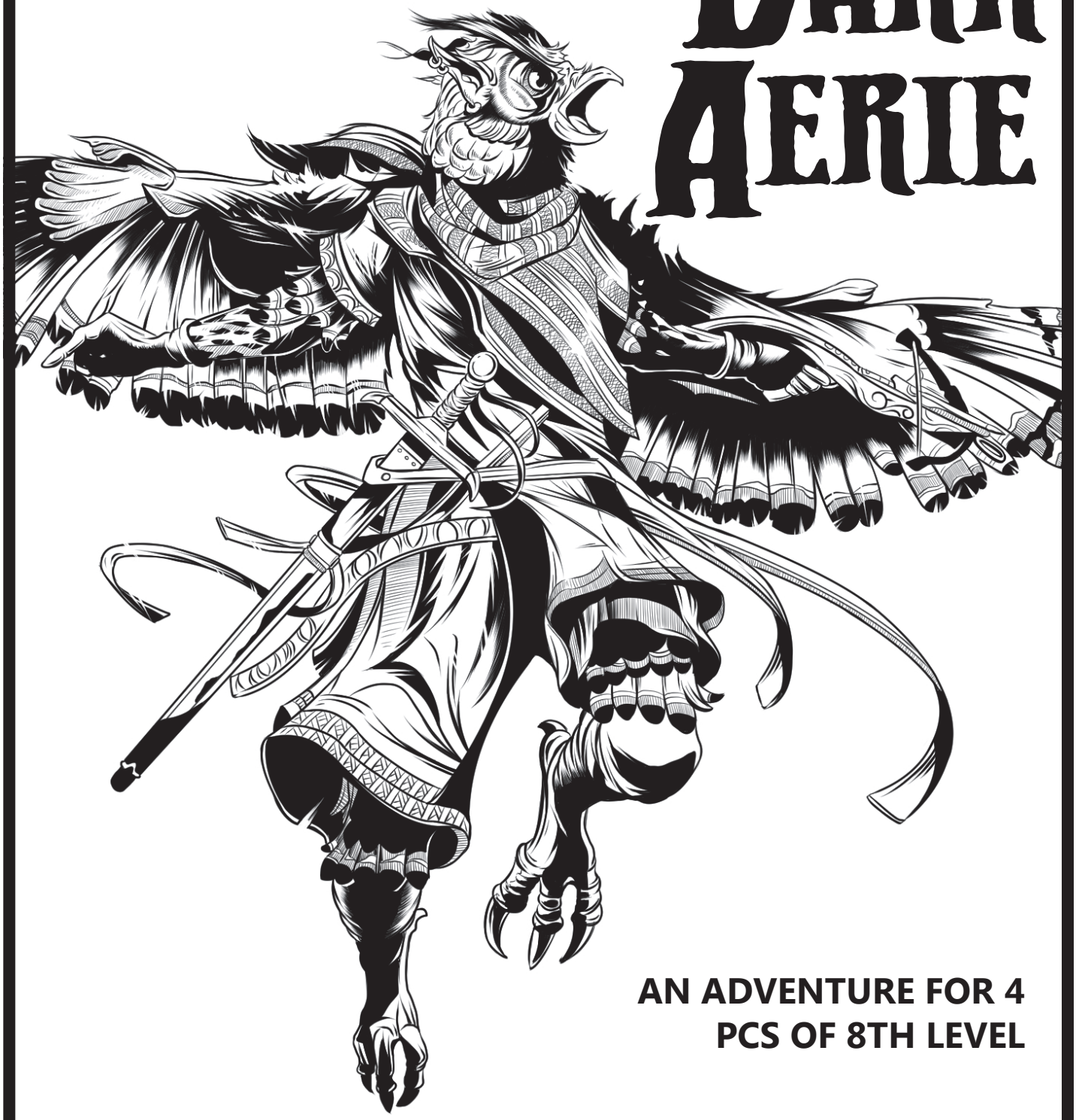
The Dark Aerie



AN ADVENTURE FOR 4 PCS OF 8TH LEVEL

A 5E WARLOCK ADVENTURE

BY MIKE WELHAM

THE DARK AERIE

Adventure Background

The traveling Aerial Circus showcased flying monsters and people enhanced by magic performing death-defying stunts in flight. The performers based themselves in a remote bluff in the Red Wastes, which also afforded them safety from the gnolls patrolling the desert. When the circus came under fire due to an unfortunate incident involving their owl-headed roc killing an audience member, the performers disbanded and vacated their base.

Shortly thereafter, the shadow fey enchantress Delaria received visions about the compound and an urge to travel there. At first, she thought the compulsion came from the Queen of Night and Magic, but her patron, Alquam, Demon Lord of the Night (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 84), soon revealed its identity to her. Dissatisfied with the path to power provided by following Queen Sarastra, Delaria believed the demon lord would hasten her rise. She duped a small band of shadow fey into believing she worshipped an owl-based aspect of the Queen of Night and Magic and led them to the Red Wastes. At Alquam's behest, Delaria led her cult to capture a mated pair of owl-headed rocs. Blood from the strange breed of rocs and a touch of power from the cult's patron provided the catalyst for the transformation of one of the cultists into an owl-elf hybrid, the first wereowl. Though a scratch from the wereowl's talon carried the curse of lycanthropy, Delaria prefers the "purity" of the ritual's transformation, and she forbade the wereowl from spreading its curse to the other cultists. She allowed the wereowl to hunt and infect the humanoids of the Red Wastes with lycanthropy, and she awaits the inevitable response from the neighboring group of gnolls she failed to convert to the worship of Alquam, or locals looking to put an end to her cult.

Adventure Hooks

Research on a magic item or relic the PCs have been tracking might lead them to the Aerial Circus's former location. The PCs may hear about a reward for evidence of the existence of rare owl-headed rocs rumored to hide in the Red Wastes. Alternatively, a horse tribe of the Qaen Plain might hire the PCs to track and destroy silent, flying hunters that have been absconding with the tribe's horses. Finally, a minor noble may enlist the PCs to track down a relative taken by gnoll slavers.

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Traveling the Red Wastes

The temperature is unbearably warm for most of the trek to the Aerial Circus. In addition to this persistent heat, the trip through the desert also features a terrible sandstorm, a potential encounter with a gnoll slaver patrol leading the PCs to the gnolls' camp, and a hint about what the PCs will face in the aerie.

SCOURING SANDSTORM

Most desert sandstorms are barely more than annoyances which reduce visibility and require the effort of emptying sand from boots and packs after the sandstorm subsides. Alquam's recent emergence combines with the Red Wastes' hostile environment to create a devastating cyclone of stinging sand that appears sporadically in the area surrounding the circus.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check alerts the PCs to the danger shortly before it occurs, giving them time to construct impromptu shelters, if they have the materials. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check builds a shelter capable of protecting one creature from the storm. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, the shelter can accommodate an additional creature.

When the storm strikes, unprotected creatures must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature without eye protection that fails the saving throw is blinded for 1 hour or until it receives magical healing.

GNOLL SCOUTING PARTY

A pack of gnolls, numbering two **gnoll slavers** (*Creature Codex*, p. 189 or page 12) and six **gnolls**, searches for caravans to plunder and lesser creatures to enslave. Currently, they have three **commoners** in chains and manacles, with two of the gnolls holding those chains. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check spots the scouting party before the gnolls notice the PCs. A successful DC 16 Dexterity (Stealth) check among the dunes dotting the Red Wastes allows the PCs to remain out of the gnolls' sight, giving the PCs a chance to ambush the gnolls.

If the gnolls spot the PCs, they approach. The slavers plan to knock the PCs unconscious, take their belongings, and capture them as slaves. A successful DC 16 Charisma (Intimidation) check convinces the craven creatures to back off from a fight, provided the PCs pay compensation of 100 gp per PC not taken as a slave. If the PCs refuse this "generous" offer, the gnolls attack, not wanting to end their encounter empty-handed. If reduced to half their number and one of the slavers has died, or if both slavers die, the remaining gnolls flee, leaving behind their slaves.

If the PCs agree to the gnolls' demand for compensation, they can further negotiate for the commoners' freedom, at the cost of 200 gp per slave. Should anyone ask about the higher price, the gnolls explain they had to use resources on capturing and transporting the slaves and require more compensation for each slave. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check negotiates this down to 100 gp per slave.

Development. If the PCs rescue the slaves, either by paying for them or killing or driving off the gnolls, the slaves believe they can make the trip to nearby Isphahan without any assistance. One of the slaves offers a reward of 500 gp to free her brother from the slavers encamped nearby. She had escaped with her brother's help but was re-captured this morning. She knows the way to the gnoll camp and shares that knowledge with the PCs regardless of their decision to free her brother. Alternatively, a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Survival) or Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers the direction to the camp.

Shredskin Slaver Camp

The Shredskin tribe of gnolls hunt this area. They used to hunt humans and lesser dragons for sport and food and gave little regard for the victims of their hunts. When Laughing Fire rose to power after her transformation into a werehyena, she steered them away from mere hunting and killing to something she thought would be more lucrative and sustainable for the tribe: slavery. Laughing Fire worships Forresh, the Demon Lord of Snakes and Fire, who grants her his power.

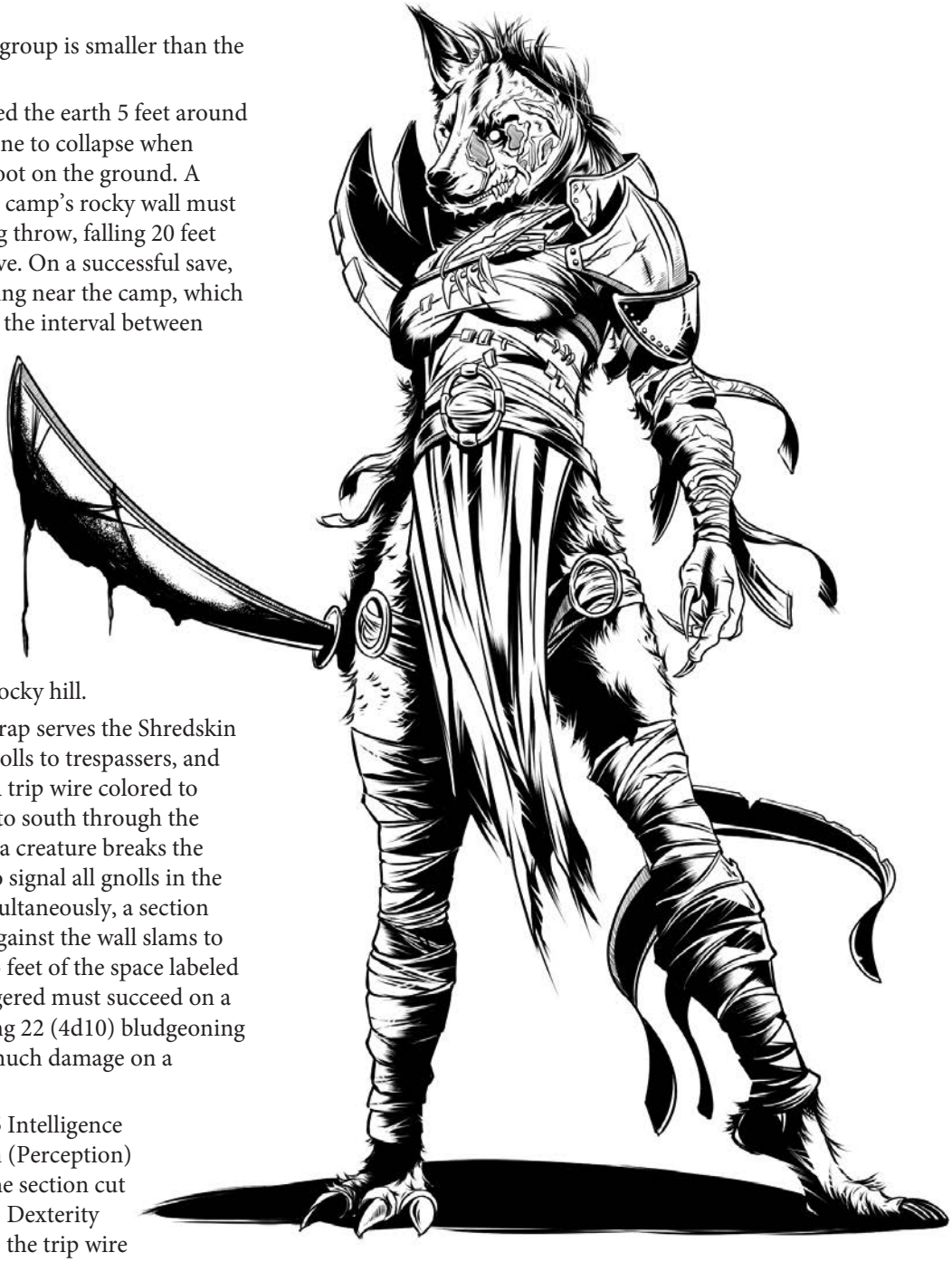
The Shredskins have increased in notoriety as slavers, selling slaves to dragons from the Mharoti Empire and to centaurs and other tribes of the plains. They haven't completely given up their hunts, however, often turning loose unchosen slaves for some sport.

Delaria took notice of the gnoll tribe and thought the gnolls would make excellent hunters in service to Alquam. However, unaware of Forresh's involvement with the tribe, the shadow fey failed in her attempts to convert the Shredskin tribe to her demon lord. Though the gift of flight briefly tantalized Laughing Fire, the gnoll knew her blessings from Forresh prevented her from following another demon lord, and she certainly wasn't going to permit the tribe to follow the other demon lord. Delaria hasn't given up on bringing the Shredskins into her fold and has set a plan in motion to kill Laughing Fire and convert the remaining gnolls.

The tribe's complement amounts to Laughing Fire, three **gnoll slavers**, and ten **gnolls**. Two of the gnolls stand guard in Area 2, while the other gnolls rest, taunt the slaves, or otherwise entertain themselves. If the PCs manage to catch the gnolls off-guard, notably by not setting off the trap in Area 1, the gnolls are slow to realize the camp is under attack and move to intercept the PCs in waves of three gnolls every 1d4 + 1 rounds. You can adjust the number of gnolls at the camp under the pretense these gnolls have left to roam the

Red Wastes for more slaves, if your group is smaller than the recommended four PCs.

Unstable Ground. The gnolls worked the earth 5 feet around the camp's perimeter, making it prone to collapse when a creature larger than a hyena sets foot on the ground. A creature moving within 5 feet of the camp's rocky wall must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, falling 20 feet and alerting the camp on a failed save. On a successful save, some of the gnolls notice debris falling near the camp, which makes them suspicious and reduces the interval between waves of reinforcement gnolls to 1d2 rounds. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) or DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the ground's instability.



1. ENTRANCE

The difficult cliff walls surrounding the encampment leave only one feasible entryway to the camp: a 10-foot-wide path on the southern end of the camp's rocky hill.

Welcome to the Camp Trap. This trap serves the Shredskin tribe in two fashions: it alerts the gnolls to trespassers, and it acts as their first line of defense. A trip wire colored to match the ground runs from north to south through the space labeled '1' on the map. When a creature breaks the trip wire, bells jingle loud enough to signal all gnolls in the camp who are currently awake. Simultaneously, a section of rock cut away from and resting against the wall slams to the ground. Each creature within 15 feet of the space labeled '1' on the map when the trap is triggered must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

> ***Prevention***. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check discovers the trip wire or the section cut from the wall. A successful DC 15 Dexterity check using thieves' tools disables the trip wire harmlessly. A character without thieves' tools can attempt this check with disadvantage using any edged weapon or edged tool. On a failed check, the trap triggers.

2. GNOLL GUARDS

Two **gnolls** stand guard at the opening to the camp. If the PCs don't set off the trap in Area 1 or otherwise alert the camp, the bored guards pay little attention to their duties and have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to notice stealthy PCs. If the gnolls survive an initial assault, they yip and howl to warn the rest of the camp about intruders.

3. SECLUDED CAVE

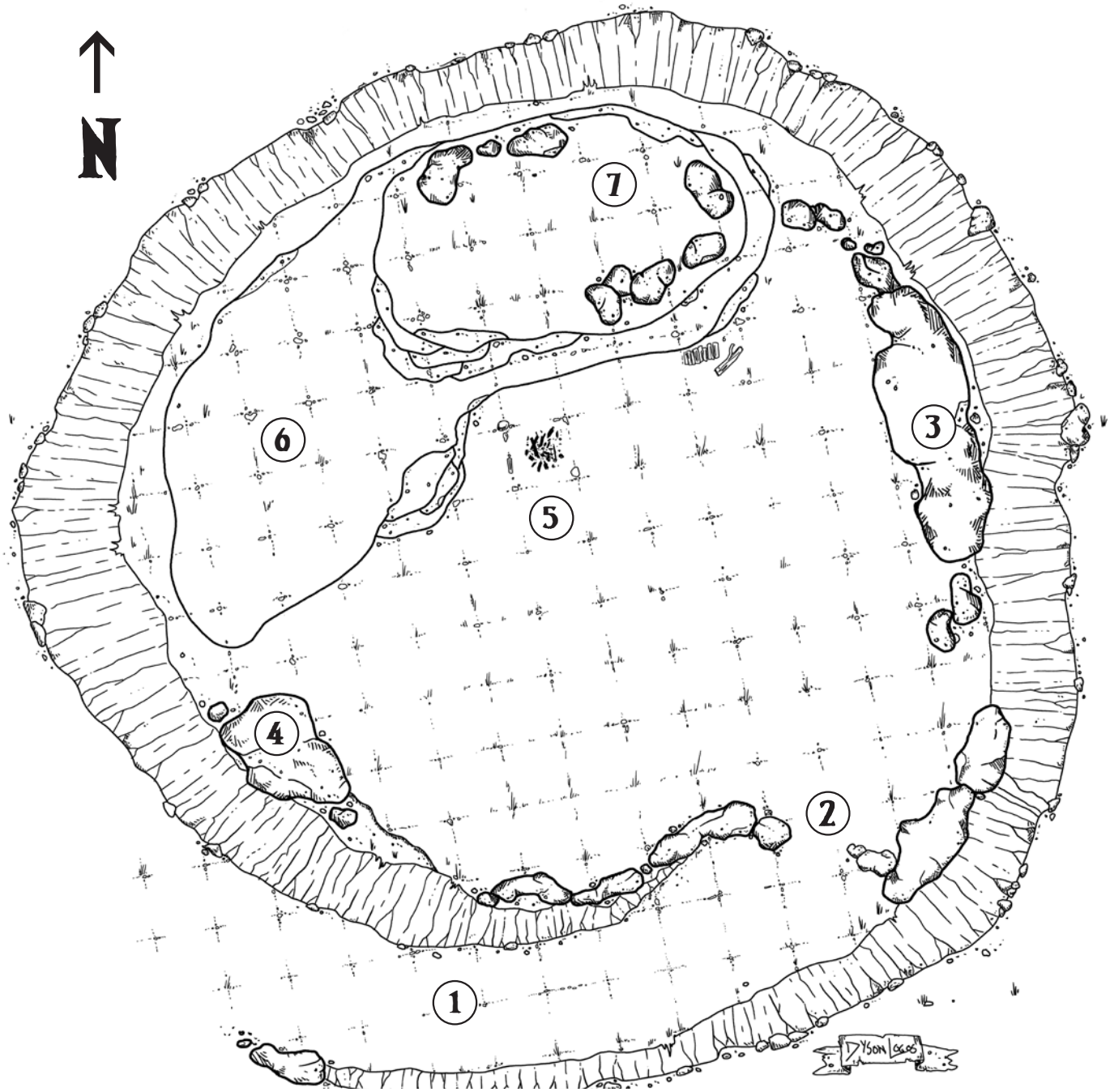
Laughing Fire, the Shredskin tribe's **werehyena** (*Creature Codex*, p. 259 or page 12) leader, communes directly with Forresh in this cave set behind a boulder. Her blessing from Forresh scarred her, but she wears the scars with pride. If the PCs enter the camp without triggering the trap in Area 1, she is alone in the cave. Otherwise, she has two **gnolls** and one **gnoll slaver** accompanying her, while she waits to spring a surprise attack on the intruders. A successful DC 19 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the cave opening.

4. COVERED SNAKE HOLE

Forresh's arrival through Laughing Fire precipitated the presence of strange snakes lairing in a large hole underneath a boulder. One **swarm of poisonous snakes** and two **giant poisonous snakes** bask on the boulder during the heat of the day and preserve their warmth under it when the temperatures drop at night. The snakes deal fire damage instead of poison damage when using their bite attacks. Only Laughing Fire can control the snakes, but they don't harm the other gnolls. If she is aware of the PCs' intrusion, she commands the snakes to attack. The snakes reach the PCs 1d4 rounds after the last wave of gnolls.

5. SHRINE TO FORRESH

It took little effort for Laughing Fire to convert the Shredskin gnolls to the worship of Forresh, especially after she revealed her transformation into a werehyena. She commanded the gnolls to build a pyre from bits of wood and the remains of creatures killed by the tribe. The pyre has burned continuously since Laughing Fire's touch set it alight. During



MAP: CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THIS MAP FOR YOUR VIRTUAL TABLE TOP.

the day, sunlight masks the light from the pyre, but at night travelers can see the pyre's lurid red glow a quarter mile away from the camp.

Jumping Fire Trap. The shrine is another defense mechanism for the Shredskin tribe. A snake-like tendril of fire strikes at any creature that is not a gnoll or hyena moving within 5 feet of the pyre. The tendril attacks with a +6 bonus and inflicts 4d10 fire damage on a successful hit.

Prevention. A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check realizes the danger posed by proximity to the pyre. A successful *dispel magic* (DC 16) cast on the pyre disables the trap for 24 hours. If Laughing Fire is killed, she can't rekindle the pyre, which effectively destroys it until Forresh locates a new host for his power.

Treasure. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a fire opal worth 250 gp within the pyre.

6. HYENA RUN

Three **hyenas** and one **giant hyena**, which the Shredskin gnolls have loosely trained, prowl the area around the slave pit, serving as a deterrent to those thinking of escape. If the tribe becomes aware of the PCs' arrival in advance, they command the hyenas to attack any non-gnoll attempting to enter or leave the slave pit. Suitably afraid of their gnoll masters, the hyenas fight to the death.

7. SLAVE PIT

The Shredskins keep their fodder for slave trades within this depression. The nearby hyenas and the difficult-to-climb rock walls of the pit keep the slaves in the area. A successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check scales the walls into the pit. Alternatively, a creature can enter or exit the pit through tiered, stair-like rocks on the southwestern edge of the pit. The gnolls meet the odd attempt at escape or rebellion with glee, as it gives them a chance to harm the escapee or dissident without fear of punishment. Despite the gnolls' apparent savagery, they treat slaves who obey reasonably well, providing suitable food and water and modest sleeping accommodations (still under the stars). Haggard slaves don't bring in as much money, and Laughing Fire reasons these "niceties" serve a practical purpose. Currently, the slaves number four human **commoners** and one shadow fey **wereowl**.

Development. Delaria sent the wereowl, Demetriev, to be captured by the gnolls and to kill Laughing Fire when the opportunity presented itself. Delaria planned for Demetriev to invoke the right to the tribe's leadership for killing the previous chief, making it a simple matter to convert them to Alquam's worship. The PCs' intervention quashes those plans, especially if the PCs kill most of the gnolls. However, Demetriev sees the PCs' arrival as an opportunity to infect obviously more powerful creatures with wereowl lycanthropy. He asks to remain with the PCs for protection and seems unconcerned by the notion that they plan to travel further into the Red Wastes (meanwhile, the commoners are more than happy to journey to Isphahan as a group). During the remaining travel to the Aerial Circus, he tries to separate one of the PCs from the party or surreptitiously scratch a PC with his talons. If no such opportunity presents itself, he is content to play the part of lost traveler grateful for protection by his saviors. He then betrays the group at the earliest chance within the circus. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check sees through Demetriev's ruse.

A BIZARRE DISCOVERY

After encountering the gnoll slavers and about a day out from reaching the Aerial Circus, the PCs find a sphere, roughly 3 feet in diameter, containing bones and feathers. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check recognizes this as a much larger version of a bolus, a pellet regurgitated by an owl. Another successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check while examining the bolus's components discovers bones belonging to horses, livestock, large birds, and many rodents.

Aerial Circus

Set into a high butte in the Red Wastes, the Aerial Circus's home stood out of reach of most of the creatures haunting the desert. The entrance cavern is easily visible from the north. Unless otherwise noted, the ceilings in the complex are 15 feet high.

Illumination. The entire complex is engulfed in darkness. Due to Alquam's influence, all light sources, including those produced by spells or magic items, shed light to only half the usual radius.

1. ASCENT

The bluff's walls climb 30 feet to the aerie's entrance. Assuming the PCs have done nothing drastic to alert the complex's residents and they arrive during the day when most of the inhabitants are asleep, they face no resistance when scaling the walls.

2. MAIN CAVERN

The Aerial Circus discovered this natural cavern near the butte's peak and built their complex around it. The cavern has 30-foot-high ceilings. Dozens of owls drawn to Alquam roost among the cavern's nooks. They become a **swarm of owls** (use the statistics of a **swarm of ravens**), attacking creatures that move near the flight of stairs leading to Area 7.

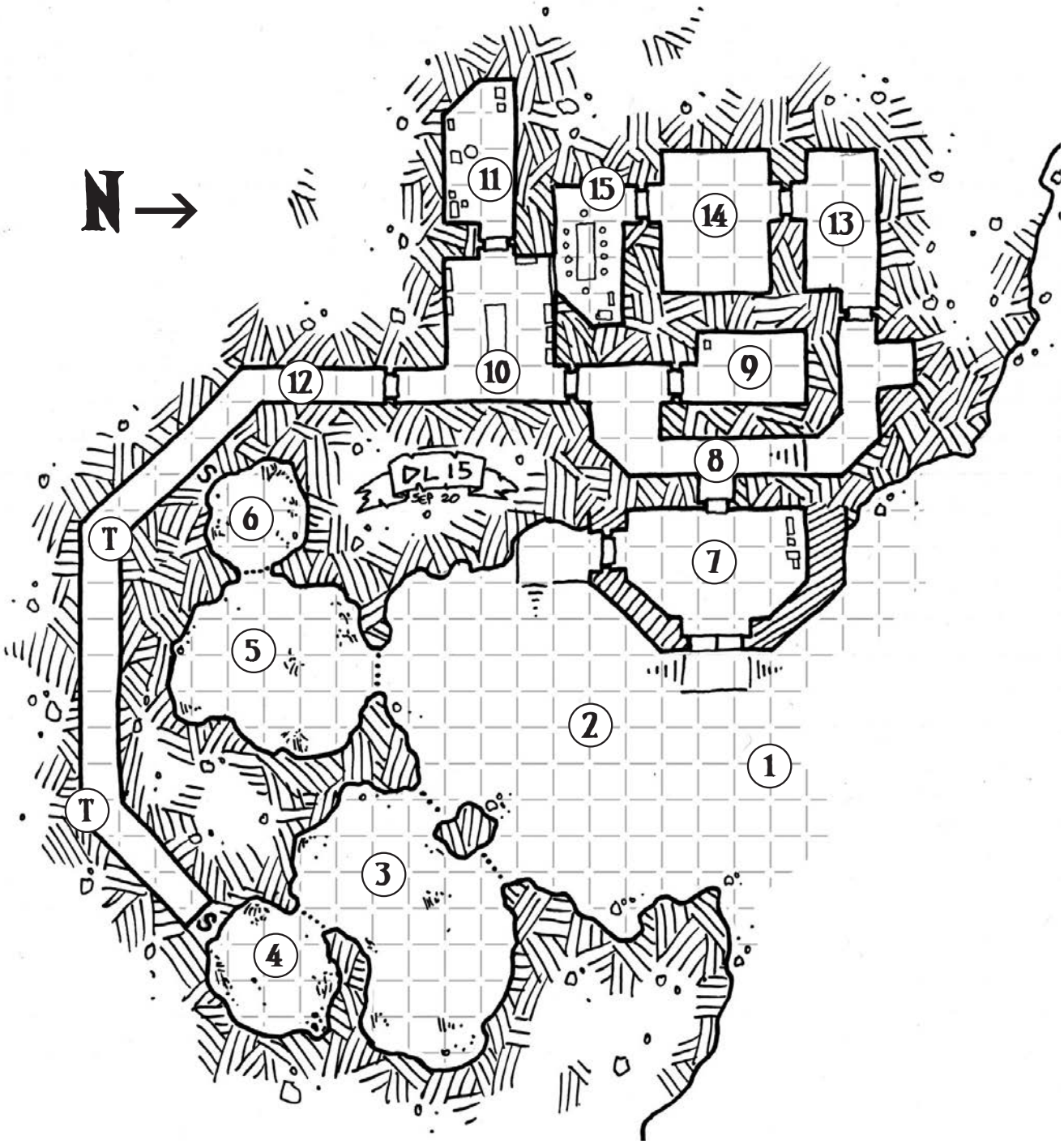
A successful DC 18 Intelligence (Religion) check realizes the owls' behavior is consistent with owls found near shrines to Alquam, the Demon Lord of Night.

Development. When the PCs reenter this cavern after spending time in the complex beyond it, two **wereowls** returning from a recent hunt attack the PCs. The creatures work together to grapple nonflying foes and push or drop

them over the ledge to the ground 30 feet below. They fight to the death.

3. ROC CAGE

The Aerial Circus built two caged sections at the rear of the cavern to house their beastly performers. They prided themselves on the care of their animals, which enjoyed relative comfort in their captivity. Such is not the case for the unusual owl-like **roc** currently imprisoned here. It has 82 hit points remaining and has 3 levels of exhaustion due to the abuse dealt to it by the cult. A successful DC 13 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check calms the roc. Once calmed, the roc remains silent, allowing the PCs to approach and move past it to open the door to Area 4. If an elf is among the PCs and the roc sees the elf, the PCs have disadvantage on this check.



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Locked Cage. A door with a latch and a simple lock closes the cage. A successful DC 12 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock. Alternatively, a successful DC 15 Strength check breaks the latch and pulls open the door. Concerned for its eggs in Area 4, the imprisoned roc never attempted to break down the door.

Development. If the PCs reunite the roc with its eggs, it flies away with the eggs, attacking any creature physically preventing it from leaving.

4. ROC EGGS

The cultists retrieved a pair of eggs from the owl roc's nest when they captured it, and they use the eggs to keep the roc in line. Though the roc in Area 3 is unaware of this, the cultists have no intention of destroying the eggs, especially following the loss of the roc in Area 5 after a cultist accidentally smashed an egg in view of the roc.

Latched Cage. The door to this area is sturdier than the other cage and shows signs of battering by the roc. It is latched but unlocked.

Secret Door. The door to Area 12 is hidden and locked. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers the seams of the hidden door cut into the natural cavern. A successful DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock.

Treasure. The roc eggs are worth 500 gp each to an interested collector of exotic animals. If the PCs give the eggs to the roc, the roc returns to the aerie (or the surrounding area if the PCs have already departed the aerie) an hour later with jewelry worth 1,275 gp from its nest.

5. DEAD ROC

After one of the cultists broke the egg in Area 6, the captive roc held here went berserk, forcing them to dispatch the creature. The roc corpse lurches to undeath as a **zombie roc** (see page 10) 1 round after the PCs enter the enclosure. A successful DC 18 Wisdom (Religion) check while within 10 feet of the still body realizes it is an undead creature.

Locked Cage. A door with a latch and a simple lock closes the cage. A successful DC 12 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock. Alternatively, a successful DC 15 Strength check batters down the door. If the PCs' presence activated the zombie roc, and the PCs retreated to Area 2 after latching the cage again, it uses an action to break down the door to get to the PCs.

6. CRUSHED EGG

The shattered shell of a giant egg contains the remains of an embryonic owl-like roc. One of the shadow fey accidentally destroyed the egg, spurring the wrath of its parent and resulting in the roc's untimely death. Unlike the cage in Area 4, the door to this cage is open.

Secret Door. The door to Area 12 is hidden and locked. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers the seams of the hidden door cut into the natural cavern. A successful DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock.

7. PRACTICE STAGE

This platform is 20 feet up from the cavern's floor and accessible via three flights of stairs. During private rehearsals or auditions of new acts, the double doors leading to this platform were closed. Otherwise, the doors were left open, allowing the troupe to view and comment on new routines practiced prior to a public show. Currently, the doors are open.

8. GUARDED ACCESS

Two **shadow fey duelists** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 171) act as the first line of defense against intrusion. The pair work together to create a bottleneck at the door, allowing them to fight one opponent at a time. The duelists are sworn to give their lives for the cult and fight to the death.

9. COMMANDER'S QUARTERS

Geryk, a **shadow fey forest hunter** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 173), believes the lie about this cult being a sect of the Queen of Night and Magic's followers. However, the shrewd elf has noticed a couple of things that don't quite mesh with his view of Queen Sarastra. Surprised by intruders, he asks why the PCs are in the aerie and listens to credible evidence about Alquam's influence. A successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check convinces him of the truth of the PCs' allegations. Armed with this information, he plans to confront Delaria, but he insists the PCs take no action against the enchantress while he speaks with her, unless she directly threatens him or the PCs.

10. FLYING SURPRISE

An **owlbear** lurks in this chamber. It has been blessed by Alquam's power and has a flying speed of 30 feet. The creature shrieks during combat, alerting the complex to the presence of intruders, and it fights to the death.

11. HONORED GUESTS

This room is filled with moldering equipment that once belonged to the Aerial Circus. Two **owl harpies** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 246) in service to Alquam wait here, amusing themselves with the baubles from the circus. While they are free to move about the complex—the owlbear in Area 10

recognizes them as allies—they are content to wait here, even if they hear the commotion of battle from beyond this room. However, they intend to protect the demon lord's interest in this place and fight to the death.

12. CAGE ACCESS

This long corridor served two purposes, the first of which was to provide hidden access to the animals held by the Aerial Circus. The doors leading to Areas 4 and 6 have slots, which troupe members used to provide food for the captive creatures. In cases where they had to access the animals in Area 3 or 5, they would tranquilize dangerous animals before proceeding onward.

Floor Spikes. The corridor's second purpose was to test the circus troupe's acrobatic or flying skills. It also serves as an impromptu trap for the unwary. The trap activates when more than 20 pounds of weight is placed on a pressure plate (indicated with a 'T' on the map). Each creature within 10 feet of a pressure plate when the trap is triggered must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 11 (2d10) piercing damage. The trap automatically resets after it is triggered.

> ***Prevention***. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check finds the pressure plate. Wedging an iron spike or other object under the pressure plate prevents the trap from activating.

Locked Doors. The doors to Area 4 and Area 6 are locked but are visible from this side. A successful DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools picks the lock.

Treasure. A shelf near each secret door holds two darts tipped with tranquilizing poison. Treat the darts as normal, except a target hit by one of the darts must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour.

13. ENTRANCE TO THE INNER SANCTUM

Two **shadow fey guardians** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 174) guard this room. Like all the complex's shadow fey other than Delaria, they have no idea they serve a demon lord. However, they ignore entreaties to listen to the PCs. Only their commander, Geryk, can convince them of the truth. If he is with the PCs, the guardians allow the PCs access to Area 14. The guardians immediately raise the alarm if the PCs enter Area 13 unaccompanied by Geryk. If the PCs flee, the guardians don't pursue anyone beyond the stairs leading to the lower part of Area 8.

Development. When one shadow fey guardian dies, the other retreats into Area 14, asking Delaria for assistance.

14. THE QUEEN'S LESSONS

Delaria, the **shadow fey enchantress** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 172) at the heart of the cult's operation, teaches her followers Alquam's tenets under the guise of an offshoot form of worship of the Queen of Night and Magic. When she isn't instructing her followers and isn't leading a ritual in the adjoining chamber, she remains here to guard the ritual room. Feverishly devoted to Alquam, she fights to the death to keep the unworthy from entering the ritual room in Area 15. She assumes the shadow fey guardians can handle disruptions and doesn't investigate if combat breaks out in Area 13. If one of the shadow fey guardians brings a fight into her chamber, she joins the combat, aiding the guardian against intruders.

A dozen prayer books seemingly devoted to the Queen of Night and Magic rest on the floor. A DC 16 Intelligence (Religion) check after 10 minutes of reading realizes the prayers don't quite match the Queen's doctrines and instead invoke a brutal aspect more in line with a demon than Sarastra's graceful nature. A shadow fey who reads a prayer book has disadvantage on this check, owing to enchantments Delaria placed on the texts.

Development. If Geryk is with the PCs, he attempts to convince her to change her ways and return to the Queen of Night and Magic's service. Delaria entertains his pleas for a few minutes before using *dominate person* on him to force him to attack the PCs.

Treasure. Delaria wears a set of **eyes of the owl** (see page 12).

15. RITUAL ROOM

This chamber contains a rectangular rug, which seems to absorb all light in the room, surrounded by several circular mats. A ritual dagger crafted from a block of lead and stained with blood sits on the rug. Delaria and her unknowing followers conduct rituals to bridge the gap between Alquam's realm in the Abyss and the Red Wastes. Blood shed to transform shadow fey into wereowls further enlarges the portal.

A newly-created **wereowl** (see page 11) in hybrid form attacks intruders who enter this room. If it hears combat in Area 14, it enters that area 4 rounds later.

Alquam's tenuous link to the aerie originates from this room. It can manifest a portion of its power in this room where a nascent portal to its lair has formed. A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check realizes a partially-open portal sits in the southern wall, and it is capable of allowing a portion of Alquam's power from the Abyss into this chamber. A successful DC 19 Intelligence (Arcana) check while within 10 feet of the portal closes it for 1 hour. A successful *dispel magic* (DC 15) cast on the southern wall destroys the portal. Unsuccessfully attempting to close the portal triggers the Aspect of Alquam.

Aspect of Alquam. If a creature other than the aerie's current inhabitants moves within 5 feet of the wall adjoining Area 10, a shadowy wing and set of talons emerge from the portal to attack those nearby. The wing and talons each make a melee attack with a +7 bonus against a random target within 10 feet of the portal (vision is irrelevant to this attack roll). A target that is hit takes 2d10 bludgeoning damage (wing) or slashing damage (talons).

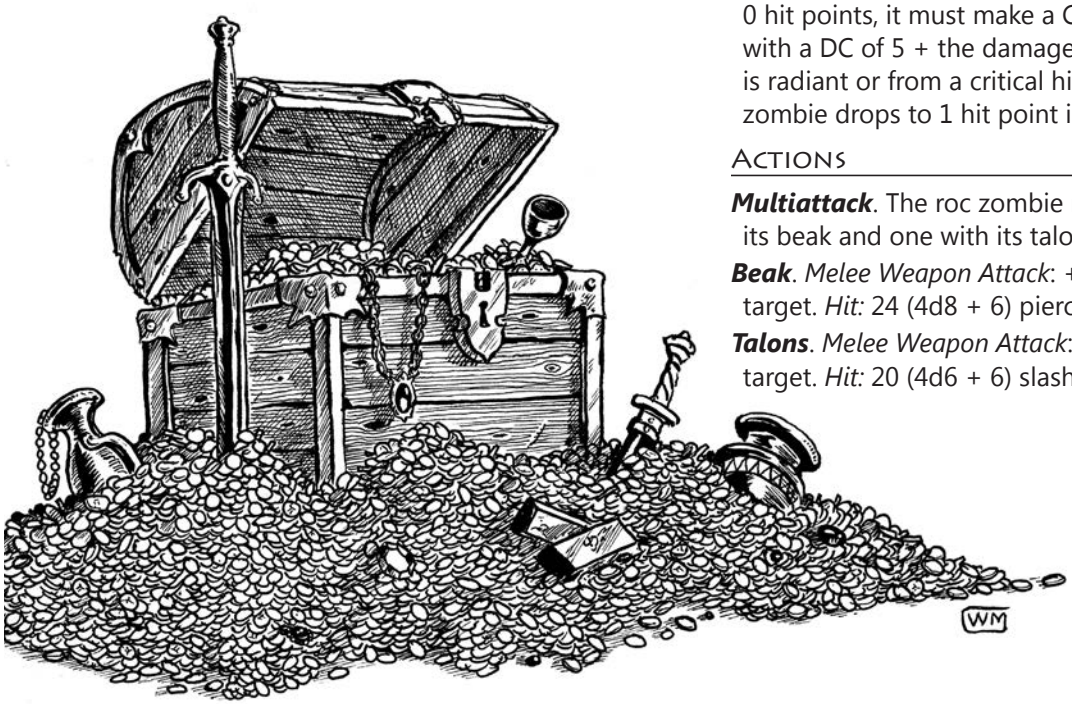
Treasure. The leaden ritual dagger is worth 50 gp.

Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs came to the aerie in search of clues to a magic item or relic, they find it among Delaria's belongings. If they instead undertook a mission to locate owl-headed rocs or end the destruction of horses, they receive a 1,000 gp reward for their efforts.

The cleared-out aerie may serve as a base of operations for the PCs, provided they dispel the portal to Alquam's Abyssal home or perform a cleansing ritual to permanently close the portal. Regardless of how the PCs deal with the aerie, the demon lord has marked them as enemies and seeks vengeance against them.

Likewise, if the PCs killed Laughing Fire, they earn Forresh's enmity, and the demon searches for a suitable gnoll host to track down and enslave his new foes. Fortunately for the PCs, the demon lords refuse to work together to retaliate against their mutual enemies. However, if Laughing Fire managed to escape, Forresh is content to hold off on his revenge, at least until the gnoll rebuilds the Shredskin tribe.



ROC ZOMBIE

This formerly magnificent and massive bird of prey has gray, tattered feathers, revealing patches of rotting skin, and its eyes are clouded over. Despite the decaying nature of the bird, it can still hold itself aloft.

A zombie roc requires enormous necromantic power, putting its creation out of the reach of all but the most potent necromancers. However, in locations influenced by mighty, evil creatures with a purview over avians, a roc brutally killed might return as a zombie. The undead roc retains its ability to fly, albeit limited compared to a living specimen.

Undead Nature. A roc zombie doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

ROC ZOMBIE

Gargantuan undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 11 (natural armor)

Hit Points 200 (16d20 + 32)

Speed 20 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	6 (–2)	14 (+2)	3 (–4)	6 (–2)	5 (–3)

Saving Throws Wis +1

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

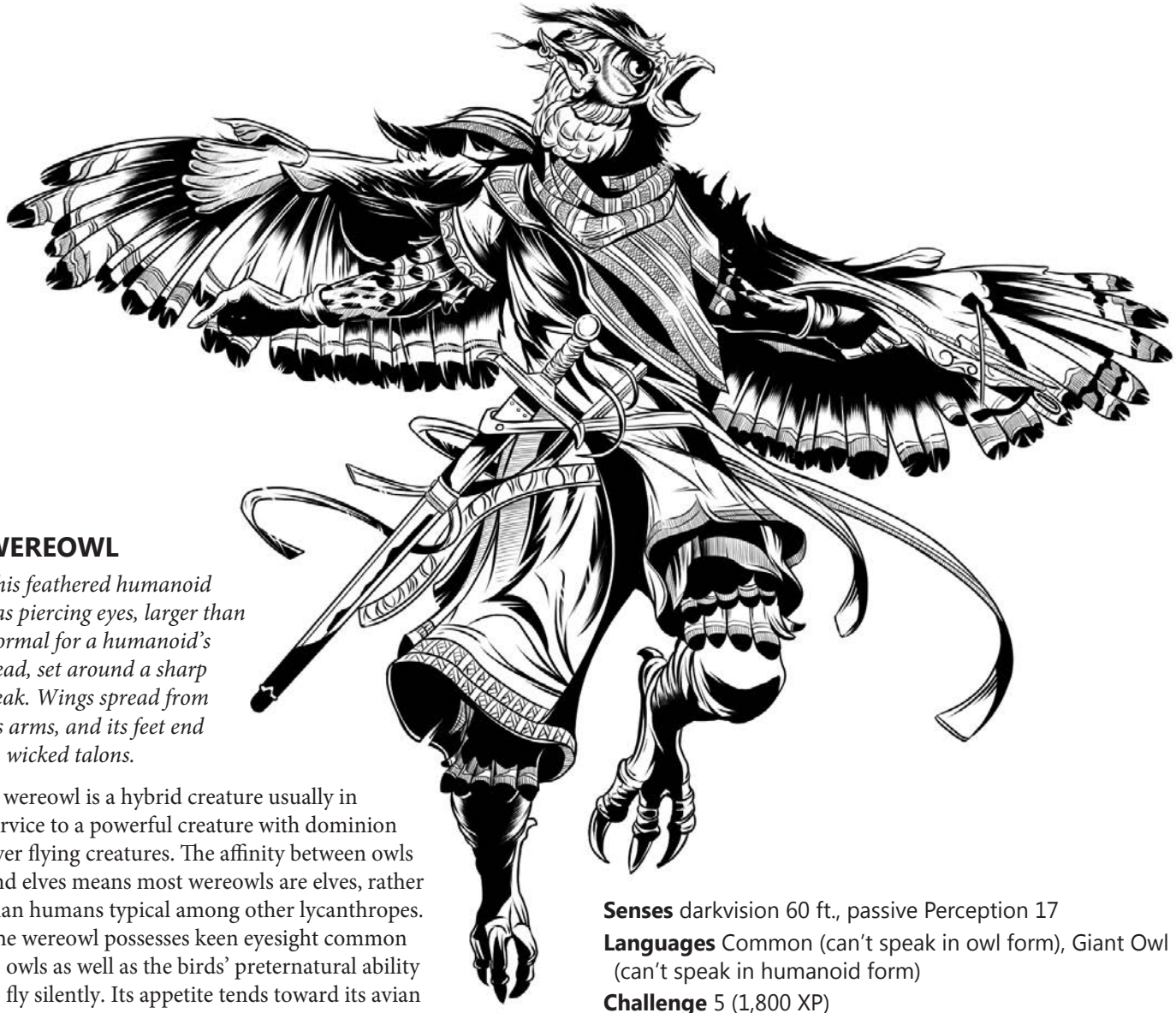
Undead Fortitude. If damage reduces the roc zombie to 0 hit points, it must make a Constitution saving throw with a DC of 5 + the damage taken, unless the damage is radiant or from a critical hit. On a success, the roc zombie drops to 1 hit point instead.

Actions

Multiattack. The roc zombie makes two attacks: one with its beak and one with its talons.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 24 (4d8 + 6) piercing damage.

Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (4d6 + 6) slashing damage.



WEREOWL

This feathered humanoid has piercing eyes, larger than normal for a humanoid's head, set around a sharp beak. Wings spread from its arms, and its feet end in wicked talons.

A wereowl is a hybrid creature usually in service to a powerful creature with dominion over flying creatures. The affinity between owls and elves means most wereowls are elves, rather than humans typical among other lycanthropes. The wereowl possesses keen eyesight common to owls as well as the birds' preternatural ability to fly silently. Its appetite tends toward its avian nature, and it feasts on rodents and other small mammals, usually raw and directly after a successful hunt. Its attitudes toward rodents extends to wererats and rodent-like creatures, such as ratfolk, and it often prefers to attack such creatures to the exclusion of other foes.

WEREOWL

Medium humanoid (elf, shapechanger), lawful evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 117 (18d8 + 36)

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

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Perception +7, Stealth +6

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common (can't speak in owl form), Giant Owl (can't speak in humanoid form)

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Flyby. The wereowl doesn't provoke opportunity attacks when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

Keen Hearing and Sight. The wereowl has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or sight.

Shapechanger. The wereowl can use its action to polymorph into an owl-humanoid hybrid or into a giant owl, or back into its true form, which is humanoid. Its statistics, other than its size, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Silent Flight (Hybrid or Owl Form Only). The wereowl has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks when it flies.

Actions

Multiattack. In owl form, the wereowl makes two talon attacks. In humanoid form, it makes three shortbow or shortsword attacks. In hybrid form, it can attack like an owl or a humanoid.

Shortbow (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Shortsword (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Talon (Hybrid or Owl Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with wereowl lycanthropy.

GNOLL SLAVER

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 71 (11d8 + 22)

Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Athletics +6, Intimidation +5, Perception +2, Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Gnoll

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Rampage. When the gnoll reduces a creature to 0 hp with a melee attack on its turn, the gnoll can take a bonus action to move up to half its speed and make a bite attack.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The gnoll makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its whip or three with its longbow.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Whip. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 10ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) slashing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Menace Captives (Recharge 5–6). The gnoll selects up to three creatures it has taken captive within 30 feet. Each creature must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or have disadvantage for 1 minute on any attack rolls or skill checks to take actions other than those the gnoll has ordered it to take.

WEREHYENA

Medium humanoid (gnoll, shapechanger), chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 in gnoll form, 14 (natural armor) in hyena or hybrid form

Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft. (50 ft. in hyena form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +5

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks not made with silver

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Gnoll (can't speak in hyena form)

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

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

Shapechanger. The werehyena can use its action to polymorph into a hyena-gnoll hybrid or into a hyena, or back into its true gnoll form. Its statistics, other than AC, are the same in each form. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Gnoll or Hybrid Form Only). The werehyena makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws or scimitar.

Bite (Hyena or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with werehyena lycanthropy.

Claws (Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (2d4 + 3) slashing damage.

Scimitar (Gnoll or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

EYES OF THE OWL

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

These translucent onyx lenses fit over the eyes. While wearing them, your eyes appear much larger than usual. In addition, you have advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight, and you don't have disadvantage on such checks when in a lightly-obscured area if the disadvantage is caused by dim light.

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