception +5, Stealth +8

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 10 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Abyssal, Common

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Resistant. Yikrugrak has advantage on Constitution saving throws.

Unlovely. Yikrugrak has disadvantage on Charisma (Performance or Persuasion) checks made against creatures that aren't roachlings.

Actions

Multiattack. Yikrugrak makes two attacks with her shortsword.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) acid damage.

Reactions

Parry. Yikrugrak adds 3 to her AC against a melee attack that would hit her. To do so, she must see the target and be wielding a melee weapon.

Development. Oddly enough, Yikrugrak is an excellent potential ally for the party. Yes, in the Shadow Realm, everything comes with a price, but a roachling duelist might be among the most trustworthy individuals here. If the party wins the trust of the Crawling Knight by defeating her in a duel, she will remain loyal and friendly to the person who bested her. Although she is not wholly good, her desire to gain allies might convince her to train the characters in the dueling arts (granting them the Defensive Duelist or Dual Wielder feat for use only during the dueling season and without prerequisites). She can also give them some rather useful information about the maze and the Moonlit King: in particular, if the party helps her with one or two small tasks, such as gaining access to the kitchen pantry (mouths to feed!), retrieving her lord's stolen dagger from the belt of Baron Suvid where it hangs as a prize, or even assassinating Brightspur (who loathes Yikrugrak as unworthy and un-fey, seeking to drive her into exile).

Her information includes the knowledge that:

1. The Moonlit King is a hermit-like figure who never leaves his tower, and it is death to wander toward that tower without an invitation.

2. A hidden cache of treasure exists near the lantern dragonettes' roost in the maze, buried underground there for times of need.

3. The king's servants are more powerful by moonlight, and they might well seek to kill the characters if they learn what the party intends.

4. The Demon Lord of Roaches is very, very eager to seize the king's title for itself.

In addition, Yikrugrak comes with a few strings attached—she is ready to lay eggs and is looking for an appropriate place (such as inside the carcasses of many dead fey, and even better if she could not be tied to the murders). She seeks a nest of rotting carcasses to raise her next generation. Perhaps the characters could help, she asks, by slaughtering a few of the fey?

A friend she might be, but hardly a human friend.

Treasure

Yikrugrak asks the winner of a duel against her to swear friendship. If the winner agrees, she gives the character a black star sapphire (1,000 gp) and a *potion of greater healing*. She also comes to visit the winner occasionally at awkward hours of the night, asking how the character has survived and avoided the wrath of the Moonlit King so far.

Eric Tomlinson (Order - 5183207)

LADY SORREMINX OF THE RIVER COURT

Minimum Status: 13

An exotic, black-haired high elf from the River Court who enjoys scholarship and history, Lady Sorreminx carries an ebony wand set with diamonds at both ends. She prefers to hear discussions of things arcane and historical rather than dueling and swordplay, and she is always quick to point out the flaws in her foes. Indeed, she delivers her putdowns with a cruel smile: "Where did you learn your major arcana, in a pigsty? Any apprentice knows better, sir, for shame!"

Lady Sorreminx of the River Court

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (elven chain)

Hit Points 77 (14d8 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	21 (+5)

Saving Throws Con +4, Cha +8

Skills Deception +8, Insight +4, Perception +4, Persuasion +8

Senses darkvision 60 ft,. passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Fey Ancestry. Sorreminx has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

Metamagic. Sorreminx can use the following options when casting her spells. She can use Heightened Spell twice and Quickened Spell three times, and regains expended uses when she finishes a short or long rest:

Quickened Spell. Sorreminx casts a spell with a casting time of 1 action as a bonus action instead.

Heightened Spell. One target of a spell Sorreminx casts has disadvantage on the first saving throw it makes against the spell.

Special Equipment. *Elven chain*, silvered rapier, *wand of the warmage*

Spellcasting. Sorreminx is a 12th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She knows the following sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): *blade ward, fire bolt, light, minor illusion, prestidigitation, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *feather fall, grease, shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *false life, invisibility, scorching ray*

3rd level (3 slots): *hold person, vampiric touch*

4th level (3 slots): *bestow curse, black tentacles*

5th level (2 slots): *cone of cold, telekinesis*

6th level (1 slot): *sunbeam*

ACTIONS

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

Development. Lady Sorreminx sometimes takes a liking to those who spar well. If a character who duels her shows any romantic interest, the two might become an item at court.

If such a character snubs Lady Sorreminx, she might take it badly unless the character lets her down smoothly with a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Failure to disentangle oneself gracefully means that Sorreminx might connive to have Sir Rujan or Lord Chelessfield challenge the duelist soon.

Eric Lindell (Order #3154279)

Treasure

Lady Sorreminx happily gives a victorious duelist a 5,000 gp emerald and a *potion of superior healing*.

SIR RUJAN, KNIGHT OF THE BARNACLE TREE

Minimum Status: 15

Sir Rujan is both an instigator of duels and a master of shadow fey illusion.

Sir Rujan, Knight of the Barnacle Tree

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (18 with mage armor)

Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+X)	20 (+5)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Int +7

Skills Acrobatics +8, Arcana +7, Deception +8, Insight +4, Intimidation +8, Perception +4, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances cold

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of his turns, Rujan can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Fey Ancestry. Rujan has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. Rujan's spellcasting ability is Charisma. He can cast the following spell, requiring no material components:

2/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Rujan deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Rujan's that isn't incapacitated and Rujan doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Spellcasting. Rujan is a 7th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *minor image, prestidigitation, ray of frost,*

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor, shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *invisibility, mirror image, phantasmal force*

3rd level (2 slots): *blink, counterspell, major image*

4th level (1 slot): *greater invisibility*

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Rujan has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. Rujan has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Rujan makes two attacks with his rapier.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) cold damage.

Development. Sir Rujan appears calm and poised in defeat, but inside he seethes with rage. He grants no gifts or spoils to the victor in a duel, although he will attempt to claim some similar reward (by intimidation and threats, generally) if he comes out on top.

LORD CHELESSFIELD, MASTER OF THE ALPINE

Minimum Status: 17

This elderly elf, with golden hair and purple eyes, wears a tabard of white marked with blue diamonds. He has a set of mithral bracers as well as a circlet of pure gold worked into the shape of a dragon (the symbol of his title and rule of the highlands in the fey realms).

Lord Chelessfield carries a boar spear and a hand crossbow on his off days, and is a close friend of the Black Prince because of his love of the hunt. He is a dangerous foe, since he is interested in what the characters might do in the Shadow Realm, rather than hoping to score points with the ladies. He asks the characters many pointed questions about their goals here, what acts of murder they might have committed against elf or shadow fey interests, and what other lords they might have crossed swords with.

Lord Chelessfield

Medium humanoid (elf), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 20 (mithral plate, shield)

Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +5, Wis +5

Skills Athletics +8, Insight +5, Perception +5, Persuasion +8, Survival +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft,. passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan, Umbral

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Eric Lindahl (Order #51842079)

Brave. Lord Chelessfield has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when Lord Chelessfield hits with it (included in his attacks).

Fey Ancestry. Lord Chelessfield has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Lord Chelessfield makes three melee attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Shield Bash. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d4 + 5) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Leadership (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). For 1 minute, Lord Chelessfield can utter a special command or warning whenever a nonhostile creature that he can see within 30 feet of Lord Chelessfield makes an attack roll or a saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand Lord Chelessfield. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if Lord Chelessfield is incapacitated.

Development. Defeating Lord Chelessfield irks him but does nothing to affect shadow fey politics. He might choose to woo a courtesan that his challenger also pursues or has won—and given his charm and wealth, he might well win her away.

Treasure

Lord Chelessfield gives a *sentinel shield* to the victor if he is defeated; it is marked with the blue-and-white mountain insignia of his home fiefdom. He also generously offers to foster any of the victor's offspring in the knightly arts and to teach that child archery.

BARON SUVID, LORD OF BLADES

Minimum Status: 19

Baron Suvid's clothes are made of shimmering silk woven with silver, so that they ripple like water when he moves. He wears lace, feathers, and ribbons as well, all of which turn into a blurry cloud of color. Following his lunges and slashes in combat is exceedingly difficult for spectators, not to mention opponents.

A quickstep who is the fastest and perhaps most lethal blade at the court, Suvid is widely and justly feared. Speed is his main weapon, together with the ability to shift away when he pleases and to humiliate his lessers. He's usually looking for an excuse to duel someone; the Ravens are all terrified of him, and he defends the honor of the Grey Ladies faction when they ask it of him.

When dueling, Suvid wears armor made of white feathers that further blurs his movements. Generally, he becomes visible in the instant before combat begins, and then begins a whirlwind of destruction.

Baron Suvid

Small fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 121 (22d6 + 44)

Speed 120 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	23 (+6)	15 (+2)	15 (+2)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +9

Eric Lindell (Order #31542079)

Skills Acrobatics +12, Perception +9, Sleight of Hand +12, Stealth +12

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Umbral

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Evasion. If Suvid is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw, and only half damage if he fails.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Suvid deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage when he hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Suvid's that isn't incapacitated and Suvid doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Speed Blur. Attack rolls against Suvid have disadvantage unless his speed is reduced to 0.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Suvid makes three shortsword attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d6 + 6) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage.

Invisibility. Suvid magically turns invisible until he attacks, or until his concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell). Any equipment Suvid wears or carries is invisible with him.

Tactics. Suvid employs hit-and-run tactics, using his invisibility to engage and deliver sneak attacks; he strikes, then moves away and returns, literally running around his foe as needed. If badly wounded, Suvid disengages and retreats. He is not a fan of fighting very long, and as he leaves, he shouts, "The King shall hear of this! You shall be struck down as the impure whoreson mongrels you are!"

Development. If Suvid is defeated, most of the court is terrified at the thought of dueling the winner. Suvid, however, wants revenge. In a day or two, he talks to the Black Prince about banishing the characters—and when that fails, he will turn to the assassins of Akyishigal or even the moonlight demons of the king.

Treasure

Baron Suvid is remarkably magnanimous in defeat after a formal duel; he is seeking, in fact, to win favor with the character for the future, hoping to turn this deadly combatant into someone he can manipulate. He gives two very rich gifts in the wake of a duel: a quickstep-forged, glossy black *scimitar of speed* and a circlet set with two sparkling diamonds (worth 10,000 gp in total).

Act III, Scene 5: Akyishigal, Demon Lord of Roaches

Minimum Status: 13

The party is invited to meet the Demon Lord of Roaches, who seeks to dissolve the court and seize power from the queen While pretending to offer alliance and friendship, the demon is a well of corruption and destruction. The queen knows this fact well but keeps the demon lord on a leash, just as she does her demon hounds and her son, the Black Prince. Akyishigal is in love with—or at least obsessed by—the fey princess Vailessia Graystone (who is all too often absent from the court). To help secure her, Akyishigal seeks allies among the humans, since even its scuttling shadow minions are outnumbered here. In particular, Akyishigal is frequently outfoxed by the Lords of Light (see page 74), so it seeks to approach the characters after they are rejected by that group or before they even speak to Revich the Blind Seer.

Eric Tomlinson (Order - 5183207)

Motivation. Akyishigal wants to rise into the ranks of shadow fey nobility and join the court through force and fear. It plans to shred the king's soul and offers information to would-be allies about the tower labyrinth and how to get through the maze—and about the rich magical treasures it can offer to anyone who produces proof of the Moonlit King's death.

AN INVITATION TO THE DEPTHS

A strange goblin steps forward from the shadows and bows; it seems to have antennae or horns of some kind on its forehead. "You are invited, lords and ladies, to treat with one who has watched your climb from the sewers to the stars. Lord Akyishigal would share confidences with you at the bottom of the Black Well tonight at moonrise."

The odd little goblin bows and steps away.

If the characters accept the invitation and go to the Well of Night (area 52), a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check allows them to climb safely 50 feet down the slippery, slimy walls of the well into the darkness below. Their arrival does not go unnoticed.

The chamber is mostly dark, yet the sound of scuttling and scraping is everywhere; five-foot-thick pillars of black stone reach up to the ceiling twenty feet overhead. A creature with the head of an enormous cockroach steps into the dim light, its antennae twitching. "Welcome to the blackest pit in the palace. The only ones who visit here are my servants and my food. Which are you?"

All around in the darkness, a hundred scuttling legs suddenly stop.

Eric Lindahl (Order #3154279)

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Hard (9th-level characters)—Akyishigal

Hard (11th-level characters)—Akyishigal, 2 spawn of Akyishigal, 3 roachling soldiers, 3 roachling servitors

Deadly (12th-level characters)—Akyishigal, 4 spawn of Akyishigal, 6 roachling soldiers, 6 roachling servitors

Illumination. Light sources all fade by one category here: from bright light to dim, and from dim light to darkness. A shadow censer burns in the center of the chamber, darkness spreading from it.

Pillars. The pillars grapple any foe that starts its turn within 5 feet of them (escape DC 14).

REACTIONS AND NEGOTIATING WITH THE DEMON LORD

If the characters respond with "Your guests," the demon lord remembers its plan to bribe the party. It offers them power in the form of two appropriate rare or uncommon magic items in exchange for the *Orb of Rule*, which is currently held by the Moonlit King. If the characters accept this offer, the speaker becomes a member of Akyishigal's faction (see "Fealty to the Demon Lord" below). The lord says, "Take this brooch as a sign of our bargain." Refusing to do so enrages it and might result in combat unless the characters leave immediately. If the characters escape without instigating combat with Akyishigal, award each character 2,500 XP.

If the characters respond with "Neither," the demon lord is offended. The characters must make a successful DC 17 Charisma (Deception) or DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check each round to keep Akyishigal from attacking. The demon is an impatient listener, and its swarms attack on a single failed check. If the party has nothing to bargain with or if a single character visits alone, the servants might join combat immediately.

If the characters respond with "Your servants," the demon lord offers the group badges (shiny black roaches that are worn as brooches or buckles). Those who accept the badges become members of Akyishigal's faction.

Fealty to the Demon Lord. Akyishigal is perfectly willing to accept the party's fealty; each character who swears fealty so gains a Tiny roach companion that always accompanies them. Akyishigal, operating through the roach, can dominate that character for 1 round, as the spell *dominate monster*, at any future time (with no saving throw allowed). Characters who pledge their service to Akyishigal earn a +2 increase to Status and the undying hatred of the Lords of Light, because doing so is an evil act.

If the characters respond in any other way, it's up to you to figure out whether the demon lord decides to talk to them or eat them for supper.

Akyishigal

Large fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 138 (12d10 + 72)

Speed 40 ft., burrow 20 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	17 (+3)	22 (+6)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)	24 (+7)

Saving Throws Str +9, Dex +7, Con +10, Wis +6, Cha +11

Skills Acrobatics +11, Athletics +9, Perception +6, Stealth +11

Damage Resistances acid, fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities cold, lightning, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Elvish, Infernal, telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Akyishigal's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 19, +11 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *detect evil and good, magic circle, teleport*

3/day each: *dispel magic, insect plague* (6th level), *shapechange* (vermin only)

1/day: *contagion* (filth fever only)

Magic Resistance. Akyishigal has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Summon Demon (1/day). Akyishigal can summon a rattok demon[CC]. The rattok appears in an unoccupied

Shards of a Broken Mind: The Root of Madness

Akyishigal conceals one of the clues to unraveling the Moonlit King's madness: that the demon lord caused the king to go mad in the first place.

The demon's ambitions hinge on the destruction of the Moonlit King. Although the Roach Lord won't reveal much, it does tell those who swear fealty to it that it drove the king mad to force him out of favor as part of a long-term scheme. Akyishigal tells this to its new vassals in the hope of impressing upon them the vast reach of its influence and power.

This particular secret is known to one other group: the Lords of Light.

Akyishigal

Of all the dreadful demons lurking within the Abyss, perhaps none is as vile and disgusting as Akyishigal, the Cockroach Demon, whose filth-slicked mandibles clack hungrily and ceaselessly for the flesh and souls of humans. Despite this, it has a surprising number of followers among the urban dispossessed, the slum-dwelling downtrodden, and those who lurk within the lightless depths beneath cities.

Though Akyishigal has sired an entire race in its image, it still craves followers among humans, elves, and other races as a means of corrupting civilization from within, rotting it at its core like an aging fruit. Shrines are most likely to be located in abandoned buildings, garbage dumps, sewers, ruins, graveyards, and other filthy places.

Kidnapped victims find themselves submerged in filth with only their heads showing. Bound, disoriented by darkness and sounds of chanting, and paralyzed by fear, the innocent are helpless to prevent their fate as ravenous roaches feast on their eyes and tongues. A sacrifice who survives is later released back into the populace. There, blind and speechless, its body wracked by disease contracted from the filth in which it was submerged, the sacrifice despairs as its slow decline toward death becomes a drain on family and society.

In most cases, the cripple soon begins begging in the slums, adding to the seething mass of disenchanted citizens that exist in the shadows of the worst large cities. These tragic figures become potential new supplicants for Akyishigal, who promises to heal them of their ills but leaves them hollow shells of bitterness and cruelty. These cults are almost as difficult to stamp out as are real cockroach infestations. Even if they are driven off repeatedly, followers inevitably resurface among the teeming mobs of beggars, thugs, streetwalkers, and refugees.

space within 60 feet of Akyishigal, acts as an ally of Akyishigal, and can't summon other demons. It remains for 1 minute, until it or its summoner dies, or until its summoner dismisses it as an action.

Actions

Multiattack. Akyishigal makes four claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) slashing damage.

Cloak of Swarms (Recharge 5–6). Akyishigal can emit a cloud of flying stinging insects from its mouth, its eyes, and the tears in his skin. This cloud surrounds it to a radius of 5 feet. When the cloak is active, all attacks against Akyishigal are made with disadvantage, and Akyishigal can see in all directions (through the insects' eyes). Any living creature that starts its turn within 5 feet of Akyishigal takes 11 (2d10) piercing damage plus 10 (3d6) poison damage, or half as much poison damage with a successful DC 17 Constitution saving throw. If the saving throw fails, the character is also poisoned for 1 hour. The swarm lasts for up to 5 rounds but dissipates instantly if Akyishigal takes 30 or more damage from a non-weapon source that it doesn't have resistance to. While poisoned by Cloak of Swarms, a character emits a stench of decomposition. All uncontrolled vermin attack that character on sight and in preference to other targets.

Legendary Actions

Akyishigal can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Akyishigal regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Teleport. Akyishigal teleports to any unoccupied space it can see.

Skitter. Akyishigal makes one attack and moves up to 20 feet without provoking opportunity attacks, or vice versa.

Spellcasting (Costs 2 Actions). Akyishigal casts *insect plague*.

Spawn of Akyishigal

Medium fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 119 (14d8 + 56)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	19 (+4)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)

Saving Throws Dex +4

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Abyssal, Infernal, Spawn of Akyishigal

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Command Vermin. Spawn of Akyishigal can command Tiny beasts of Intelligence 2 or lower within 30 feet that aren't under any magical control. The beasts obey the spawn's commands to the best of their ability, heedless of their own safety.

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ACTIONS

Multiattack. The spawn makes one bite attack and two sting attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage.

Sting. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) piercing damage and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1d6 rounds.

Swarming Cough (Recharge 5–6). The spawn can belch forth a swarm of insects. The swarm is completely under the spawn's control. It remains for 1 minute or until destroyed. The spawn can have only one such swarm at a time. If it coughs up a new swarm, the previous one dissipates.

Roachling Servitor

Small humanoid (roachling), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 7 (2d6)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	9 (–1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +2

Skills Acrobatics +4, Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 10 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Abyssal, Common

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Resistant. The roachling has advantage on Constitution saving throws.

Unlovely. The roachling has disadvantage on Charisma (Performance and Persuasion) checks made against non-roachlings.

ACTIONS

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

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

Roachling Soldier

Small humanoid (roachling), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 63 (14d6 + 14)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +3

Skills Acrobatics +5, Stealth +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 10 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Abyssal, Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Resistant. The roachling has advantage on Constitution saving throws.

Unlovely. The roachling has disadvantage on Charisma (Performance and Persuasion) checks made against non-roachlings.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The roachling soldier makes two attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Dart. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

The servitors and soldiers stay close to their master, the better to tear its foes to pieces.

Development. If the characters fight to the bitter end, they will be swarmed and overrun by the Roach Lord and its underlings. Any non-good character "killed" by the Roach Lord and its servants is transformed into a roachling NPC in its service. Unaligned characters become evil, and evil characters become chaotic evil.

Treasure

The roaches have a hoard of fey memories in physical form and an appropriate very rare magic item. The *shadow censer* here requires incense to use its dimming magic.

Eric Tomlinson (Order - 5183279)

Act III, Scene 6: The Black Prince and His Hounds

Minimum Status: 17 for an audience, 21 to go hunting

Though the characters might never be introduced to him until they rise in Status enough to be invited hunting, the Black Prince is certainly aware of them, and his raven spies watch carefully to see where interesting travelers go. To all guests, the Black Prince is superficially friendly. In truth, he is bored and constantly looking for distractions to amuse himself (and possibly obtain assistance in sensitive and surreptitious matters of state).

As the party grows in influence, the brooding Black Prince becomes a rival; he is certainly his father's son—an arrogant cad who expects a great deal of deference from visitors. When the time is right, the prince sends forth a white raven, or perhaps Kolya the Kennel Master, to communicate to the characters a simple invitation without specifics: "Requesting your presence to attend his Royal Majesty in the Great Hall of the Shadow Court an hour after moonrise."

MEETING THE PRINCE

The audience chamber is filled with glowing light and shimmering surfaces; its walls ripple under the weight of tens of thousands of white moths. The fey lord sits atop a small chair draped in purple velvet. He wears black chain armor and a bascinet topped by a glowing white feather. He carries a rapier at his side, and he pets an enormous black dog. Beside him is a female shadow fey with hair as white as his is black.

The white moths on the walls aren't just decorative; they are also an alarm against intruders, covering any non-fey in hundreds of otherwise harmless but glowing creatures. Creatures covered in butterflies are affected as if by a *faerie fire* spell.

The female is Rosali Svenk, the prince's sister. Unlike most shadow fey, her skin is deathly pale, almost white, contrasting with her large, black eyes. She is tall and graceful, dressed in hooded black robes decorated with silvery eldritch patterns; her wide grin is cruel and predatory. She carries a gnarled staff decorated with raven feathers and the skulls of tiny animals.

Intelligence (Investigation) DC 20—The woman must be the prince's sister, also called the Pale Witch of the Umbral Marches. She is said to visit the courts but rarely. His dogs are his own breed of shadow mastiffs, and his shadow fey archers keep watch from above and all sides; they do not all walk beside their prince, but at a distance, keeping an arrow in hand at all times as a sign of their vigilance.

Intelligence (Nature) DC 18—The dog resembles a mastiff from the Margreve forest but is even larger. These creatures are notorious teleporting beasts.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 25—A wooden gallery runs above the audience chamber, with the sounds of fey voices and the rattle of quivers coming from within it.

Wisdom (Insight) DC 13—The woman resembles the prince and might be a relative.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Medium (9th-level characters)—The Black Prince (not recommended; single foes against a party are rarely satisfying)

Deadly (9th-level characters)—The Black Prince, the Pale Witch, 1 hound of the night

Hard (11th-level characters)—The Black Prince, the Pale Witch, 2 shadow fey archers, 1 hound of the night

Hander Svenk, the Black Prince

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (mithral half plate)

Hit Points 120 (16d8 + 48)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +7

Skills Arcana +5, Deception +6, Insight +9, Persuasion +6, Perception +9, Stealth +6, Survival +9

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19

Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan, Umbral

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the Black Prince hits with it (included in the attacks).

Fey Ancestry. The Black Prince has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put him to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The Black Prince's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. He can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

2/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Spellcasting. The Black Prince is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He knows the following ranger spells:

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Cantrips (at will): *blade ward, prestidigitation, produce flame, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, hunter's mark, longstrider, speak with animals*

2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, pass without trace, silence*

3rd level (3 slots): *conjure animals, plant growth, protection from energy*

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the Black Prince has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. The Black Prince has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Black Prince can use Shadow Charge if it's available, then makes two melee attacks. He can choose to cast a cantrip in place of one of those attacks.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) piercing damage plus 9 (2d8) poison damage, or 14 (2d8 + 5) plus 9 (2d8) poison damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack. If the Black Prince throws his spear, he can magically call it back to his hand as a bonus action.

Shadow Charge (2/rest). The Black Prince teleports up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space within 5 feet of a creature he can see.

REACTIONS

Parry. The Black Prince adds 4 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, he must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

Rosali Svenk, the Pale Witch

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (breastplate)

Hit Points 123 (19d8 + 38)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +6, Cha +7

Skills Arcana +4, Deception +7, Perception +6, Persuasion +7, Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The Pale Witch has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The Pale Witch's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. She can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

4/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Spellcasting. The Pale Witch is a 10th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Charisma (save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). She knows the following bard spells:

Cantrips (at will): *blade ward, friends, message, vicious mockery*

1st level (4 slots): *bane, charm person, faerie fire*

2nd level (3 slots): *enthrall, hold person*

3rd level (3 slots): *conjure animals, fear, hypnotic pattern*

4th level (3 slots): *confusion, greater invisibility, phantasmal killer*

5th level (2 slots): *animate objects, dominate person, hold monster*

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the Pale Witch has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

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Traveler in Darkness. The Pale Witch has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Pale Witch makes two rapier attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage plus 17 (5d6) psychic damage.

Beguiling Whispers (Recharge 5–6). The Pale Witch speaks sweet words to a creature she can see within 60 feet that can hear her. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw or be charmed for 1 minute. While charmed in this way, the creature has disadvantage on Wisdom and Charisma saving throws made to resist spells cast by the Pale Witch.

Leadership (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). For 1 minute, the Pale Witch can utter a special command or warning whenever a nonhostile creature that she can see within 30 feet of it makes an attack roll or a saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand the Pale Witch. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if the Pale Witch is incapacitated.

Hound of the Night

Large monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 112 (15d10 + 30)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	9 (–1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +5, Wis +5

Skills Intimidation +3, Perception +5, Stealth +6

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Immunities cold

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages understands Elvish and Umbral but can't speak

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Blood Scent. A hound of the night can follow a scent through *phase shifts*, ethereal movement, *dimension door*, and *fey steps* of any kind. *Teleport* and *plane shift* are beyond its ability to follow.

Innate Spellcasting. The hound's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13). It can innately cast the following spell, requiring no material components:

At will: *dimension door*

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d10 + 5) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Frost Breath (Recharge 5–6). The hound exhales a 15-foot cone of frost. Each creature in the cone must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 44 (8d10) cold damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

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Shadow Fey Archer

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +4, Cha +6

Skills Arcana +3, Perception +4, Stealth +10, Survival +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Fey Ancestry. The shadow fey has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put it to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The shadow fey's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

3/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The shadow fey deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the shadow fey that isn't incapacitated and the shadow fey doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow fey has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. The shadow fey has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow fey makes two ranged attacks.

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage poison damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Tactics. The hound corners a foe and attacks from darkness if possible. It uses its Frost Breath to catch clustered enemies before teleporting next to its victim to threaten any responders. The Pale Witch seeks to stay out of melee combat if she can, using her spells and her enchanting voice to disrupt foes, possibly turning them against one another. If an opponent engages her in close combat, she slips away with misty step before using turning her full attention on that character. The archers first target anyone who is a melee threat to the prince. Subsequent targets include anyone who casts blasting spells; the archers concentrate fire on these figures, especially on identifiable clerics and healers.

Treasure

The Black Prince keeps many odd things in his chamber—the horns of a shadow elk as a hunting trophy, the bottled sighs of virgins, and the collected shadows of the Family Stross— but these are valuable only in the Shadow Realm, or at least only among the shadow fey.

His real treasure is a set of a dozen silver apples made of distilled moonlight. These apples shine like mithral and are worth 1,000 gp each. *Moonlight apples* are rare wondrous items; when consumed, one grants a creature a +1 bonus to AC and saving throws and immunity to Sunlight Sensitivity for a year and a day. The apples are always carried by two young shadow fey pages who retain them until such time as the Moonlit King returns to the palace. They are for the prince's consumption alone, not for any lesser creatures.

DEVELOPMENTS WITHOUT COMBAT

If the characters appear as summoned, the prince speaks to them courteously and warns them off. "Do not interfere with the Blood Royal. Do not attempt to bring your quarrels to my mother. And do not tamper with my ravens, my hounds, or my friend Baron Suvid. Do not ally yourselves with the Roach Lord. And leave the court before another moon grows full."

If the characters insist on their right to continue to act against the prince's wishes, he challenges them to a duel during the next dueling season if he perceives any threat to the court or his influence. If one or more of the characters has attempted to woo "his" succubus courtesan, he warns that character off in particular.

If the characters agree to stay away, the prince is quick to notice any breach of their promise (his lantern dragonettes report the event to him). Breaking their word is cause for a duel and, likely, for expulsion from the court if they lose it.

DEVELOPMENTS AFTER COMBAT

If he is defeated in combat, the Black Prince is not killed; the party has overcome him and earns XP accordingly, but he cannot be slain in his home court. Instead, he bows, stows his spear, and confesses, "You have bested me; I am your servant." His minions, hounds, and sister (if any survived) cease combat as well, although they remain wary. Goblin servants leap out of nowhere to bandage the wounds of all fey and of those with Status of 16 or higher.

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The Black Prince's sudden change of temperament from raging attacker to genteel host might throw the characters off guard, but a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check makes it plain that he is sincere about his surrender and his newfound peaceful demeanor.

If the characters accept his peace offer, they gain considerable Status (a +5 increase) as soon as word spreads that they have "drunk claret with the prince." If they refuse and attempt to continue combat, they gain no Status for the triumph, the prince immediately gains 85 hit points, and he vacates the area.

Raven Assassins. If the Black Prince escapes in this way, he sends his "raven assassins" to attack the party that night and each night thereafter until such time as they have killed sixteen raven demons or they make him an apology for their ignoble behavior in the face of a sincere surrender.

Despite their name, these creatures are not birds, but rather a group of oni appropriate to the party's size and level (use three oni for a hard encounter for 9th-level characters).

The oni enter through the window of the party's rooms or break down the door, attacking by surprise for 1 round. The last survivor of the would-be assassins flees to report their failure to the prince, who dispatches another group of assassins the next night.

Act III, Scene 7: The Hunting Lodge: Catching the Firebird

Minimum Status: 21 to receive an invitation, which includes two guests

If the Black Prince invites the party to go to Hunt's Retreat, his hunting lodge, he offers to outfit the party with bows and boar spears to hunt for game in company with the elf Lord Chelessfield and two others from among the prince's favorite followers, which include:

- Kolya the Kennel Master (to control the dozen shadow mastiffs and coursing hounds)
- Baron Suvid, Lord of Blades (if the characters have not crossed blades with him and defeated him)
- Gwathion Everglade, the shadow fey courtier, who has a temper (always baiting the party)
- Meltathraiel, the shadow fey advisor, who has a deep-seated hatred of all non-fey (so he is irredeemably hostile toward many characters, which the prince finds entertaining)

The trip to the lodge is a rattling journey through the forest on horseback with a pack of shadow mastiffs and a small troop of archers for company. The lodge, which has a gabled roof painted in hound and eye designs, is large enough for the whole crew. At first light of the Shadow Realm's morning, the hunters are awake and ready to seek out deer or boar among the deeps of the forest, flickering between the shadow realm and Margreve Forest in the mortal world. This occasion is a glorious chance for the invited characters to curry some favor with the Blood Royal and portray themselves in a good light. Characters can demonstrate skill in the chase by making successful DC 17 Wisdom (Survival) checks; success wins approval in the eyes of the prince and his companions and a +1 increase to Status for the character.

The Boars and the Butterflies

The party encounters death butterfly swarms in the woods on the first day's hunt.

> The woods are filled with a cloud of silent, fluttering butterflies. Each of them has wings checkered black and white, and their motion is as a swarm or a wave.

Intelligence (Nature) DC 18—These are death butterflies, particularly notorious and dangerous fey swarms.

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Intelligence (Nature) DC 22—This bunch of creatures is much more potent than a normal swarm!

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Medium (9th-level characters)—2 greater death butterfly swarms

Hard (9th-level characters)—3 greater death butterfly swarms

Deadly (9th-level characters)—4 greater death butterfly swarms, and reduce the sandalwood to a 5-foot-by-10-foot area

A nearby stack of sandalwood logs holds the swarms at bay if it is lit ablaze. Magical effects that burn flammable material set the logs on fire instantly; otherwise, it takes 1 round to ignite the wood using burning oil or some other significant fuel or flame. The smoke from the blaze prevents the swarms from entering the squares surrounding the fallen logs, which is a 10-foot-by-15-foot area. A character who succeeds on a DC 18 Intelligence (Nature) check realizes this fact. A swarm must make a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw when it tries to enter that space, or at the start of its turn if it's already there. On a failed save, it can't enter, or it must leave the space immediately.

Greater Death Butterfly Swarm

Huge swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 84 (13d12)

Speed 5 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
1 (–5)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	1 (–5)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)

Damage Vulnerabilities cold, fire

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Potent Poison. The death butterfly swarm's poison affects corporeal undead that are otherwise immune to poison.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny butterfly. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Weight of Wings. A creature in a space occupied by a death butterfly swarm has its speed reduced by half, and must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw or become blinded. Both effects end when the creature doesn't share a space with the swarm at the end of the creature's turn. If a creature succeeds on the saving throw, it is immune to the swarm's blindness effect (but not the speed reduction) for 24 hours.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The swarm makes a bite attack against every target in its space.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (6d6 +3) piercing damage, or 13 (3d6 + 3) piercing damage if the swarm has been reduced to half of its hit points or fewer. The target also takes 17 (5d6) poison damage and becomes poisoned for 1d4 rounds; a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw reduces the poison damage by half and prevents the poisoned condition.

Particularly vile creatures never seem to rest, often coming back as unliving abominations and ghastly spirits. Sometimes, though, these creatures do cross over to whatever reward awaits them, leaving behind tainted corpses that pass the evil on to those that feast on the remains.

A death butterfly swarm results when a rare breed of carrion-eating butterflies, drawn to the stench of decay, feed on the corpse of an evil creature. Individually, and prior to feeding on such a creature, the butterflies pose no threat, but afterward the driving animus forces the butterflies to swarm and inflict misery on all who cross their path.

The swarm's changed state enables it to inflict a fast-acting, necrotizing poison on its victims. Thus, it can feed immediately on carrion created with its poison. The oppressive evil infused in the butterflies bears down on those caught in the swarm's wake, potentially paralyzing victims that the swarm passes over. The swarm benefits from this effect, fluttering around unmoving victims and necrotizing more and more flesh while the prey cannot escape.

Undead creatures, to which the death butterfly swarm would obviously be drawn, are not immune to a death butterfly swarm's poison. Just as the swarm rots away a living creature, it might also dissolve an undead creature's animating force. Given the choice between an undead and a living creature, a swarm will always attack the undead target. The swarm finds ghouls and ghasts to be particularly appealing. Because of this fact, non-good mages see summoning a death butterfly swarm as a necessary evil when battling the Empire of the Ghouls.

Eric Lindahl (Order #51842079)

The Firebird

If the characters want, they can pursue more legendary game—the long-tailed firebird. The queen has often expressed a desire to receive the bird as a gift, and the characters might have learned of this from Intelligence (Investigation) checks to gather information and gossip (see page 57).

FINDING THE BIRD IN THE WOODS

Locating the firebird is a skill challenge in which the characters must score 6 successes before they get 3 failures. In addition to ability checks, appropriate spells can provide successes as well.

Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) DC 16—Climbing trees and hills for a better view, chasing sounds while running along fallen tree trunks in the forest, leaping from branch to branch in a favored tree, or otherwise moving to a better position can enable the elusive bird to be more easily spotted.

Alternative: Flight or casting *spider climb* provides a success.

Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Survival) DC 18—Knowing the bird's nesting habits, likely food sources, and preferred foraging, roosting, and mating habits enable it to be more easily tracked in the enormous forest.

Alternative: Casting *speak with animals* or spending a use of wild shape provides a success.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 14, limit 2 successes—Hearing the firebird's distant song or the rush of its wings or seeing signs of its smoldering nest in a treetop are sure signs that it's nearby.

Dexterity (Stealth) DC 17, special, does not contribute to success—A successful Dexterity (Stealth) check provides a character advantage on his or her next check.

Alternative: Casting *silence* provides advantage for a character's next two checks.

If the characters succeed in the skill challenge, read:

> You've spotted it! In the distance ahead of you is the firebird. This marvelous avian has the bearing of a peacock, made all the more majestic by its flaming fan of feathers, which shift through the color spectrum.

Once the firebird is found, the chase can begin!

CHASING AND CATCHING

Seeing the bird and catching it are two very different things. The job of catching the firebird requires netting it, or bringing it down by striking it without causing lethal injury. (The Black Prince's hunting party has birding arrows and bolts, special blunt projectiles that impose disadvantage on attack rolls but will knock the firebird unconscious instead of injuring it.) Of course, the party might try to kill it (see "Killing the Firebird," page 120), but the queen is more interested in a living bird as a mark of Status—no one is interested in the bird as food, although the feathers would find takers.

But first of all, the characters must catch up to it.

They begin in one space on the Firebird Chase map, and the firebird in a space directly opposite them on the outer edge of the map. The characters can pursue either clockwise or counterclockwise; the forest geometry around the firebird is subject to major shifts and the bird seems to create a sort of "chase magic" around itself, particularly when it moves through the central black circle (see below). Characters have a speed of 3

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spaces. Creatures can move diagonally on the circle map with no increased cost in movement.

The exact distance covered by the spaces is left indeterminate. Assume that the party can group together or spread out easily in one space for the purpose of beneficial spells or features. If the party splits up, any touch spells or melee attacks require that the target be in the same space as the creature using the feature.

The firebird flies away with its movement and the Dash action (traveling a total of 10 spaces) whenever the party comes within 6 spaces of it, and it always tries to move away from any creature it is aware of. The firebird can move into a perching position on any tree (putting it 5 spaces above the ground) by ending its movement in that space. It has cover from ranged attacks while perched.

The firebird can move through the central black circle out to anywhere on the edge (but not the reverse) up to three times during the chase. When it passes through the center, the forest seems to warp around the bird, enabling it to potentially elude pursuers. If the firebird passes through the black circle for a third time, it leaves the area of the woods near the characters, ending the hunt. Its birdsong can be heard fading in the distance for some time.

Much of the forest is difficult terrain (marked with brambles). Tree trunks are impassable terrain, and climbing is difficult: DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks are needed for jumping over the logs, and Strength (Athletics) checks are needed for climbing the mossy trees (DC 15) or jumping the stream (DC 15 with a running start or DC 20 without).

Heavily Wooded Terrain. Because of the many obstacles in the area, ranged weapons with the ammunition property have a short range of 3 spaces and a maximum range of 6 spaces. Ranged spell attacks and any spells that require line of sight to the target have a range of 6 spaces. Nets and other thrown weapons have a range of 1 space.

Successful Tactics. One solution is to use magical movement or for the characters to gather near the black circle and flush the firebird to the edge. Splitting up to herd the firebird can work as well. Once a character is close enough to throw a net, cast a nonlethal spell, or shoot a birding arrow (disadvantage on attack rolls), they might knock the bird down long enough to be able to grab it.

THE FIREBIRD (PASSIVE)

In the standard version of the hunt, the firebird does not engage its pursuers in combat. It has an Armor Class of 16 and an initiative bonus of +4. Two hits against it will reduce the bird to 0 hit points, whereupon it falls unconscious and can be caught before it revives. It also has the following special action:

Blinding Radiance. As a bonus action, the firebird sings and releases a mote of fiery brilliance, which floats up to 6 spaces from the bird and explodes. All those within the affected space must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 5 (1d10) radiant damage and is both blinded and paralyzed until the start of the firebird's next turn, or it takes half as much damage and isn't blinded or paralyzed on a successful save. Note: Shadow fey find this effect disconcerting, and if it is used against them, they will soon abandon the chase (on a roll of 1–2 on 1d6 each round).

THE FIREBIRD (ACTIVE)

For a greater challenge using a firebird that fights back, use the statistics below.

Firebird

Small celestial, neutral good

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 99 (18d6 + 36)

Speed 20 ft., fly 100 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	19 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	21 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +4, Int +5, Wis +4, Cha +7

Skills Acrobatics +6, Arcana +5, Insight +4, Medicine +4, Nature +5, Perception +7, Religion +5

Damage Resistances lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities fire

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, invisible

Senses truesight 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Celestial, Common, Elvish, Primordial, Sylvan

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The firebird's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *guidance, purify food and drink, speak with animals*

3/day each: *charm person, cure wounds* (as a 2nd-level spell), *daylight, faerie fire, heat metal, hypnotic pattern, tongues*

1/day each: *geas, heal, reincarnate*

Light of the World. The firebird's feathers glow with a warm light. The creature sheds light as dim as a candle or as bright as a lantern. It always sheds light, and any feathers plucked from the creature continue to shed light as a torch.

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Warming Presence. The firebird and any creatures within a 5-foot radius are immune to the effects of natural, environmental cold. If invited into a home or a building, a firebird can extend this benefit to its inhabitants no matter how close they are to the creature.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The firebird makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

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

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d8 + 4) slashing damage.

Blinding Ray (Recharge 5–6). The firebird can fire a burning ray of light from its tail feathers in a line 5 feet wide and up to 50 feet long. Targets in the line must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 24 (7d6) fire damage and become blinded for 1d4 rounds. A successful saving throw negates the blindness and reduces the damage by half.

Development: The Black Prince's Offer

If the party captures the firebird, the Black Prince is not pleased. To turn things to his advantage, he offers the party a trade:

> The prince raises an eyebrow as he comes close to the firebird.
>
> "You have done remarkably well. I will reward your enterprise and resolve. Each of you will be given a lantern dragonette as a mark of my royal favor upon our return to the palace. In return, you will give me this firebird." He nods and holds out his gloved hand.

If the party refuses to relinquish the bird, it requires a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) or Charisma (Deception) check to mollify the prince. If the check fails, the character who caught the firebird and possibly anyone else who refused to hand it over can expect a challenge to a duel from one of the prince's followers or a challenge (in dueling season) from the prince himself. In addition, the characters suffer a –4 deduction to Status for treating the prince poorly.

If the ability check is a success, the prince does not challenge any characters to a duel, but he does warn the party not to give the bird to the queen:

> "I warn you," says the Black Prince. "It is too precious a thing to bandy with. Set it free, keep it in your chambers, but on no account give it to the queen."

The hunting trip ends on this note, and the group returns to court the next morning.

Killing the Firebird. If party kills the firebird instead of using non-lethal means, the killing character immediately suffers a –5 deduction to Status, but the prince gives the character a mithral mirror (2,500 gp) and a moonglass goblet (1,500 gp) for "good service to the crown."

Act III, Scene 8: Queen's Attention

Minimum Status: 30 or Firebird-Giver

The queen does have her favorites, but the characters are not among them at first—they simply have too little Status to be worthy of her attention. They must earn that attention through their actions at court.

GIFT OF THE FIREBIRD

Players are contrary by nature and the prince is an arrogant bastard, so it's quite likely the party might not give the captured firebird to the prince but instead to the queen.

As the characters approach the Great Hall or walk over the Bridge of Night with the firebird, make much of the reactions of those around them: servants dropping dishes, fey staring open-mouthed, and even well-regarded diplomats and stone-faced courtiers getting wide-eyed as the characters approach the feast hall to present their gift.

Read the following:

> The golden feathers of the firebird do more than merely glow in the feast hall; they seem to paint the chamber with gold, lightening its nocturnal tones to the bright colors of summer. All around it, the creatures of the court turn to fading, irrelevant shadows, dim wisps compared to the bird's lush coloration of fire and blood.

Wisdom (Insight) DC 15—The Queen of Night and Shadow on her throne is the only one who seems delighted by your presence; her servants and courtiers are terrified.

Let the presenting character make a speech if so desired. With a successful DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check, this attempt goes smoothly. A failed check means that some courtier takes offense and threatens the characters (boorishly, but without summoning any guards):

> "No mortal should dare make such a gift. It is unheard of! Begone!"

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When the bird is handed over to the queen, read:

The firebird squawks once and settles comfortably onto the queen's wrist. She pets it once, twice, three times, and each time the fire in her eyes grows stronger. The queen smiles and says, "Oh, you have done well, my beloved. You have brought me a fine gift indeed." Her eyes sparkle, and she waves you forward. "Come to me that I may whisper to you."

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 20—The queen has a strange, mystic relationship with the firebird. It is not related to the shadow powers of the court. Indeed, it seems more related to the radiant powers of the queen.

If the character who presented the bird does approach, take that player aside and ask him or her whether they want their character to become the queen's consort and possibly her lover. (The same offer might be made if a character reaches a Status of 30 or higher.) If the answer is yes, the character is given a heavy golden necklace set with rubies (7,000 gp) and asked to stand at the queen's right side. If no, he or she is dismissed with a rueful glance; the queen holds no long-lasting grudge, although her first reaction is quite negative (see below).

A New Consort

If the character accepts the offered position in the court, the queen is most pleased and the presenter gains a +9 increase to Status immediately (see Table 2–2, page 41).

The queen takes the firebird to the window and sets it free. The courtiers whisper and bow. "You are dismissed. We shall retire," says the queen, and she steps through a shadowy portal. Her words echo faintly into the hall. "Come with me, O Royal Birdcatcher."

If the newly elevated character decides to follow the queen to her bedchamber, he or she is not seen again by the other characters. Behind the scenes, Queen Sarastra's semi-divine domination turns the character (temporarily) into an NPC. The character dotes on the queen and spends no time with his or her old friends. The player might choose to play an NPC such as Brightspur (see page 69) or the roachling duelist Yikrugrak (see page 102), or might roll up a new temporary character such as a shadow fey, elf, gnome, or half-elf courtier. The queen gives a gift of a very rare or lesser magic item to her new lover as a token of her delight.

As the queen's lover, the character is essentially untouchable by all other fey until the queen tires of her new toy (in 1d6 weeks) and dumps him or her. At that point, the former lover must fend off 1d4 + 1 dueling challenges, as well as many cutting remarks and new sycophants, all seeking either to prove themselves worthy to the queen or to learn the "secret" of impressing her (see "Discarded Favorites" below).

DECLINING THE QUEEN

If the character refuses to follow the queen to her bedchamber, the queen takes this rejection very poorly for several days. The character's Status suffers a –3 deduction, and the guards keep the character out of the Royal Halls by royal decree, regardless of Status. All other courtiers view the character as the fool who passed up a golden opportunity, and they snub the character for a few days or until he or she does something worthy.

The character does, however, wind up in the good graces of the demon lord Akyishigal and the Black Prince, and might be invited by one or both to plot against the queen's interests, or at least to share some treacherous gossip.

DISCARDED FAVORITES

If a discarded lover tries to return to the queen's good graces sooner than one year after he or she has been dismissed, things go very poorly indeed for that individual. Queen Sarastra banishes her old, used up, worn out, or just plain no longer fancied lovers to the Labyrinth, perhaps even binding them into a new shape for her own amusement, such as a goblin or a gnome.

If the characters are smart, they might figure out that the various fey beggars and goblins in the maze can be sources of information. That is, if they don't kill these denizens first.

Shards of a Broken Mind: The Queen's Gambit

If the queen takes one of the characters as her consort, sometime during the course of their tryst she reveals one of her most valuable secrets: she is magically forestalling the Moonlit King's return to power.

The queen uses the power of the firebird to perpetuate the Moonlit King's madness, though she doesn't know what drove him mad in the first place. By doing this, she delays the turn of the courtly seasons and ensures that she remains in power. Otherwise, the seasons would turn, and the Winter Court would rise to power. When that happens, she would have to step down and surrender the throne to her husband, until the seasons turn once again.

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DEVELOPMENT: THE PRINCE'S RAGE

The prince knows that the queen derives some power and pleasure from the firebird, and it is his plan to give her such a bird himself, thus foiling the ambitions of Akyishigal and ingratiating himself with his mother, who currently mistrusts him (for good reason). If the party does give the bird to the queen despite the prince's warning, he is angry enough either to send a double-size group of his raven assassins (see "Raven Assassins," page 116) or to duel the gift-giver personally on the Bridge of Night. He expects to thrash them.

Regardless of the outcome of these measures, the Black Prince remains the characters' enemy, sending messenger birds bearing news about them to the Moonlit King, whispering into the Well of Night to inform the demon Akyishigal about them, and encouraging Baron Suvid to destroy them in any manner he finds suitable.

Act IV: Royal Audiences and Treachery

For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror, which we are still just able to endure, and we are so awed because it serenely disdains to annihilate us.

Every angel is terrifying.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, Duino Elegies

And when it was night, oh, as was their plight,
The moon had gone down, the stars gave no light;
They sobbed and they sighed, and bitterly cried
Then the poor little babes, they lay down and died.

—"Babes in the Wood" (traditional English folksong)

Once the characters have gained higher-ranked connections (or intimidated and enchanted the right enemies), they gain more access to power. The first character to the top gains an audience with the queen in which she deigns to speak of the king, whose name is rarely spoken except in fearful whispers in the times when the queen rules. The encounters in this act presume that the characters have reached 9th or 10th level.

Act IV, Scene 1: Meeting the Queen

When a single character has reached Status of 26 or higher, he or she is invited to an audience with the queen, at the character's earliest convenience. By making a successful DC 17 Intelligence (History) check, the character knows that a courtly ritual is required to visit the queen. This involves wearing one's best finery, lighting a candle in the Shrine to the Shadow Gods (area 25), and walking across the bridge to the Royal Chambers. There, one climbs the 1,000 steps up to the Queen's Audience Chamber, eventually walking out onto a cloud above the twilight gloom below.

Characters of Status 21 or higher who have not been specifically invited can trail along as friends and confidantes of the invited character. They are not announced (see below).

Characters of Status 16–20 can attend the invited character as servants or hirelings of the invited character, so long as they bear no weapons and wear no armor or jewels. They may not speak, on pain of immediate expulsion—the floor literally vanishes beneath the expelled character, and he or she falls 100 feet down to the Bridge of Night, landing near the Eastern Gate and taking 10d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall. Survivors suffer an immediate loss of all earned Status.

Characters of Status of 15 or lower may not enter the presence of the queen except by stealth or deception (disguising themselves as someone of higher Status). If their pretense is discovered, they are expelled immediately through the floor, falling and suffering the loss of all Status as described above.

The stairs up to the audience chamber are not quite endless; it takes most of an hour to reach the top. Countless stars shine above the audience chamber, and the floor is covered in cloudlike mist. The chamber seems to be entirely outside the palace, hundreds of feet up in the sky. There are no walls, just a throne of dark lapis lazuli flecked with gold. A curtain of shadows obscures the throne's occupant, though she clearly wears a shining crown set with stars. A small herald steps forward and announces you.

ANNOUNCING THE CHARACTERS

A small shadow fey herald with a large voice announces the characters. The queen is announced as soon as the door is opened, and the characters enter in order of precedence (by Status). The queen is announced thus:

A fluid voice echoes from all around. "You enter the presence of Her Celestial and Royal Majesty, Sarastra Aestruum, Queen of Night and Magic, Duchess of the Heavens, Countess of Thorn, Mistress of Air and Darkness, Lady of the Summer Palace and Bride of Shadows. Attend her well."

A small fey herald turns, and the curtain of shadows ripples. "Your majesty, may I present to you the invited

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guest _____, the honorable mortal and visitor who has been acquitted most passing well."

Give the name of the character with the highest Status together with any title and noteworthy accomplishments including duels won, courtesans wooed, and monsters slain recently. Then announce any other character with a Status of 21 or higher, giving a shorter title and perhaps a single accomplishment ("Seducer of the Succubus" or "Confidant of the Ravens"). Disregard characters with Status of 20 or lower, referring to them only as "servants and other mortal followers not of this realm."

The veil parts to reveal the queen, a beautiful female shadow fey with black hair below a crown of mithral and glowing starstones. Her cloak is pure black, and her dress of deep indigo is set with numberless diamonds. Four lantern dragonettes curl around her feet, darting forward and hissing. The queen speaks a word, and they disappear beneath her throne.

She lifts a hand and waves you forward. "You have cut quite a swath through my court. The lantern dragonettes have been full of stories about you. I find your mortal ways charming, truly I do."

Wisdom (Insight) DC 13—The queen is totally schmoozing you; her lack of sincerity isn't even covered up that well. It's all a matter of etiquette.

THE QUEEN EXPECTS AN ANSWER

Even though the queen is buttering up the party, she does have a vested interest in listening to the characters' case to some degree. After all, they've been mucking about her court, and her lantern dragonettes have told all sorts of stories of what the characters have been up to. The party has proven to be entertaining, and might be capable of entering the Spiral Maze and defeating the Moonlit King and bringing his *Orb of Rule* back to her. The matter of the shadow fey's takeover of Zobeck is a secondary concern to the queen, although she is much too smart to admit that it is a bargaining chip for her.

Though she never says so directly, the queen hints broadly that she will give up her claim to Zobeck if the characters enter the Spiral Maze, fetch a mark of the king's rule, and return it to her: his buttons, perhaps, or his *Orb of Rule*.

The queen won't give just anyone such a promise. The characters have to pass her questions and prove their worthiness first: clever but not too clever, brave but not impudent, and ingratiating without ass-kissing. It's a fine line.

CONVINCING THE QUEEN

Gaining the queen's confidence is a skill challenge in which the characters must score 5 successes before they get 3 failures.

Charisma (Deception) DC 20, limit 1 success—A smooth talker generally wins some points with the queen for bravado.

Charisma (Persuasion) DC 18, +2 per additional attempt—Charisma (Persuasion) smooths the way with the queen, but the more you use it, the tougher Her Celestial Majesty becomes. She likes to make diplomats sweat.

Charisma (Intimidation) DC 17, limit 1 success—Gusto is considered a sign of bravado, courage, and aggressiveness. Too much of it, though, is merely uncouth.

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 23, limit 1 success—As the Queen of Night and Magic, Her Celestial Majesty knows almost everything that there is to know about the arcane. Even when she doesn't, she finds it extremely annoying to be corrected on the subject.

Intelligence (History) DC 20, +1 per additional attempt—Some knowledge of the queen's reign and her king's checkered past is a boon. Too much knowledge of the past makes the queen doubt the speaker's trustworthiness and question whether, perhaps, the speaker knows too much.

Intelligence (Investigation) DC 19—Well-informed and gossipy visitors are always welcome. The queen is keenly interested in an outsider's view of her court's politics to compare with her own.

Intelligence (Nature) DC 17, limit 1 success—Feeding or playing with the lantern dragonettes and making it clear that the creatures are pleased with this attention is a sign that the queen takes seriously—though once a character does this, the queen dismisses her lantern dragonettes to fly off and chase birds. Conversely, being nipped by a lantern dragonette (getting a failure on this check) is a mark of weakness.

Intelligence (Religion) DC 20, limit 2 successes—Terms and hymns of praise for the Goddess of Night and Darkness and insights into the divine are somewhat of interest to the queen. She fears anyone who knows too much on this topic, however, seeing them as a potential rival; she discourages religiosity among her court.

Wisdom (Insight) DC 20—Who understands the whims of an ageless and powerful monarch? She seeks to balance many interests beyond her own, and a wise character can see her perspective.

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Option: The Queen's Champion Wears a Stolen Face

This variant of the queen's champion looks exactly like one of the characters; ideally, this is the same character who had a shadow double appear and talk with the party for some time (see Act II, Scene 3). In addition to its other powers, the champion can use one of the features of the character it appears like, mimicking that ability as a reaction when the character uses it. If killed, the shadow creature still resembles the character for a moment, before becoming an empty suit or cloak once more.

Success

If the characters succeed in the skill challenge, Queen Sarastra is willing to forget about sending a statthalter to Zobeck. The queen agrees not to send an emissary to root out disloyalty in Zobeck for, say, 100 years—but only under certain conditions. These conditions amount to "If the king also agrees to it. Or if his reign should end."

She gives each eligible character a ceremonial dagger as a mark of favor (unannounced characters and those who serve the Lord of Roaches or the Black Prince's faction do not receive one). Read:

> Sheathed in a charcoal gray scabbard engraved with the queen's owl emblem, this jeweled dagger is an extremely well-made piece. When in shadow, this double-edged blade can be seen to be engraved with bloodred fey runes.

The daggers serve as keys to the labyrinth; one can be used to unlock the gate at the bottom of the hidden stair (area 42). Once the bearer arrives at the Tower Beacon, the daggers are still worth 1,000 gp apiece, and a +2 increase to Status, if the characters decide to return to the court at a later date.

If a member of the party has a Status of 25 or higher, she also gives that character a piece of unsolicited advice about the nature of the king's servants, saying: "Heed me well, for I shall say this but once: do not attend the king too closely, for his presence is dangerous, and he draws his strength and his celestial voice from the moonlight. Return with his seal and his word, and you shall leave my kingdom without harm or hindrance."

Failure

If the party fails in their attempt to sway the queen, read:

> "You tread upon my patience. You impose on my hospitality and discomfit my champion. You will now amuse me with the dueling I have heard so much of. Champion, step forth!"
>
> And you see a familiar set of armor step forward, but this figure's visor is up, and there is a black skull within the helm, its eyes bright sparks as cold as a winter moon. A cloak of owl feathers hangs from the champion's shoulders, and it salutes you with twin swords.

YOU SAY THE WORST THINGS

Roll initiative. The party must fight the queen's champion. Fortunately for the party, the queen doesn't take a direct part in the battle—she would easily slay them all, and she knows it. She influences the battle through use of her lair actions, however, as well as the holes in the clouds (see below).

If the characters disable the holes in the clouds, the queen is content to watch the battle, using her remaining lair actions to stun and wall off any characters who dare to threaten her.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Hard (9th-level characters)—the queen's lair actions, 1 monolith champion, 1 shadow fey guardian, 1 hole in the clouds

Hard (10th-level characters)— the queen's lair actions, 1 monolith champion, 3 shadow fey guardians, 1 hole in the clouds

Hard (11th-level characters)— the queen's lair actions, 1 monolith champion, 4 shadow fey guardians, 2 holes in the clouds

Illumination. The audience chamber is bathed in dim light from perpetual starlight and lantern dragonettes.

The Queen's Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the Queen of Night and Magic takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; the Queen of Night and Magic can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- The queen wills darkness to overpower the light. All bright light sources in the lair shed only dim light to their normal bright light radius, and dim light sources are extinguished. This lasts until the queen dismisses the effect or dies.
- An opaque wall of writhing shadows springs up from a solid surface within 120 feet of the queen. The wall

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is up to 60 feet long, 10 feet high, and 5 feet thick. Each creature in the area must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 18 (4d8) necrotic damage. Creatures in the wall's space are pushed 5 feet out of the wall's space, appearing on whichever side of the wall they choose. A creature can move through the wall, but the semimaterial shadow resists intrusion. For every foot a creature travels through the wall, it must spend 4 feet of movement. Furthermore, any creature that, during its own turn, occupies any part of the wall's space takes 18 (4d8) necrotic damage, or half damage with a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw. Each 10-foot section of wall has AC 5, 15 hit points, vulnerability to radiant damage, resistance to bludgeoning and piercing damage, and immunity to cold, poison, and psychic damage. The wall lasts until the queen uses this lair action again, or until she dies.

- The queen targets one creature within 60 feet of her and assails its mind with visions of hopelessness and despair. The creature must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be stunned until initiative count 20 on the next round.

In this chamber, the queen has an additional lair action:

- The queen can move a hole in the clouds to a space within 20 feet of the hole's current position. Any creatures in the hole's new space must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw as described below.

Holes in the Clouds

There are holes in the solid cloudstuff that forms the floor of the queen's audience chamber. Insubstantial mist fills the holes, blending with the surrounding tangible floor. The holes are magical traps. A successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the danger. The holes are 5 feet in diameter, and lead to a dizzying plummet to the courts below.

A creature that walks over a hole must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, it falls into the hole, but catches itself on the edge. While hanging, the creature has disadvantage on attack rolls, and attack rolls against it have advantage. If the saving throw fails by 5 or more, the creature falls 100 feet to the staircase leading up from the courts, takes 35 (10d6) bludgeoning damage, and lands prone.

A creature can disable a hole in the floor by making a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check, or successfully casting *dispel magic* against DC 17. A disabled hole fills with solid mist and becomes a normal part of the floor.

Monolith Champion

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 102 (12d10 + 36)

Speed 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+6)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Damage Immunities poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't adamantine

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

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Languages Elvish, Umbral
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Blatant Dismissal. While in a fey court or castle, a monolith champion that scores a successful hit with its greatsword can try to force the substitution of the target with a shadow double. The target must succeed on a DC 14 Charisma saving throw or become invisible, silent, and paralyzed, while an illusory version of itself remains visible and audible—and under the monolith champion's control, shouting for a retreat or the like. Outside fey locales, this ability does not function.

Fey Flame. The ritual powering a monolith champion grants it an inner flame that it can use to enhance its weapon or its fists with extra fire or cold damage, depending on the construct's needs.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The champion makes two greatsword attacks or two slam attacks.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (4d6 + 4) slashing damage plus 11 (2d10) cold or fire damage.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 11 (2d10) cold or fire damage.

Shadow Fey Guardian

Large humanoid (elf), neutral evil
Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)
Hit Points 110 (13d10 + 39)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	6 (–2)	14 (+2)	8 (–1)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +5
Skills Athletics +6, Perception +4
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 19 (see Shadow's Vigil)
Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Fey Ancestry. Magic can't put the shadow fey guardian to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The shadow fey's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma. It can cast the following spell innately, requiring no material components:

1/day: *misty step* (when in shadows, dim light, or darkness only)

Shadow's Vigil. The shadow fey has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks (included in its passive Perception), and magical darkness does not inhibit its darkvision.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow fey has disadvantage on attack rolls and on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Traveler in Darkness. The shadow fey has advantage on Intelligence (Arcana) checks made to know about shadow roads and shadow magic spells or items.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The guardian makes two pike attacks.

Pike. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120, one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Protect. The shadow fey guardian imposes disadvantage on an attack roll against an ally within 5 feet. To do so, the guardian must be wielding a melee weapon.

Development. If the party defeats the monolith armor, the queen is impressed and immediately proclaims one of the characters as her new champion and Keeper of the Seals of the Realm. As the character's first responsibility, he or she must visit the Moonlit King and gain his approval to abandon the fey claim to the city. The queen doesn't entirely expect the character to return.

If the chosen character refuses the title as the queen's new champion, the party is immediately dropped through the cloud floor of the chamber (falling 1,000 feet to the ground far below the courts, but bouncing off the shadow bridge to take "only" 10d6 damage).

Depending on the circumstances and the danger that the queen feels the characters present to the realm, she might salute them and drop them into the maze (without damaging them), or she might banish them from the Shadow Realm; thereafter all castings of the *tread the Niflheim Road* spell simply release shadow beasts (see page 128) against the characters.

In this second case, as every hand is turned against them, the characters' mission has failed. The statthalter soon arrives to seize control of the city of Zobeck, and the rule of the shadow fey is reestablished.

The queen hopes the characters will kill the king—whom the fey believe cannot be slain—through some mortal trick; if the audience turns into a combat session, this does not mean that her goal has changed. Indeed, regardless of whether the fight turns against her or the party is defeated, she tells the characters that she will give them what they want—but doing so requires the acknowledgement, or at least the witnessed consent, of her royal husband.

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She grants them permission to visit the king's tower and considers herself lucky no matter what happens thereafter. If the characters never come back, good riddance to annoying visitors. If they find the Moonlit King's tower and get his signature or permission, then the queen hopes that she can use this concession of territory against her husband at some future date.

Act IV, Scene 2: Welcome to the Labyrinth

Once the characters enter the Spiral Maze from the hidden stairs in the northeastern section of the palace (area 42), they quickly see that the maze is incredibly large, taking up huge swaths of the forest, and is filled with dark, thorny hedges and wide-open avenues that twist and curl in all directions. Worse, it is dark and extremely unfriendly (see the "Conditions in the Labyrinth" sidebar).

Most parties will make their way over time toward the Tower of the Moon, where the king is being held. The maze is quite deadly, though, for the queen does not want many visitors to find her husband (the situation would be too dangerous if his partisans were to have ready access to the king).

This first encounter is a nesting place for the lantern dragonettes, which is protected by a trap that they and their shadow beast guardians never trigger.

And of course, if the characters watch the glowing brazier's light, they are immobilized and hypnotized when the shadow beasts come out of the shadows. . . .

> The maze's passage opens up ahead, and bright lights flicker in some sort of clearing. A dozen of the small lantern dragonettes are warming themselves around a huge brass brazier.

Passive Perception (contested by the shadow beasts' Dexterity (Stealth) check)—The shadows you see don't come entirely from the fire and the dragonettes; the walls of the maze conceal large shadowy creatures, just barely out of sight.

If the characters approach within 50 feet, the dragonettes all fly to their nests and hide from the ensuing combat. The shadow beasts step forward out of the black walls of the maze, surprising any creature whose passive Perception failed to beat their Stealth check.

Conditions in the Labyrinth

The purpose of the labyrinth is to protect and sequester the king during the winter, or the queen in those rare seasons when the king is ascendant. Entering it requires flight, powerful magic to unlock the wards on the maze, or the use of the key-daggers that the queen holds and might give as gifts to worthy visitors (see Convincing the Queen, page 123).

The queen considers other shadow fey the biggest threats to her rule, so the labyrinth is built to be most difficult for shadow fey, not for mortal characters: radiant damage, painfully bright light near the tower, the need to carry supplies, and so forth. The place is a nightmare to the shadow fey, as no shadows can ever appear around the tower, because all of it glows.

Climbing the Walls. A character can climb the crumbling, thorny, mossy, or slick walls of the Spiral Maze with a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check, failure indicates a fall for 2d6 bludgeoning damage. The walls are made of shadowstuff, black wood, bone, crumbling stone, and other materials; they stand about 10 feet high.

Getting atop the walls doesn't help very much for scouting because of the size of the maze. The climber can see the glow of the King's Tower, but doesn't find out much about how to get there. Because the walls of the maze are often 50 feet thick and the passages as much as 20 to 30 feet across, it doesn't save much time to climb. The top of the walls are difficult terrain and treacherous due to thorns and jagged outcroppings.

Never a Moment's Peace. Resting in the maze is difficult or impossible: frequent disturbances include insect swarms, animated hedge creatures, wandering mystic eyeballs, lantern dragonettes, and disembodied crying voices. Characters who attempt to enter an extradimensional space, such as by a *rope trick* spell, find that the passage simply loops back into the maze at the place where it opened. The conditions don't significantly improve for those within the dome of a *Leomund's tiny hut* spell, though it at least ensures that the party won't be attacked, and short rests become possible.

Be sure to describe the distracting, unsettling nature of the labyrinth early to give the party a clue that long rests won't be possible.

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ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Medium (9th-level characters)—1 pyrohypnosis brazier (trap), 2 shadow beasts

Hard (9th-level characters)—1 pyrohypnosis brazier (trap), 3 shadow beasts

Deadly (10th-level characters)—1 pyrohypnosis brazier (trap), 4 shadow beasts

Pyrohypnosis Brazier

The brazier in the center of the chamber is a magical trap. A humanoid that starts its turn within 30 feet of the brazier and that can see it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be charmed until the start of its next turn. While charmed in this way, the creature is incapacitated, its speed is reduced to 0 and it can't benefit from increases to its speed, and it has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks. The effect ends early if a charmed creature takes damage.

A character who examines the brazier from afar and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies the danger. The brazier can be disabled with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check, or with a successful casting of *dispel magic* against DC 13.

Shadow Beast

Medium fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +6

Skills Stealth +7

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral, Void Speech

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The shadow beast can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Innate Spellcasting. The shadow beast's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *fear, telekinesis*

Magic Resistance. The shadow beast has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow beast has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow beast makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) slashing damage.

Shadow Push (Recharge 5–6). The shadow beast buffets opponents with a gale of animated shadows in a 15-foot cone. Any creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 10 feet and knocked prone.

Developments

Demon Lord Appears—If the party has not met and defeated the Demon Lord of Roaches, Akyishigal appears here with its roachling servants shortly after the party has rested (or perhaps after they uncover its hidden treasure cache; see below). It demands that the party steal the King's *Orb of Rule* and surrender the orb to it if they succeed in the encounter at the tower.

Dragonettes Speak—If the party succeeds in this encounter without killing a single lantern dragonette, the glowing little dragons speak to the and spill all the secrets they know. (You can use this opportunity to provide information to characters who have, shall we say, failed to court the courtiers and lack sufficient investigative or persuasive skill.)

Treasure

If the characters know about the hidden treasure cache from speaking with Yikrugrak (see page 102), they can find it easily, buried under the hedge where the lantern dragons roost most heavily. If the party wasn't told about the hidden cache of treasure, someone must succeed on a DC 21 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check to spot the disturbed earth where it lies buried.

Either way, it takes 1 hour to dig up the treasure from beneath the empty chest marked on the map (or half that time if the party is carrying a shovel). The treasure, two *potions of superior healing* and a *staff of healing*, is very useful later in the maze against the eye golem or the Moonlit King.

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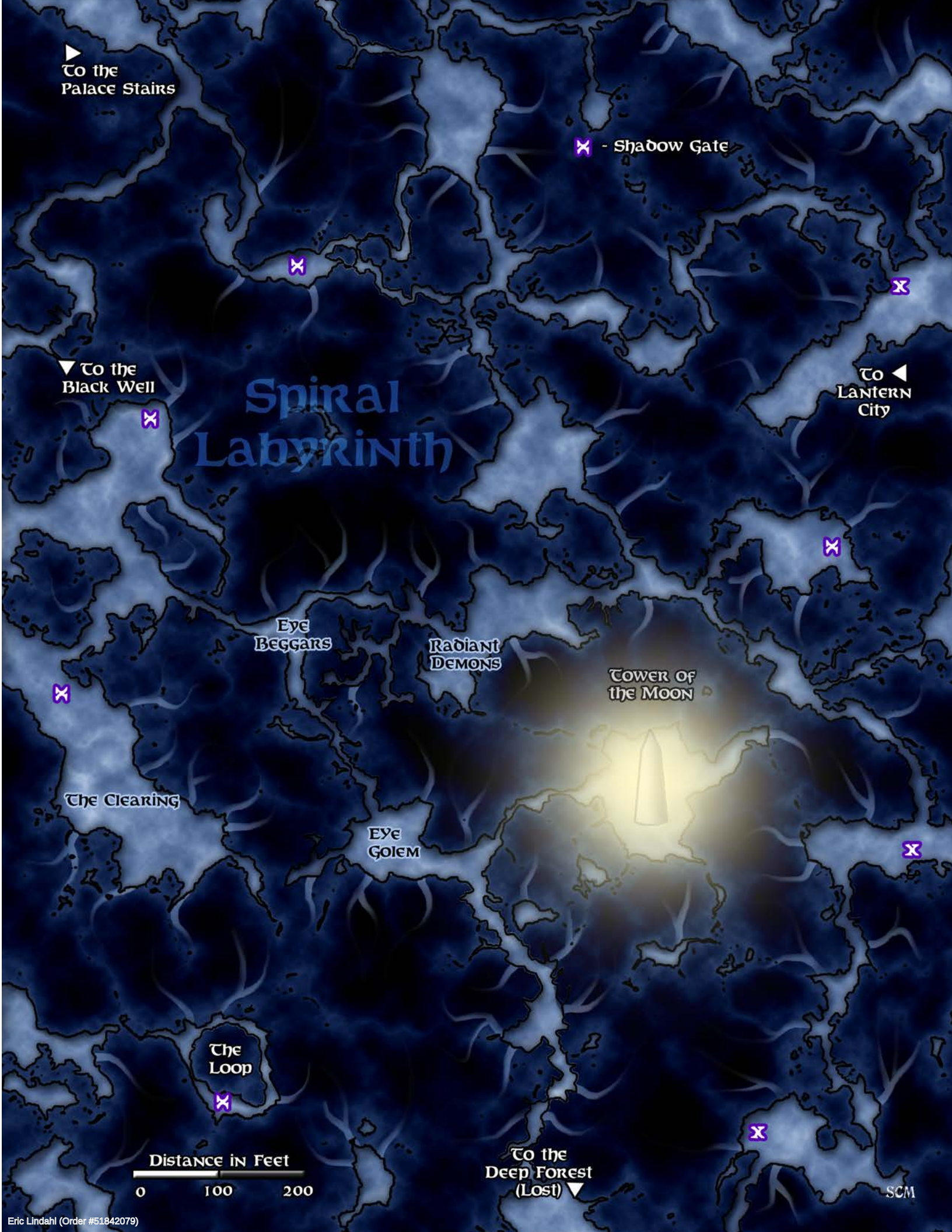

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The space behind the chest is a private, tented sanctuary, the only place where the characters can manage a long rest while in the maze. When the sanctuary is used once, its magic fades and it cannot be used again unless the party leaves the maze and reenters it.

While the party digs for treasure, arcane eyes appear in the walls of the maze and can be found in the bottom of the brazier's coals, foreshadowing the danger in the eye golem encounter (see page 132).

Act IV, Scene 3: The Hedge Dryad

The winding path reveals a hedge wall with an arching vine trellis covered in thick and vibrant black-speckled plants. Beyond the archway, a short series of steps lead down into an elaborate hedge maze. The labyrinth gives way to the darker shadows of the tangled ivy that looms overhead and presses down like the closing fist of some leafy titan.

Inside the hedge labyrinth, characters find twists and turns. Have them make Intelligence (Investigation), Wisdom (Survival), and Wisdom (Perception) checks to navigate the maze, and describe their travels, dead ends, and backtrackings while creating a sense of tension. Remind them of the urgency of their travel and that there is no opportunity to take a long rest. Eventually they arrive at the duskthorn dryad's garden.

The maze opens into a wide clearing. Four gaunt, trollish figures, recognizable as part of a topiary, are frozen in mid-stride, dancing around a great central tree. Dark, thorny vines cover the lower trunk of the tree. Its upper trunk is dead, with pale and barren limbs that reach into the dusky sky.

The topiary is actually a pack of trolls that the duskthorn dryad caught and reduced to skeletons. Each is coated with vines, turning it into a mindless protector controlled by the magic imbued within the troll hearts that are kept in a hollow of the dead tree.

The characters must kill the trolls and the dryad, or simply slay all the hearts in the tree, which destroys the trolls and sends the dryad fleeing. The hedge closes behind the party as they enter; the apparent opening on the far side of the deadwood tree is an illusion.

HEART OF THE DEADWOOD

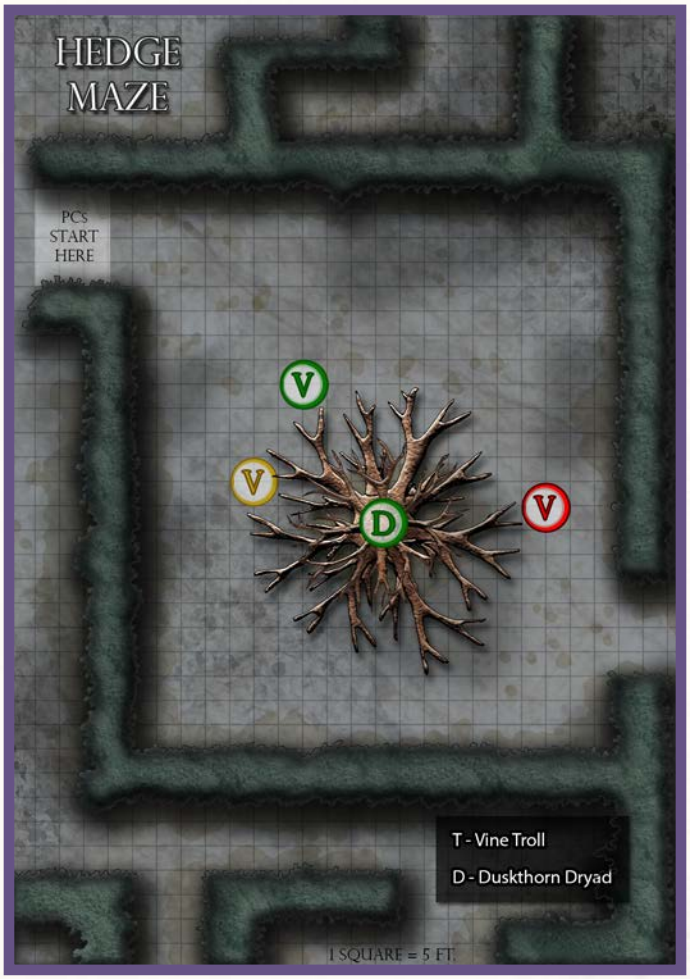
The hearts of the once-troll guardians pulsate within the hollows of the great, ivy-coated tree at the center of the glade. Foul magic flows from the long tendrils and animates the vine-coated skeletons. The characters can destroy a heart and put a vine troll skeleton to rest by undertaking a skill challenge and getting 4 successes before 3 failures. The challenge is repeated for each skeleton present in the encounter (see below).

Dexterity (Acrobatics) DC 11; Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) DC 10—You scale the tree to remove a heart from one of the hollows, severing its connection to a troll.

Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Medicine) DC 16—You determine the specific place where a vine is linked to an ensorcelled troll heart.

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 18, Intelligence (Nature) DC 18, Intelligence (Investigation) DC 10, or Wisdom (Perception) DC 16—You realize that the umbilical vines heal too quickly to be cut away in stages and must be torn out completely.

Overall Success: The troll attuned to a specific heart is destroyed.



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Overall Failure: The heart receives a surge of magical essence, and the troll attuned to it can make one attack as a reaction.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Hard (10th-level characters)—1 vine troll skeleton, 1 duskthorn dryad

Deadly (11th-level characters)—2 vine troll skeletons, 1 duskthorn dryad

Deadly (13th-level characters)—3 vine troll skeletons, 1 duskthorn dryad

Duskthorn Dryad

Medium fey, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 77 (14d8 + 14)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	24 (+7)

Saving Throws Con +3, Wis +4

Skills Animal Handling +4, Deception +9, Nature +6, Perception +4, Persuasion +9, Stealth +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Elvish, Sylvan, Umbral

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The dryad's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *dancing lights, druidcraft*

3/day each: *charm person, entangle, invisibility, magic missile*

1/day each: *barkskin, counterspell, dispel magic, fog cloud, shillelagh, suggestion, wall of thorns*

Magic Resistance. The dryad has advantage on saving throws made against spells and other magical effects.

Speak with Beasts and Plants. The dryad can communicate with beasts and plants as if they shared a language.

Tree Stride (1/Turn). The dryad can use 10 feet of movement to magically step into one dead tree within her reach and emerge from a second dead tree within 60 feet of the first tree, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second tree. Both trees must be Large or larger.

Tree Dependent. The dryad is mystically bonded to her duskthorn vines and must remain within 300 yards of them or become poisoned. For every 24 hours she remains out of range of her vines, her Constitution is reduced by 1d6. If the dryad's Constitution is reduced to 0, she dies. Once the dryad is within range of her vines again, she regains all lost Constitution when she finishes a long rest. The dryad can bond with new vines by performing a 24-hour ritual.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d4 + 5) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Vine Troll Skeleton

Large plant, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 119 (14d10 + 42)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	6 (–2)	8 (–1)	5 (–3)

Saving Throws Con +7

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities deafened, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Regeneration. The vine troll skeleton regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn if it is within 10 feet of the duskthorn dryad's vines and it hasn't taken acid or fire damage since its previous turn. The skeleton dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate, or if the duskthorn dryad that created it dies, or if the troll's heart inside the tree is destroyed.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The vine troll skeleton makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (3d10 + 5) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (3d8 + 5) slashing damage.

The duskthorn dryad stays close to the central tree unless the adventurers bypass its defenders; then she uses Tree Stride in an attempt to escape. She uses her *wall of thorns* and *entangle* spells to hinder enemies while trying to stay close to her allies, so she can grant them the benefit of her other spells.

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DEVELOPMENT

As the last troll dies, the dryad fades into the ground along with all the surrounding vines. The way out is suddenly exposed. An exit appears in the shadowy core of the tree itself—a passage leading down and out!

Treasure

Within the space beneath the fallen tree are revealed a brazier of solid, carved red gemstone (worth 7,500 gp), and 1,000 gp in coins of the Shadow Realm.

Act IV, Scene 4: Lost Children and Eyeless Beggars

This is a two-part encounter with a blinded mother and daughter who are lost in the maze. It foreshadows the arrival of the eye golem. These unfortunates have gained blindsight from their years in the maze, yet they are cursed never to be able to find one another.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 13—You hear a woman's voice up ahead, speaking Elvish. She seems to be weeping or distressed, calling out, "I hear you, little one! I'm not far away."

Let the characters make whatever preparations they like. If these acts take longer than 2 rounds, read:

> A bedraggled woman wearing layers of rags stumbles out of one of the maze's side passages. Her hands trace a path along the right-hand side of the hedge, and her eyes are entirely missing. "Who's there?" she says.

The woman's name is Ardevallissen Thiomoire. She has lost her eyes, to "a monster," and also has become separated from her daughter, Helliboshe, who is also blind. The two seek each other despite knowing that a curse keeps them apart.

To help mother and child find one another, the party must perform a special ritual, which requires slaying the eye golem and using its largest eye as a component for the ritual. (Once the golem is slain, a DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check is all that is required to successfully perform the ritual.) This eye is also a potentially valuable treasure, however (see below).

Development. If the characters ignore the Thiomoires' plight, they might meet other eyeless beggars who were also thrown into the maze to suffer: the famous shadow fey duelist Dax the Hook-Handed, the brownie painter Sollerveg Toma, the duchess Loirachne who refused the Black Prince's advances, and so forth—innocent and guilty alike. All are eyeless, pale, and terrified; all are reluctant to blame the king and queen for their suffering, although they might confess their "crimes" if plied with DC 14 Charisma checks. There are sixteen such beggars who serve the eye golem in exchange for protection from other creatures in the Spiral Maze.

The mother, Ardevallissen, is a disgraced noble who does not serve the golem; instead, she is under a curse that protects her but prevents her from ever finding her lost child. She begs the characters to help her find her child, or failing that, to retrieve her eyes from the golem. Ardevallissen claims that the golem serves as an ever-watchful bodyguard of the Moonlit King (and she's right, though the creature is older than that).

Treasure

Ardevallissen knows things from her long wanderings in the maze. She shares her most valuable information if the party helps her by recovering her eyes from the golem as outlined above.

She knows that the Moonlit King is either partially or wholly mad, and that all those who visit him are likewise mad: this is why his servants are often enormously powerful derro, who thrive on madness, or demons and elementals, who seem likewise to suffer no ill effects from the king's presence. For the fey and others, she knows, the secret to avoiding this madness is the application of a simple binding charm involving the use of holly and a firebird's feather (500 gp). This charm grants advantage on saving throws against the king's madness aura (see "Tower of the Moon" on page 136).

Act IV, Scene 5: Eyes in the Dark

The labyrinth is a trap for the enemies of the Blood Royal, and fey are not infrequently banished to the maze for a time. Most of the fey survive their punishment, but much darker and more dangerous things are banished here permanently—things from long, long ago, things that even the fey want kept out of sight. One of these is the eye golem, a creature that gains strength by absorbing the eyeballs plucked from those who have displeased the queen.

> The maze opens into a clearing that has a ramp leading up to the top of the walls. Scattered around the area are several shadow fey, goblins, and elves, all dressed in rags and all missing their eyes.
>
> Behind them stands a giant creature of great muscle and marble-white skin that almost glows in the light of the tower. It is at least ten feet tall, and its skin is covered with real eyes as well as tattoos of arcane sigils that resemble eyes. The eyes and the eye tattoos all open at once and turn to you, and the eyeless beggars scream and flee.

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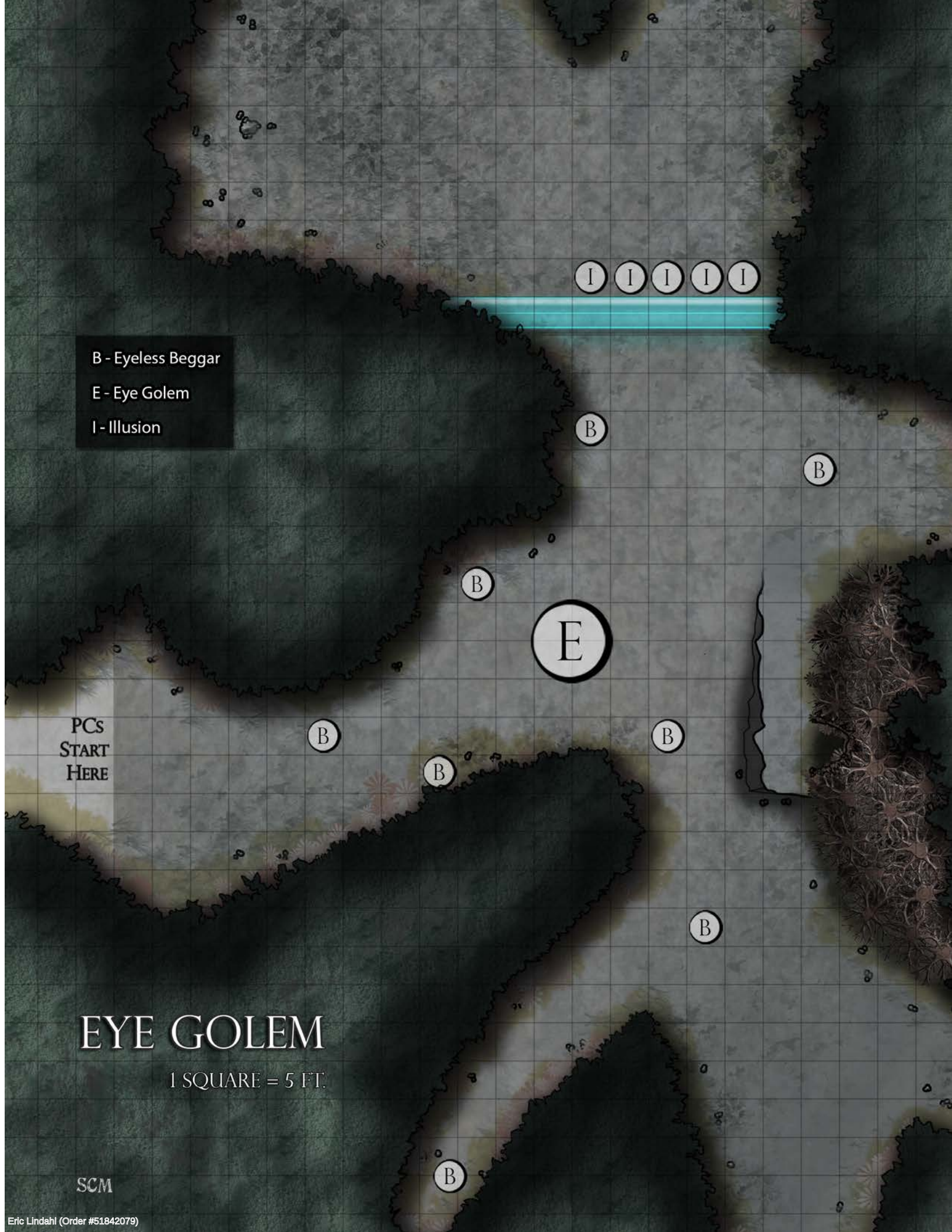

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Glass Wall. The force field to one side of the clearing prevents creatures from entering the grounds of the Tower of the Moon. Five floating eyes on the far side appear to be monsters ready to attack the party; these are mere illusions. The glass wall can be opened in several ways: by a *passwall* spell, by the sacrifice of the golem's largest eye, or by the sacrifice of 10 hit points from each creature passing through the barrier.

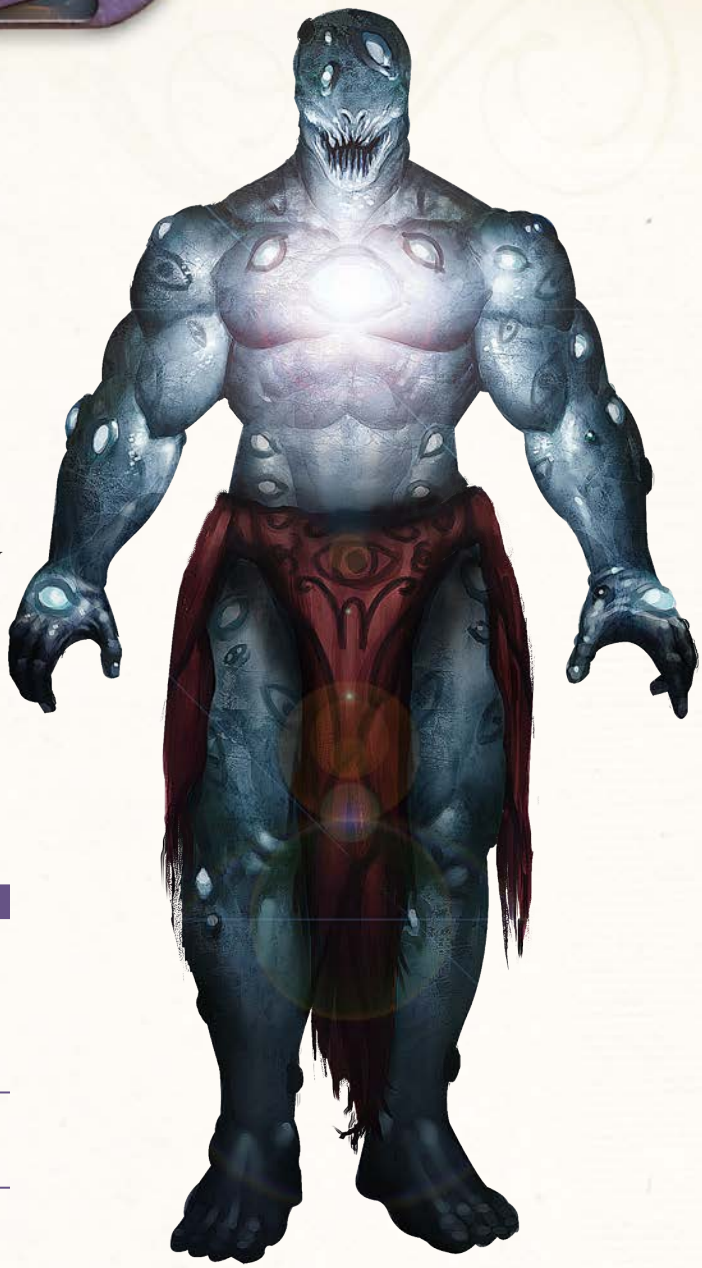
Ramp. The ramp up is normal terrain and reaches a height of 20 feet, enough to reach the cave entrance which is (strangely enough, and counter to most geography) at the top of a small hill. The cave itself is filled with a number of banished fey and angels, all of them quite dangerous (see "Development" below if they are freed).

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Hard (9th-level characters)—1 eye golem

Hard (10th-level characters)—1 eye golem, 1 shadow beast

Hard (11th-level characters)—1 eye golem, 2 shadow beasts



Eye Golem

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 20 (natural armor)

Hit Points 157 (15d10 + 75)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	9 (–1)	20 (+5)	5 (–3)	11 (+0)	1 (–5)

Skills Perception +8

Damage Immunities fire, poison, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't adamantine

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages understands the languages of its creator, but can't speak

Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Magic Weapons. The golem's weapon attacks are magical.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The golem makes two melee attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Gaze of Ancient Light (Recharge 6). The golem emits a burst of blinding light, affecting all opponents within 30 feet that it can see. These creatures must make a successful DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be permanently blinded. All affected creatures, including those that succeed on the save, are stunned until the end of their next turn.

Primal Voice of Doom (1/Day). The golem intones a disturbing invocation of the sun god. Creatures within 30 feet of the golem must make a successful DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened. Deafened or unhearing creatures are unaffected.

Shoot into the Sun (1 Minute/Day). When roused for combat, the golem opens many of its eyes, emitting blinding light. All ranged attacks, including ranged spells that require a spell attack roll, are made with

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disadvantage against the golem. The effect persists as long as the eye golem desires, up to a total of 1 minute (10 rounds) per day.

Shadow Beast

Medium fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +6

Skills Stealth +7

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral, Void Speech

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The shadow beast can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Innate Spellcasting. The shadow beast's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *fear, telekinesis*

Magic Resistance. The shadow beast has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow beast has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Multiattack. The shadow beast makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) slashing damage.

Shadow Push (Recharge 5–6). The shadow beast buffets opponents with a gale of animated shadows in a 15-foot cone. Any creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 10 feet and knocked prone.

Development

When it is killed, the eye golem does not simply fall down dead. All its eyes open at once, emitting a scream heard for miles and a burst of light that blots out everything around. When the light and noise stop, the dazed characters see hundreds of perfectly preserved eyeballs on the ground all around them. Stepping normally squelches them underfoot. Stepping carefully so as to avoid them requires a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. Someone who succeeds on a DC 11 Wisdom (Medicine) check realizes that the eyes are still warm and fresh, without the sort of scars or damage that one might expect.

A character who examines the eyes and succeeds on a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check determines that some of the eye golem's eyes have been taken from fey at the court. In particular, Baron Suvid's missing eye is one of them, and he would be most pleased to have it returned. Someone who studies the eyes carefully and makes a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check or a DC 24 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds that many of them have a thin, flickering beam of arcane energy that connects them to their owners. With this way, the characters can return twelve such eyes to their grateful fey; doing so is equivalent to completing a minor quest.

Creatures in the Golem's Cavern. The fey and their eye golem servant have imprisoned many fey and celestial creatures in a horrible, lightless, dreamless, merciless, and pitiful hole found at the end of the ramp. The voices within are begging and pitiful—but unlike the eyeless beggars, these creatures all speak Celestial.

These angelic-voiced creatures that are so desperate for freedom have gone mad, and if released, they might attack their tormentors. A successful DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation) check cows them, as they have been abused into a truly pitiful state. They are easily cowed because the fey enjoy pretending to be helpful adventurers, letting an angel or two loose and then stuffing them back into this place. The black hole they are within is magically warded. A successful DC 23 Intelligence (Arcana) check or a successful casting of *dispel magic* against DC 19 opens the wards.

If the characters do let the creatures out, they see them as a mix of wingless angels and demented devils, forced to dwell together in too little space. The fey pulled the wings off these creatures to beat them with, leaving them with perpetually bloody stumps. The wings can be found in the tower's upper floor and can be restored to their owners with healing magic.

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Treasure

When the eye golem dies, its various tattoos and eyeballs turn into a total of 120 pp, each coin marked with the image of an eye.

The large eye in the golem's center could be the eye of a primordial or a titan of ancient days, and that creature might come looking for it when the golem is slain. Depending on your preference at this point, the eye can instead be used as a *crystal ball* or can power the ritual that restores sight to the eyeless beggars (see Scene 4, page 132).

Act IV, Scene 6: Tower of the Moon

The party begins this encounter outside the tower. The place goes by several names, also including the Tower of Lost Hopes, the Tower of the Moonlit King (or the Tower of the Queen, in season), the Shadow Source, and the Tower of Radiant Death.

The encounter proceeds from outside the door to the entryway, then to the Stairway of Radiant Beams, and finally into the Lunar Audience Chamber. Each section has its own challenges, and lingering in a section draws the attention of Revich from atop the tower. He might urge the party on if they dawdle.

Illumination. The light from the Tower of the Moon is so bright that it hurts to stare at it. Its piercing light inflicts great pain upon light-sensitive creatures, making this a very safe place to keep things away from the shadow fey. The Tower's light counts as sunlight for the purpose of creatures that have weaknesses to sunlight.

THE TOWER PROPER

The outer walls of the tower literally resemble the moon, with both light and dark sections, plus areas that resemble lunar craters and seas. Big holes can be seen in its walls halfway up; a small balcony perches almost at the top; and the slate roof is topped by a statue.

Beyond the blue glass door is an enormous chamber dominated by a pale gray-blue set of stairs, as if smoke had taken a spiral form and were climbing up. On either side of the stairs are piles of stone rubble. The enormous oak and iron circle of a wheel fully ten feet across lies across the bottom of the stairs. A chain dangles down to the oak wheel from above.

A wall of moonlight divides the room behind the stairs from the front section. Bloodstains and green splatters stain the floor around the throne.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 17—Something shadowy sits on the throne.

See the description of the *Orb of Rule* (page 140) for details about the wall of moonlight.

The Radiant Stairway. The stairs in the center of the tower glow with bluish light, and they are transparent. The king or another person holding the *Orb of Rule* can turn the stairs on or off each round as a bonus action. When they are on, they are solid stairs. When they are turned off, the stairs disappear, and creatures on them plummet to earth. The Moonlit King flies up to the top and uses the Radiant Stairway to allow Chamberlain Ralk to climb up to him. He's willing to let Ralk fall if it takes his enemies down as well.

Creatures that fall through an interior level of the tower can grab hold of the beams or edges of the floor and arrest their fall with a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. Failure to grab onto something means an extra 1d10 bludgeoning damage from the impact of the wall or floor against an arm or leg, plus falling damage.

The First Floor. Two holes look down to the ground floor, and the smoky bluish spiral stairs continue up, although they are paler here than below. The chain extends through the western hole and continues up.

The Charred Beams and Hoist. This feature is a dangerous floor that seems solid at first. Read:

This burnt-out floor is a strange one: two enormous holes mar the outer walls, and a layer of bluish smoke stops just above the charred remains of many floor beams, creating a sort of arcane floor. Two of the charred beams still extend all the way from one side of the tower to the other. One is near a block-and-tackle hoist that connects a heavy chain to the bottom floor.

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 18—The smoke is magical, but it won't hold weight.

Wisdom (Perception) DC 16—The charred beams will fall apart pretty soon. Don't count on them for long!

The floor holds very little weight. It collapses at the start of the third round of combat or when three creatures stand on one beam at the same time.

Upper Level. The spiral stairs become quite spongy underfoot in this area. Two open doorways lead out to the balcony and balustrade.

The Balustrade. Fully 130 feet above ground level, the 6 foot-wide balcony has a simple marble wall, about 2 feet high. Exterior stairs ascend to the battlements and rooftop.

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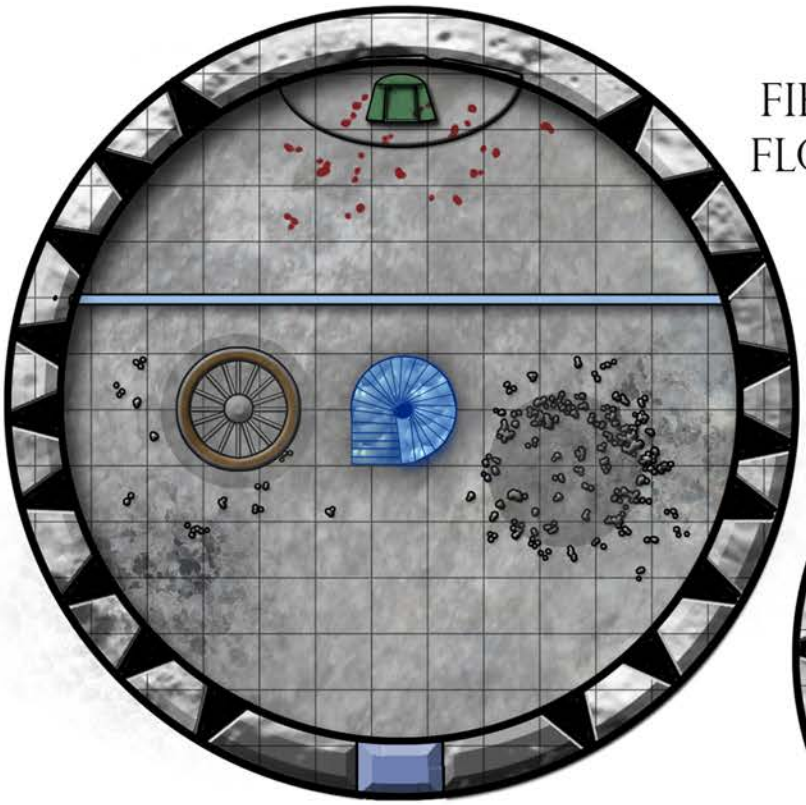
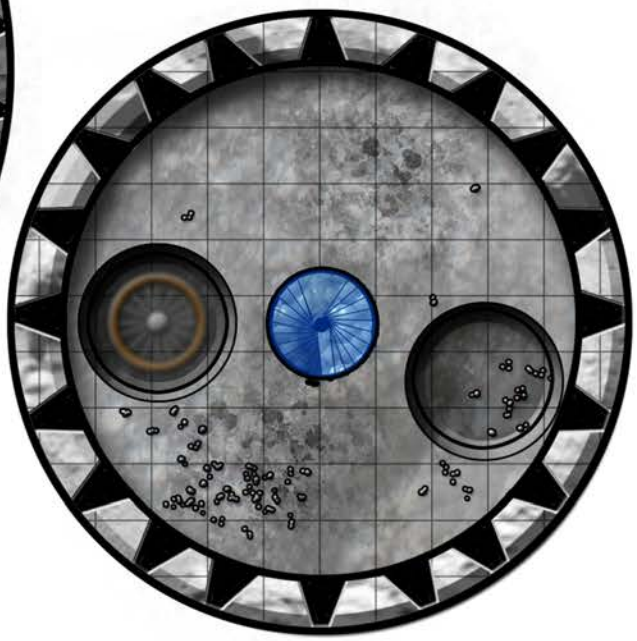
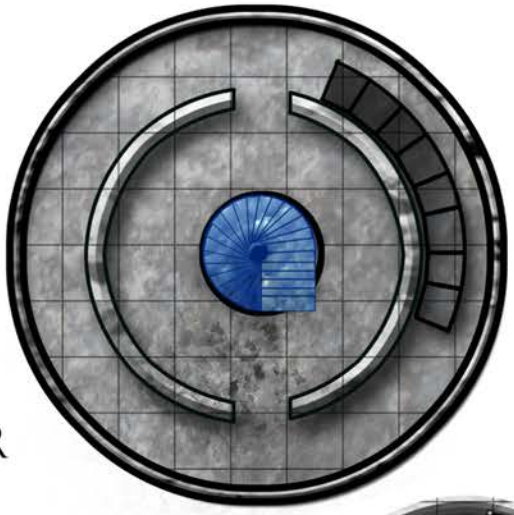
TOWER OF THE MOON



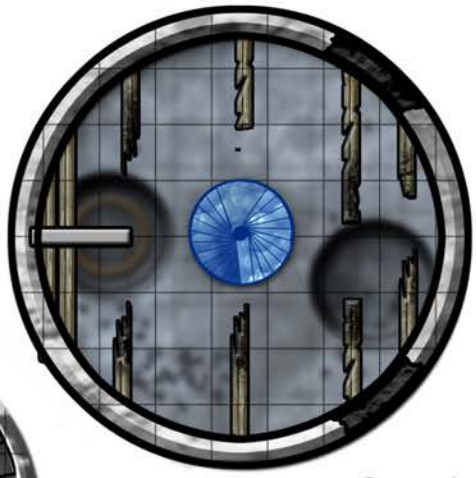
FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



THIRD FLOOR



FOURTH FLOOR

FIFTH FLOOR

SCM

1 SQUARE = 5 FT.

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Slate Roof and Angel. The battlements and the 35-foot-diameter slate roof are the darkest parts of the tower, although the statue at the peak is in fact the blindfolded angel Revich, glowing with a pure warm light. He knows this meeting will irrevocably affect the future of the Shadow Realm, and is here to observe the event.

If the characters befriended him in the Lords of Light encounter, he might assist each member of the Lords of Light faction by healing them up to 25 hit points each and giving them a minor boon (treat the next critical hit against the character as a normal hit instead).

MEETING THE MOONLIT KING

The former monarch of the Moonlit Court, exiled here by the queen, is fading into a ghost—a psychic impression of his former self. The king is far enough gone, however, that he doesn't know that's what is happening. His retinue attends him in the form of lunar devils and talking shadows, and he still believes he can reclaim the throne. His physical servant is Chamberlain Ralk, a mad derro who has been twisted into a fiendish hulk, huge and insane and willing to cater to his master's every whim.

The king talks to the characters to "enlist" them in his cause. To lure them close, he promises them secrets and rewards, perhaps even a way out of the labyrinth—none of which he can or intends to fulfill.

Although the king is mad, he's mad in a very particular way. The party can hold a conversation with him, but he's not always part of the same conversation they hear. Sometimes, the Moonlit King doesn't address the characters directly at all but talks to ghosts and even to his own sentient shadow.

This shadow, it should be noted, might be his strongest vestige and animating power. It is strong enough that it can survive his death—his shadow is in fact stronger than he is.

The characters probably have no idea what they are getting into, though lucky ones will figure it out fairly quickly.

LUNAR AUDIENCE CHAMBER

By stealth or strength of arms, when the characters reach the heavily guarded Tower of the Moon, they soon discover the Moonlit King is mad mad mad.

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The interior of the tower is filled with two piles of rubble, a handful of moonbeams, and a bright glowing staircase of blue light. In the back, in shadow, is a throne of pale greenish stone.

The figure on the throne resembles a shadow fey, if a shadow fey were half-transparent, with wild blue hair like a derro savant and grayish-green armor. His limbs sometimes appear ghostly and transparent, and at other times gray and solid as stone.

An enormous creature stands next to him, a servant or bodyguard of some kind, a hunchbacked giant with the heavy proportions and flowing beard of a crazed dwarf.

The king speaks. "I am the ancient spirit doomed for long aeons to walk this maze, and each day to be chained fast in a dozen tiny fires till the crimes done in my sighted days are purged and burnt away. Have you come to free me?"

Let the characters respond.

Passive Perception (contested by the lunar devil's Stealth check)—Creatures are hiding among the moonbeams and strange shadows in the tower. They're silvery and translucent, with vast maws and folded wings—something inhuman.

Wisdom (Insight) DC 13—The king's stare is odd, and he seems to only halfway hear you. There's something wrong with him.

If the party keeps talking, the king enjoys their company but makes it plain that he will not truly bargain for Zobeck's release from the fey unless he gets something out of it. Read or paraphrase the following:

The king's head lolls back, and he pulls a bluish-gray orb out from beneath his short cloak. "Listen, O Crescents, these petitioners have come to give me speech and seek my counsel. Yet I am no scáthsidhe easily bought. What have they brought? What tribute do you render unto me, my shadow, say now, and tell it to mine ear?"

He motions his lumbering servant forward to the moonlight wall, and waits expectantly.

Intelligence (History) DC 16—His majesty expects an offering, or bribe, as is customary among the nobility.

Wisdom (Insight) DC 21—The king mostly likely would accept magic, possibly something more personal, such as a sign from the queen or proof of a rival's death.

The audience ends unless the characters can convince the king to speak with them by giving him an offering. Acceptable items include anything you see fit, with emphasis on those that are connected with the characters' previous actions Possibilities include the head of the Demon Lord of Roaches, a mass of gold or jewels (worth 25,000 gp or more), a very rare magic item, a lock of the queen's hair or a memory of hers in physical form, and the complete set of key-daggers the characters received earlier (see page 124).

If no bribe is offered to draw his interest, the king continues his conversations but less and less frequently addresses the characters. Instead, he speaks more and more to the hulking derro giant and to his shades and servants, barely visible ghosts and tattered spirits. He sits behind his wall, content to babble and wait the party out.

Playing Crazy. To demonstrate how the king behaves, turn away from the players and address a wall or a ceiling occasionally. This tactic might be amusing if you have the king ask for impossible things—"Fetch me two cups of girlish laughter." It might come off as creepy and unsettling if he asks for horrible things—"I demand that you excise my petitioner's conscience, and then his childhood." Make it clear that the king thinks he can crush them like bugs—"Where are my boots for crushing mortal hopes? Polish them! Get them on my feet, you worthless shade!"

THE KING'S MADNESS

The King can offer what the characters want—the relinquishing of the claim to Zobeck—in exchange for their cutting him and spilling his blood in the Tower. The characters might think that he is a Joker-style masochist, but the truth is slightly different. Spilling the king's blood breaks an ancient prohibition against harming the king and frees him from his sworn oath to remain in the tower—and it even helps relieve his madness.

The problem is that his madness prevents him from taking even simple steps for his own benefit, and thus the characters must help put the pieces of his sanity together before he can do so. Treat this approach as a skill challenge with some added complications; the King asks some questions that weigh heavily on his broken mind. The correct answers help pull him closer to the shores of sanity, while false answers drive him deeper into rage.

Throughout the adventure, the characters might have discovered the answers to these questions. Each such clue is noted in a sidebar titled "Shards of a Broken Mind," with the exception to the answer of "Who sent you here?" That answer should be obvious to them, but they need to be careful in how they deliver that answer.

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Restore the Mad King's Trust and Mind

The king asks many questions of the characters. Setting him straight on all counts requires undertaking a skill challenge and getting 5 successes before 3 failures. Below are the questions, the proper answers, and the kind of successful ability check needed to convey each answer. If the characters actually know the answers to any of these questions, they can speak an answer and gain an automatic success in the skill challenge without rolling.

"How long has my bride ruled the realm?"
"A hundred years or more, Your Majesty."
(Intelligence [History] DC 22)

"Who brought this madness upon me?"
"The Demon Lord of Roaches did, Your Majesty."
(Charisma [Persuasion] DC 24)

"Who sent you here?"
"The queen worries for your continued health, and sent us to you for reasons of state."
(Charisma [Deception] DC 21)

"Where is my daughter?"
"She abides far from the Realm of Shadow, in the lands of Midgard."
(Intelligence [Investigation] DC 24)

"How has the queen ensorcelled me?"
"She uses the light of the firebird to weave the chains that bind your mind, Your Majesty."
(Intelligence [Arcana] DC 22)

Each time the characters answer incorrectly, gaining a failure in the skill challenge, the king shouts the following demands in order:

1. "You offer me trifles! You know nothing! Lord Stross, I compel you to attend me."
2. "Wrong again! You must be traitors sent against me! Master Quickstep, I compel you to attend me."
3. And finally, "What you say is not possible. You are false ghosts sent to torment me. Archduke Bonerattler, I compel you to destroy them!"

Overall Success. The Moonlit King's shattered mind regains some semblance of order, if only briefly. Proceed to "The Weary King's Price."

Overall Failure. Combat begins and continues until the Moonlit King is defeated.

Orb of Rule

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

The *Orb of Rule* is a glowing bluish-gray orb that always reflects the phase of the moon; black at new moon, glowing on its entire surface during a full moon. It harnesses the power of moonlight, giving its wielder significant abilities.

As a bonus action, you can transform the orb into a *+3 flail* that deals an extra 2d6 radiant damage on a successful hit, or back into orb form. In orb form, it has the properties described below.

While holding the orb, you gain a flying speed equal to twice your walking speed, and you have resistance to radiant damage.

The orb has 20 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it (spell save DC 17): *magic missile* (1 charge), *polymorph* (4 charges, bat and owl forms, including giant, only), *resilient sphere* (4 charges), *wall of force* (5 charges).

The orb regains 2d8 + 4 expended charges daily at midnight.

Combat with the King

even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

—Psalms 139:12

If the skill challenge results in a failure or the characters do not even try to engage the king in conversation, combat ensues.

The Moonlit King is a glass demon, a translucent creature of light and hardened glass. He remains out of reach by flying, or by casting wall of force from the *Orb of Rule*. The Moonlit King is a pale shadow of his former might, an echo left behind after the scream of madness passed. He has half his maximum hit points, and spends most of his normal actions during the combat raving unless he is directly threatened. He can use his legendary actions and lair actions to affect the battle, however.

ENCOUNTER CHOICES

Hard (10th-level characters)—Moonlit King, 1 lunar devil, Chamberlain Ralk

Hard (11th-level characters)—Moonlit King, 1 lunar devil, Chamberlain Ralk, 1 shadow beast

Deadly (11th-level characters)—Moonlit King, 2 lunar devils, Chamberlain Ralk, 1 shadow beast

Moonbeams. The tower is filled with four moonbeams, shafts of pure lunar light inside the walls that empower and strengthen the king's magic. As long as he stands within one of them, he can use his Aura of Madness legendary action. When the king is outside

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a moonbeam, his aura is inactive. The moonbeams are mobile terrain; they are 10-foot squares, and they start in the squares immediately adjacent to the king. The king can move the moonbeams using his Control Moonlight trait. Likewise, when a character deals radiant damage or casts a spell that creates light, the character can move one of the moonbeams up to 20 feet; a character who deals necrotic damage or who casts a spell that creates darkness can quench a moonbeam entirely with a successful DC 20 Charisma check.

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 15—Creatures with light- or radiant-based spells or abilities can probably move or control the beams of light.

Intelligence (Arcana) DC 20—Creatures with shadow- or necrotic-based spells or abilities can probably quench the moonbeams.

Moonlit King

Medium fey, neutral good

Armor Class 17 (half plate)

Hit Points 170 (20d8 + 80) (currently 85 maximum)

Speed 50 ft., fly 100 ft. (while holding the *Orb of Rule*)

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

Saving Throws Con +10, Wis +10, Cha +11

Skills Arcana +11, Perception +10

Damage Resistances acid, radiant (while holding the *Orb of Rule*); bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from weapons that aren't made of cold iron

Damage Immunities cold, fire, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 20

Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Elvish, Infernal, Umbral, telepathy 100 ft.

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Control Moonlight. As a bonus action, the Moonlit King can cause all areas of moonlight within 100 feet to move up to 10 feet.

Innate Spellcasting. The Moonlit King's innate spellcasting ability score is Charisma (save DC 19, +11 to hit with spell attacks). The Moonlit King can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components.

At will: *continual flame, detect evil and good, invisibility* (self only), *moonbeam, zone of truth*

3/day each: *blight, dispel evil and good, dispel magic*

1/day: *demiplane*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the Moonlit King fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Weapons. The Moonlit King's weapon attacks are magical, and deal an extra 7 (2d6) radiant damage (included below).

Special Equipment. *Orb of Rule* (the benefits of holding the orb are included in the Moonlit King's statistics; he prefers to attack with his crystal staff if he makes a melee attack)

Actions

Multiattack. The Moonlit King makes three attacks with either his crystal staff or his moon bolt.

Crystal Staff. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 7 (2d6) radiant damage. A target that is struck by the staff

two or more times in one turn must make a successful DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.

Moon Bolt. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +11 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (4d10) radiant damage. If the target is a creature in a form other than its natural form, it takes an extra 22 (4d10) radiant damage and must succeed on a DC 19 Charisma saving throw or revert to its natural form. When the moon bolt hits a target, moonlight glows in a 10-foot radius from that point, creating dim light. The light is stationary and lasts until the end of the Moonlit King's next turn.

Fearful Shadows (Recharge 5–6). The Moonlit King magically animates the shadows of all foes within 60 feet of himself. The animated shadows attack the creatures who cast them. All affected creatures in the area take 35 (10d6) necrotic damage, or half damage with a successful DC 19 Dexterity saving throw. A creature that fails the saving throw also loses 1d4 points from its Strength score. A creature reduced to 0 Strength is unconscious until it regains at least 1 point of Strength. Strength lost in this way returns when the creature finishes a short or long rest.

Summon Devil (1/Day). The Moonlit King magically summons a lunar devil. The summoned devil appears in an unoccupied space within 60 feet of its summoner, acts as an ally of its summoner, and can't summon other devils. It remains for 10 minutes, until its summoner dies, or until its summoner dismisses it as an action.

REACTIONS

Shadow Slip. The Moonlit King takes on the quality of his delusions when he is targeted by an attacker he can see. He becomes nearly insubstantial, so that the attack roll is made with disadvantage. If the attack hits, the Moonlit King takes half damage.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The Moonlit King can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn; the Moonlit King regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn:

Staff. The Moonlit King makes a crystal staff attack.

Lightwalking. The Moonlit King teleports from one area of moonlight to another within 100 feet.

Aura of Madness (Costs 2 Actions). While he is standing in an area of moonlight, the Moonlit King can spread his madness to other creatures within 30 feet. A creature other than a fiend that starts its turn in the aura or enters it for the first time on a turn (including when the aura is created) must succeed on a DC 19 Charisma saving throw or be confused (as if affected by the *confusion* spell) until the start of its next turn. The aura lasts until the start of the Moonlit King's next turn.

Moonlit King's Lair

The Moonlit King currently has been exiled by his wife, the Queen of Night and Magic, to the Tower of the Moon, which is hidden in a spiral labyrinth deep within the Plane of Shadows. The tower is a run-down, forlorn place, filled with false whispers and shadow ghosts of the mad fey lord's own creation.

Lair Actions

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the Moonlit King takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects; the Moonlit King can't use the same effect two rounds in a row:

- The Moonlit King creates four beams of moonlight at four points he can see within 100 feet. The beams each illuminate a 10-foot radius with dim light. These moonbeams last until the Moonlit King uses this action again, or until he dies.
- The Moonlit King chooses a point he can see within 100 feet. Disembodied whispers speaking of despair and failure fill a 30-foot radius from that point. All creatures other than fiends in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened until initiative count 20 on the following round.
- The Moonlit King magically summons four shadow beasts. They appear in unoccupied spaces the Moonlit King can see within 60 feet. They act immediately and remain until initiative count 20 on the following round.

Shadow Beast

Medium fey, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (–2)	20 (+5)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +6

Skills Stealth +7

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Elvish, Umbral, Void Speech

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The shadow beast can move through other creatures and objects as if they were

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difficult terrain. It takes 5 (1d10) force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Innate Spellcasting. The beast's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *fear, telekinesis*

Magic Resistance. The shadow beast has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the shadow beast has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The shadow beast makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) slashing damage.

Shadow Push (Recharge 5–6). The shadow beast buffets opponents with a gale of animated shadows in a 15-foot cone. Any creatures in the area must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed back 10 feet and knocked prone.

Chamberlain Ralk

Huge fiend, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 138 (12d12 + 60)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
22 (+6)	11 (+0)	20 (+5)	8 (–1)	6 (–2)	16 (+3)

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Umbral

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Insanity. Ralk has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Magic Resistance. Ralk has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

True Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Ralk has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight. The light shed by the Tower of the Moon doesn't affect Ralk in this way.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Ralk makes two greatclub attacks.

Greatclub. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (4d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Lunar Devil

Large fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 94 (9d10 + 45)

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	21 (+5)	20 (+5)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Str +8, Dex +8, Con +8, Wis +5

Skills Perception +5

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Celestial, Draconic, Elvish, Infernal, Sylvan, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the devil's darkvision.

Innate Spellcasting. The devil's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *fly, major image, planar binding*

3/day: *greater invisibility*

1/day: *wall of ice*

Light Incorporeality. The devil is semi-incorporeal when standing in moonlight, and is immune to all nonmagical attacks in such conditions. It has resistance to all damage, including magical attacks, except force damage, and damage dealt by holy water.

Lightwalking. Once per round, the lunar devil magically teleports, along with any equipment it is wearing or carrying, from one beam of moonlight to another within 80 feet. This relocation uses half of its speed.

Magic Resistance. The devil has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The devil makes three attacks: one with its bite, one with its claws, and one with its tail. Alternatively, it can use Hurl Moonlight twice.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (1d12 + 5) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Hurl Moonlight. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +7 to hit, range 150 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d12) cold damage and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become blinded for 4 rounds.

THE WEARY KING'S OFFER

Once the Moonlit King is defeated in combat (reduced to 0 hit points but not explicitly killed by the attacker, whether or not a melee attack reduced his hit points to 0) or convinced to stop fighting by a successful skill challenge, he slumps and falters. Indeed, his crown grows heavy, and he is suddenly the Weary King, burdened by his failures and madness in the past—but also sane. Read:

The king slumps in defeat, and the blue-gray orb of power falls from his hands to the floor. "I am tired of battle. I am tired of the ghosts that haunt me. That time is past." His eyes seem unclouded, and when he looks toward you, it's clear that his madness has passed.

"My mind is my own, but perhaps time is short. Let us strike a bargain: I shall give you the city of the kobolds, and you shall give me enough help that my own purposes will blossom like cherries in springtime.Let us . . . haggle."

At this point, the Moonlit King can be convinced to put his seal to a character's flesh as a royal sign that proves he has renounced the shadow fey claim to the human/kobold city. He does not do so for nothing, but he certainly accepts the mortal claim to Zobeck—and the end of fey edicts and assassinations—in exchange for whatever you think is most appropriate, given the character of the mad king. The decision is not one over which he is willing to linger. Here are four likely options:

1. A female character must spend the night with the Moonlit King atop the tower or in some secluded place. This leaves her with her choice of advantage on all saving throws against a single damage type of the player's choice (bludgeoning, fire, and so forth), but forever scarred by the touch of shadow and light (the character has disadvantage on saving throws made against necrotic and radiant damage).
2. The party must sacrifice the greatest and most powerful item it holds, which is used to restore the king's powers using mortal magic—something the fey can never quite master.
3. The party swears a divine oath that they will pursue and slay the Demon Lord of Roaches (thus perhaps setting up a future adventure). Failure to pursue this goal has dire consequences, as the characters waste away and become deathwisps (treat this effect as a geas that can't be removed by any means short of the direct intercession of a deity, unless the task is completed).
4. In a game that inclines toward the tragic, the Moonlit King might wish for his own death—but he warns the characters that this event will unleash dark powers throughout the Shadow Realm (and ignite a deadly fight that the characters must escape). Indeed, if anyone claims his crown, they also inherit his shadow and his memories—and, in time, his madness.

If the king "puts his seal to a character's flesh," this means that at least one character is marked with a crescent moon and acknowledged as a servant of the king. As soon as this occurs, move on to the Conclusion unless you particularly want to reprise all the courtly thanks and honors. It's perhaps as well that they are dropped unceremoniously back into the mortal world.

DEVELOPMENT: DEATH TO THE KING, ANGEL OF THE LIGHT

If the character who strikes the final blow obeys the queen's implicit wish and elects to kill the Moonlit King, read:

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The tower lights are all immediately doused, as if by rushing waters or a wave of shadows. A great howl goes up from the animals and creatures of the forest: wolves, birds, and owls all giving voice. Darkness presses in, and it's easy to get the idea that perhaps the tower is surrounded by monsters on all sides.

This event marks the end of light in the darkness, and the start of a dark age in the court during which the Black Prince, the Demon Lord of Roaches, and the queen commit murder daily, executing dissenters, running arcane battles of demons against fey with death to the hindmost. Trying to leave by simply going back out through the maze is suicide; there are hundreds of shadow creatures (each dissipates with a single hit, but re-forms immediately to provide an endless supply) roaming the maze. There are two other more practical options for escape:

1. **Seize the Orb**. The character who first touches the *Orb of Rule* becomes attuned to the orb immediately and assumes the title of Moonlit King. This state is temporary if the character leaves the Shadow Realm within a day. During that time, the orb's power enables the party to return to the queen without further incident if they so desire. She holds up her end of the bargain if the characters bring the orb to her, and thereafter she solidifies her rule. She rewards the characters with 140 pp, and she opens a shadow road that takes them back to Zobeck if they want to leave. (If no character takes the orb, the Demon Lord of Roaches claims it not long after, and the queen becomes very angry at that turn of events.)
2. **The Angel on the Tower**. If the characters are willing to trust their lives to a blind angel, Revich will fly them back to the queen—in return for their promise to undertake a quest for him as soon as they return to Zobeck (during the next adventure you have prepared). The angel burns through the sky like a comet all the way to the queen's audience chamber, and upon arrival he demands that the demon lord be banished from the court. The characters might attempt to support his demands as well, or they could remain true to the original bargain, by giving the queen some token of her husband's death in exchange for her release of all fey claims and their return home.

DEVELOPMENT: BACK THROUGH THE MAZE

Akyishigal waits outside the labyrinth to lay claim to the king's tattered soul and—more important—his *Orb of Rule*. If it cannot take the orb by force, it raises up a horde of cockroaches and roachling minions to assist. This is a battle that the demon lord intends to win; see Act III, Scene 5, and double the number of servants from the Black Well that accompany it.

DEVELOPMENT: A NEW KING

If a character retains the orb and wants to take the title of king or queen, that's certainly a possible outcome. They gain the shadow of the king and over a month's time gain his memories, and become able to hear his advising voice. Ruling the Shadow Realm successfully, though, is outside the scope of this adventure.

Conclusion
The Returning Mortals

But, O malignant and ill-boding stars!
Now thou art come unto a feast of death,
A terrible and unavoided danger:
Therefore, dear boy, mount on my swiftest horse;
And I'll direct thee how thou shalt escape
By sudden flight: come, dally not, be gone.
—William Shakespeare, King Henry VI, part I (IV.v)

If one character has taken the title of king and stayed behind in the fey kingdoms, he or she will soon be driven mad. As for the others, read:

Your return to Zobeck is as quick as the step from a shadow into the light of dawn.

Few mortals escape the Shadow Realm alive, and fewer still after handing a defeat to the king and queen of the shadow fey. But when you return to Zobeck, you discover that the city seems to have forgotten the fey entirely. Fat flakes of snow fall from a measureless sky. Amazingly, it has been a year and a day since you left the city. Even so, it's as if your entire experience was a midwinter night's dream; indeed, the city's Winter Festival is well under way, and spring is coming soon. The ambassador is the only one who remembers your deeds . . . and indeed, the only one who thanks you.

The adventure has taken the characters away from the city for a year and a day, no matter how long they thought it was.

Night's candles are burnt out,
And jocund day stands tiptoe
On the misty mountaintop.
—William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet (I.iii)

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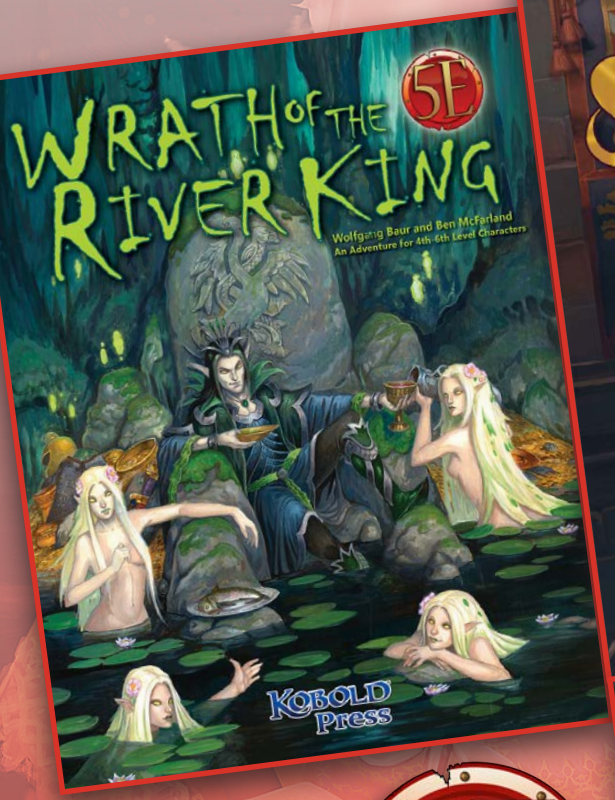

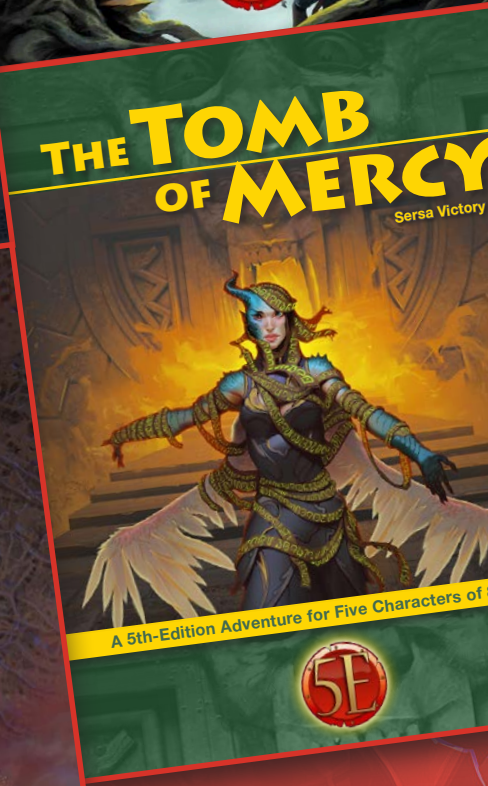

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