



HEROIC

1-10

by Eytan Bernstein

"The Tariff of Relkingham" is an adventure for four to six 3rd-level characters. In the adventure, the PCs must race against the evil high priest and vizier of Delornen, who is trying to enact an edict that would require human sacrifices from those wishing to cross the Relkingham Waterway, an important trade crossing. Can the PCs reach the vizier before he dooms Relkingham to this evil fate?

# THE TARIFF OF RELKINGHAM

**O**VER A MONTH AGO, Founder Neelani, the leader of Delornen, made it known that she was considering a sacrifice tariff in which trading parties must provide a sacrifice to Erathis each year in return for the right to use the Relkingham Waterway. She has hope that doing so will allow Erathis to bring rain to the land, since her people are currently dealing with a long-term drought that has brought great hardships to all who live in Delornen. Small groups who use the waterway, such as trading costers, might be required to have their traders sacrifice hands or eyes. Larger groups, such as those representing towns or even nations, are required to bring human sacrifices. Avonathemon, Founder Neelani's mysterious

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vizier, was the one who had proposed it, but the citizens of Relkingham opposed the tariff. They believe that others should pay a reasonable fee for use of the waterway and feel that human sacrifice of any sort is barbaric.

So, about a month ago, Relkingham sent a group of diplomats to Founder Neelani to ask her to reconsider this plan. She agreed to think about it, but her priest-vizier Avonathemon convinced her that Erathis requires sacrifices to allow this trade. After the Relkingham contingent left, she signed the edict, but then had a change of heart after she had a vision from Erathis of the suffering that would be caused by the sacrifices. As a result, she tucked away the signed edict and summoned representatives from Relkingham to her palace in Wyllea to discuss the matter with them more fully and inform them that she might be persuaded to burn the signed edict to put their minds to rest on the matter.

The PCs might be citizens of Relkingham that are chosen to travel to Wyllea or they could be travelers asked to serve as emissaries (see Adventure Hooks for more ideas).

What she didn't know is that Avonathemon is a priest of Vecna who is a secret agent in a cult. The current cult, led by the villainous High Priest Mauthereign, has made it his mission to remove one hand and eye from each person in the world to make everyone feel the pain Vecna has suffered. The tariff is Avonathemon's way of contributing to this goal.

Avonathemon, however, has other plans. Before the PCs leave Relkingham, Avonathemon absconds with the edict and rushes with his evil minions to reach Relkingham, where he intends to read the edict on the holy altar of Erathis, an altar he plans to desecrate in the name of Vecna. Delornen holds

that a signed edict sworn on an altar of Erathis is official law and cannot be repealed, except by the high priest (who is, unfortunately, also the vizier). The high priest position is a "for life" appointment, so only by killing Avonathemon or destroying the edict can the events be stopped. He knows he cannot perform the ritual to desecrate the altar at the palace because too many could see and attempt to stop him, and Relkingham is the nearest town with a sufficient altar. Knowing that the town is defenseless without its heroes, Avonathemon also hopes to summon the cult of Vecna there, who can then use the port town as a seat of power from which to further their wicked schemes. If Avonathemon enacts the edict, thousands of innocent lives will be ruined.

## ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The adventure is one in which the PCs must complete a series of noncombat encounters that are punctuated with tactical encounters. Depending on how they do in these, Avonathemon could have a greater or lesser headstart.

The adventure begins with a meeting between the PCs and the Relkingham mayor, which then leads to a meeting with Founder Neelani, where the PCs must quell any doubts she has about the edict. After the meeting, the PCs are supposed to return home, but Avonathemon has left guards to block their way and has magically sealed the doors. The PCs must fight the guards and unlock the door, or escape using the secret tunnel in a kitchen closet.

The PCs' path is diverted to the village of Hamona, a grim place that has already been

terrorized by the Cult of Vecna. All the survivors in the village are missing their left hand and eye and are extremely distrustful of outsiders. The inhabitants of Hamona are also under a curse placed upon them by the cult in which they become undead creatures at nightfall. If the PCs succeed on a social challenge, they can convince the villagers to let them leave through the tunnel just before nightfall, barely escaping without a major fight. If not, they must fight their way through the undead villagers.

If the PCs escape, they eventually come to a burned-out schoolhouse where minions of the cult are waiting. The minions try to kill the PCs or push them into the various holes in the floor of the schoolhouse that are filled with dangerous giant rats.

When the PCs reach Relkingham, the town is in an uproar over the vizier. The townsfolk claim that the vizier expelled the priests from the temple of Erathis and locked himself inside. Depending on the success of the PCs in the various skill challenges, Avonathemon has had more or less time to perform rituals, prepare the temple's defenses, and ready himself.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

The PCs might be convinced to take on the mission to see Founder Neelani in a number of ways. Most likely, some of the PCs are citizens of Relkingham, or they have been asked by the townsfolk to serve as neutral messengers with generous compensation offered. If you wish to add more personal motivations to the adventure, choose from the following.

**Promise of a Trade Partnership:** One or more of the PCs is offered a share in a profitable business at the docks or is promised a discounted rate when traveling and shipping through the port.

**Hobnob with Founder Neelani:** The PC has the desire to become a knight or noble. The mayor of Relkingham suggests that Founder Neelani or a local lord might consider this if the PCs help.

**Evil is Afoot:** One of the PCs is a priest or worshiper of Erathis and is receiving horrible visions from the god in which people are losing limbs and eyes and experiencing other events of terrible suffering.

**Missing Relative:** One of the PCs had heard rumors of strange happenings in Hamona and hopes to stop at the village on the way back from the meeting to check on a relative. (If the PCs succeed in their mission, they can go back to Hamona after the adventure to find the lost relative as you see fit.)

**Rumor of Brigands:** Rumor has it that brigands infest some of the trails and roads. Perhaps one of the

PCs wishes to locate and defeat these criminals on the way back from the meeting or find them and take their loot.

### SCALING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure is too difficult for 1st-level PCs, but it can be scaled to 2nd level. To reduce the adventure to 2nd level, do the following:

Change the social encounters with the mayor, Founder Neelani, and the villagers at Hamona to level 2.

Change the guards in the palace to Vecnan thugs. Remove the deathlock wight and the corruption corpse from the undead encounter.

Change the Vecnan mage and cult berserker in the schoolhouse to Vecnan thugs. There should now be 5 thugs. In the temple, all the guards should be Vecnan thugs and remove the deathlock wight. Subtract 20 hit points from Avonathemon and reduce his attack bonus, damage, and defenses by 2.

To scale the adventure to 4th level, do the following: Change the social encounters with the mayor, Founder Neelani, and the villagers at Hamona to level 4.

Change the guards in the palace to cult berserkers. Replace four of the zombie rotters with an additional corruption corpse.

Change the Vecnan thugs in the schoolhouse to cult berserkers.

In the temple, all the guards should be cult berserkers. Add 20 hit points to Avonathemon and increase his attack bonus, damage, and defenses by 2.

### CALCULATING THE ADVANTAGE

It's important to keep in mind that the adventure begins counting down from the time the mayor meets with the PCs. Tally up all the successes and failures, then match the number to the Results table below to see what advantages and disadvantages Avonathemon has in the final battle.

#### EVENT SUCCESS OR FAILURE

Event	Success	Failure
Mayor		
Founder Neelani		
Undead		
Ambush		

Total up the number of successes and the number of failures. Subtract the failures from the successes. Consult the Results table below with the value you calculated.

For example, the PCs were successful with the mayor, the undead, and the ambush, but not Founder Neelani. The successes equal 3 and you subtract the failures, which equals 1, to come up with a result of 2. Consult the table below to determine what occurs with 2 total successes.

The table is cumulative, so if the result is a 4, the results for 3, 2, and 1 still apply. The same goes for a negative result. If the result is a -3, the results for -2 and -1 still apply.

#### RESULTS

Tally Result	Result
4	Use Vecnite thugs instead of human guards for Avonathemon's minions.
3	Avonathemon is without his encounter power: hurl into darkness.
2	The area is still hallowed: turn undead attempts receive a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls. Undead have a -1 penalty to attack and damage rolls in the temple.
1	Avonathemon's recharge powers recharge on a 5 or 6 instead of a 4, 5, or 6.
0	No change.
-1	Avonathemon's recharge powers recharge on a 3, 4, 5, or 6.
-2	The area is desecrated: turn undead attempts take a -2 penalty to attack and damage rolls. Undead have a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls in the temple.
-3	Avonathemon can use hurl into darkness twice in the encounter.
-4	Use cult berserkers instead of human guards for Avonathemon's servants.

## THE QUESTS

The adventure ahead has two parts. The first part entails trying to convince Neelani to consider other options than the one her vizier has suggested, and the second part sees the PCs dealing with the vizier's personal attempt to make the edict into law.

### Minor Quest—Speak to Founder Neelani

The first part of the adventure includes speaking to Founder Neelani and trying to persuade her to follow a different course than the one her vizier wishes.

**Reward:** 500 XP and 1,000 gp (though it could go as high as 1,500 gp).

### Major Quest—Dealing with the Edict

The second part of the adventure entails destroying the edict in Relkingham.

**Reward:** 250 XP per character, plus the mayor and Founder Neelani might award them with further money, help with something, or items (DM's discretion).

## PROLOGUE

Delornen's seat of power is the small government town of Wyllea, where Founder Neelani, the leader of this land, resides in her palace. The leader of Delornen is chosen by Erathis, who sends visions to the chosen leader to help guide the current high priest. The high priest of Erathis and vizier to Founder Neelani is Avonathemon, an elderly priest with a large and mysterious support base. Rumors abound of corruption in his ranks, but none of them have ever been substantiated.

Although Wyllea is the governmental seat, the real power and wealth is in Relkingham, a port town that sits on a land bridge between two large continents. Avonathemon has recently announced that Erathis wishes to impose a sacrifice tariff. This tariff would require that those wishing to cross the land bridge must make a sacrifice. Smaller groups, or those sending small contingents, are expected to sacrifice the hands or eyes of those who cross. Larger groups with bigger stakes must bring human sacrifices to the temple of Erathis.

The vizier claims that by pleasing Erathis with these sacrifices, he can bring rain to end the terrible drought that has gone on in Delornen all summer. Many are skeptical of this because of the peace-loving nature of Erathis, but no one wants to argue with the holiest person in the land.

Unsurprisingly, the announcement of this policy has sent ripples through the sleepy town of Relkingham, an easygoing, albeit decadent port town of merchants and sailors. The citizens have already sent a group to Founder Neelani that attempted to express their distaste for this policy. Founder Neelani said she would consider their request, but it has been a month and she has sent no word of her ruling.

In the time since the announcement, increasing reports of brigands and Vecnite cult activities have come to the light. Citizens have trickled into the town missing eyes and hands, unable to speak of what happened to them.

Becoming nervous, Mayor Joren of Relkingham has asked to meet with the PCs to discuss the situation.

## PART 1: MEETING WITH THE MAYOR

Whether the PCs are well known to the mayor or just passing adventurers, start the skill challenge when they are escorted into the mayor's office. The negotiation with the mayor is the first part of a two-part social skill challenge that culminates with the meeting with Founder Neelani.

*You are escorted by two guards through the lavish town hall, passing numerous statues of former mayors, town merchants, and elders. The simple opulence of the edifice bespeaks old money and a level of decadence not seen in most other lands. The guards open the doors to a sumptuous office, which is appointed with a plush leather chair, a handsome desk, stuffed animal heads, and numerous cultural artifacts. You are greeted by a portly, jolly-looking man with a handlebar mustache, who is dressed in orange silk robes and is wearing far too much perfume and jewelry.*

*The man says, "Thank you all for coming. Your bravery is well known to the citizens of our town. As I'm sure you know, these are trying times and the citizens of Relkingham are worried about this edict that we're hearing about from Wyllea, as well as the violence and brigands reported in the land. We need respected heroes to speak with Founder Neelani and convince her of the problems with this new law. We would be more than happy to compensate you for the trip and any difficulties that might arise. We would be willing to offer 1,000 gold pieces if you will speak with her. We don't expect miracles and you will still be compensated if she doesn't listen, but success in this venture would be worth an additional reward."*

**Initial Negotiation: The Mayor** **Level 3**  
Skill Challenge **XP 500**

*For the Mayor to increase your reward and smooth your bureaucratic journey to Founder Neelani, you need to convince him of your merit.*

**Complexity 2** (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

**Primary Skills** Bluff, Diplomacy, Insight.  
Other Skill Streetwise.

**Victory** The mayor agrees to pay 1,500 gp instead of 1,000 gp and agrees to pay for any supplies, including horses, that the PCs require (no more than 200 gp a piece). The mayor also writes a glowing letter to the seneschal on the PCs' behalf, which allows them to be shown immediately into the throne room, instead of being made to wait in the antechamber. The letter also grants each PC a +1 bonus to the first Charisma-based skill check during the skill challenge with Founder Neelani. Check the success box for the meeting with the mayor.

**Defeat** The mayor does not pay for supplies or increase compensation. He also writes a lukewarm letter to the seneschal, which forces the PCs to wait in the antechamber. The letter causes each PC to begin the challenge with Founder Neelani with a -1 penalty to the first Charisma-based skill check. Check the failure box for the meeting with the mayor.

**Bluff** DC 10 (1 success). Two successes in a row reduce the DC of the next Diplomacy check by -3. The party fabricates reasons for the mayor to grant the party more money.

**Diplomacy** DC 15 (1 success, maximum 4 successes). One result of 20 or higher opens up Streetwise as an option or eliminates one failure.

The party discusses their past heroic deeds or describes the dangers of traveling both ways with brigands and cultists in the area.

**Insight** DC 16 (1 success, maximum 2 successes). One result of 20 or higher allows the group to understand that any Intimidate check results in automatic failure, and that Streetwise checks that appeal to the mayor's mercantile upbringing are likely to gain them a further advantage (the Mayor offers an item from his treasury to the PCs before they leave town). The party empathizes with the mayor and uses that knowledge to encourage a greater reward.

**Streetwise** DC 10 (0 successes). A failure here ruins the group's credibility; the group has a -4 penalty to Charisma-based checks until the end of the skill challenge. A success here causes the mayor to tell the PCs of secret tunnels that link many of the towns in Delornen and how they were once used by smugglers.

The group uses knowledge of the strategic importance of Relkingham and the gravity of the meeting with Founder Neelani to gain useful information that could help them later.

## THE JOURNEY TO WYLLEA

After the meeting with the mayor, the PCs leave Relkingham to head toward Wyllea. The journey takes approximately three days. Each day, roll on the random encounter table. The PCs must have at least one random encounter before they reach Wyllea, so if they haven't rolled one by the third day, choose one from the list.

## ROAD ENCOUNTERS

d%	Monsters Encountered
0-50	No encounter
51-55	3 human berserkers
56-60	1 ochre jelly, 3 orc raiders
61-65	8 human bandits
66-70	5 imps
71-75	3 goblin skullcleavers, 1 goblin hexer, 1 hobgoblin warcaster
76-80	3 pseudodragons and 2 spitting drakes
81-85	1 deathlock wight, 2 zombies, 8 zombie rotters, 1 skeleton, 1 gravehound
86-90	1 iron defender, 2 human guards, 1 human mage
91-95	2 kobold wyrm Priest, 6 kobold minions, 4 kobold slingers, 4 kobold dragonshields, 1 kobold slyblade
96-100	1 young white dragon

Following one or more random encounters, the PCs reach Wyllea, where they are met by the seneschal.

## PART 2: VISITING THE PALACE

Once the PCs reach the palace, they can enter and meet with the seneschal.

### PETITIONING FOUNDER NEELANI

If the PCs were successful in the negotiation with the mayor, the seneschal leads them through the sitting room in Area 3b on the palace map to see Founder Neelani immediately.

**Read the following if they were successful:**

*You are escorted into an opulent sitting room that is decorated in silk tapestries displaying the colors and shield of Delornen. An officious halfling with wire-rimmed spectacles greets you with a smile: “In his letter, the mayor of Relkingham speaks extremely highly of your valor and diplomatic skill. I will take you to see Founder Neelani at once.”*

If the PCs were unsuccessful in the challenge with the mayor, the seneschal is less pleasant and tells them to come back when they are summoned.

**Read the following if the PCs failed:**

*You are escorted into an opulent sitting room that is decorated in silk tapestries displaying the colors and shield of Delornen. An officious halfling with wire-rimmed spectacles greets you with a forced smile: “In his letter, the mayor of Relkingham indicates that you would like to speak with Founder Neelani. She is a very busy woman and there is a long list of people who need to see her. You will be summoned when she is ready.*

The seneschal summons the PCs about 24 hours later. When the seneschal escorts them in, **read the following when they are brought to Founder Neelani.**

*You are led from the antechamber through a portcullis and into a landing. The landing is an irregularly shaped room with no ceiling. The wall opposite the portcullis is extremely tall and rounded at its edge. A steep and grand staircase leads from the landing to whatever sits at the top of the wall. The seneschal ascends the stairs, motioning for you to follow him.*

Presuming that the PCs follow the seneschal, they are led up the staircase and announced. It is acceptable to distribute to the PCs the smaller map of just the throne room so that they can better picture their surroundings. The seneschal announces each PC by his or her full name, adding an appellation, such as “slayer of the white dragon Targoth” or “beloved servant of the Raven Queen.” If the letter to the seneschal was positive, the appellation is also positive, which is the reason for the PCs’ bonus to their first social roll with Founder Neelani. If the letter to the seneschal was lukewarm, the appellation is also lukewarm (“of Karholt” or “priest of the Raven Queen”).

**Regardless of the strength of the letter, read the following when the PCs arrive at the top of the stairs:**

*The halfling seneschal leads you under an open portcullis into an antechamber that is open to the sky above. Up the steep stairs, you see a hint of the dome of Delornen above and ahead of you, over what can only be the audience room. A guard in chainmail emblazoned with the symbol of Erathis escorts the seneschal and your party up the stairs, then steps behind you to stand guard.*

*After ascending the stairs, you stand in a wide oval-shaped throne room shielded by a great dome of stained glass, through which the dazzling sunlight filters in scintillating patterns. The chamber perches atop the palace like a hawk’s aerie—between the pillars that hold up the dome, you can see the rolling hills and forests of Delornen extend off to the horizon.*

*Eight staircases—each warded by a guard in chainmail—lead down from the platformlike chamber, which is flanked by thick pillars. Long tapestries depicting scenes sacred to Erathis hang between the pillars from the edge of the dome, and they flap gently in the breeze.*

A raised throne of gold-gilded wood and burgundy velvet stands at the center of the room, and upon this Founder Neelani sits. She wears a long gown of turquoise silk with gold and ruby accents. She sits upright but not stiffly, with the bearing of a great ruler. She has pale skin, ice blue eyes, and wears an amethyst chain circlet on her troubled brow. Lines of worry trace her eyes—perhaps she has slept little these last nights. Several attendants stand nearby, their faces obviously anxious.

*As Founder Neelani beckons languidly, the seneschal proclaims, “Kneel before Founder Neelani.”*

Any character who refuses to kneel takes an additional -1 penalty to that character’s first roll in the skill challenge. This skill challenge covers PC attempts to convince Founder Neelani to refuse the edict instating the sacrifice tariff. It also has the potential to grant the PCs a faster and less dangerous way out of the palace.

**Negotiation: Founder Neelani** **Level 3**  
Skill Challenge **XP 500**

*“Rise, my children,” Founder Neelani says. “You are as welcome here as I am.”*

*After you rise, she continues, “I have given much thought to the matter Relkingham has brought to my attention. It is a difficult question and one for which there might not be an easy answer. Nevertheless, I want to hear from each of you why you think this tariff should not be invoked.”*

*As she speaks these words, the seneschal departs down the stairs from which you entered. The guard steps back into place at the peak of the stairs behind you.*

*She waits in turn for one of you to begin your petition. Now you need to convince Founder Neelani of the merit of the town’s argument.*

**Complexity 4** (requires 10 successes before 3 failures).

**Primary Skills** Bluff, Diplomacy, Insight.

**Other Skill** Religion.

**Victory** Founder Neelani immediately agrees that the sacrifice edict should not be invoked. When she is leaving, one of her maids tells the PCs of the secret tunnel that leads out of the palace from one of the landings in the kitchen. Check the success box for the meeting with Founder Neelani.

**Defeat** Founder Neelani tells the PCs that she will consider their request, and then she departs. The maid does not provide the PCs with any information. Check the failure box for the meeting with Founder Neelani.

**Bluff** DC 10 (1 success). Two successes in a row reduce the DC of the next Diplomacy check by -3. The group fabricates reasons that the sacrifice tariff would harm the land.

**Diplomacy** DC 15 (1 success, maximum 4 successes). One result of 20 or higher eliminates one failure. The group discusses the hardship and poor hospitality of forcing neighbors to sacrifice body parts and lives.

**Insight** DC 16 (1 success, maximum 2 successes). One result of 20 or higher allows the group to understand that any Intimidate check results in automatic failure, and that Religion checks are likely to gain them further information.

The party empathizes with Founder Neelani's difficulty in making this decision and discusses how it could impact the land.

**Religion** DC 10 (0 successes). A failure here ruins the group's credibility; the group has a -4 penalty to Religion and Bluff checks. A success here causes Founder Neelani to tell the PCs that she too has had

such doubts, granting a +1 bonus to all future skill checks for that PC during the encounter.

The party discusses Erathis's teachings, expressing how the god wouldn't want people to suffer in the pursuit of civilized trade.

If the PCs failed the skill challenge, they are led by the seneschal back into the antechamber to wait for Founder Neelani for several hours. If they succeed, she answers immediately. Whenever she answers, she says the following:

*"I have given the matter much thought and believe you are right. The sacrifice tariff would impose too great a hardship on our neighbors, many of whom are also loyal servants of Erathis. I will have High Priest Vizier Avonathemon annul it. Thank you for your words on this matter."*

If the PCs succeeded on the challenge, one of Founder Neelani's maids comes up to them.

*A young half-elf maid who is a companion to Founder Neelani comes up to you and whispers, "If you would make haste, there is a secret door that runs between the kitchen and its antechamber." She points to the set of steps on the right-hand side of the north edge of the chamber. "A trapdoor in the kitchen closet leads to a tunnel that goes out of the town." She then runs off after Founder Neelani.*

Why the maid helps the PCs is up to you. Perhaps she is grateful they have averted the sacrifice tariff, since her young brother is a victim of Vecnite activity. Perhaps she believes Founder Neelani is in danger from traitors in the palace (such as the guards).

Following Founder Neelani's departure, whether they failed or succeeded, and before they try to leave the throne room, they hear the seneschal cry out.

Make sure to give at least a little time between the departure of the maid and the seneschal's cry.

*"The vizier has taken the edict! He's going to invoke it on the altar in Relkingham! Ahhhhh!" The cry trails away into a gurgle.*

*This sound is accompanied by the creak of eight portcullises closing, sealing off the antechambers from the rest of the palace.*

If the PCs attempt to find the seneschal by heading back down the stairs into area 3a, their way is blocked by one of the guards. The same is true if they try to leave by any of the other exits. There is no known chamber beneath the raised throne room, though a secret repository for the land's wealth is possible.

## PALACE LOCATIONS

Use the following descriptions when the PCs start exploring the palace (but adjust them as needed if you use them before they have spoken to Neelani).

### AREA 1: THRONE ROOM

**Read the following after the PCs visit the throne room.**

*After Founder Neelani leaves, you stand in the opulent throne room on a raised oval dais that is open to the daylight on all sides. Eight steep stairways, one in each eighth of the room, lead down into antechambers open to the sky. A domed stained glass skylight in the ceiling lets in colored rays of light, and the countryside extends around you to the horizon.*

Read this next section only if the players ask about the possibility of leaping from the dais over the antechambers onto the surrounding roof (a valid escape):

*There is a gap between the throne platform and the slightly sloped roof over the main rooms. One could clear the distance with a strong leap. If you fell, you would fall into one of the portcullis-sealed antechambers.*

The roof of the palace is 30 feet from the ground. The roof is considered difficult terrain.

### AREA 2A AND 2B: ANTECHAMBER AND SITTING ROOM

**Read the following if a PC gets past a guard.**

*The stairs lead back down to the landing through which the seneschal escorted you on your way to see Founder Neelani. The portcullis, which was raised before, is now lowered. A pool of blood spreads into the antechamber from under the portcullis.*

If the PCs enter, they find the body of the slain halfling seneschal:

*The seneschal's body lies on the ground face forward. Blood is seeping out of his severed left hand and from somewhere on his face. A lever in the corner has been pulled down.*

**If the PCs turn him over, read the following:**

*The seneschal's left eye has been crudely plucked out of his face, leaving a bleeding, gaping hole. Clutched in his right hand is a note that reads as follows: Avonathemon has absconded with the edict. He means to read it on the altar. He must be stopped!*

The door leading out of the room is locked. If the PCs search even cursorily, they find a young messenger boy:

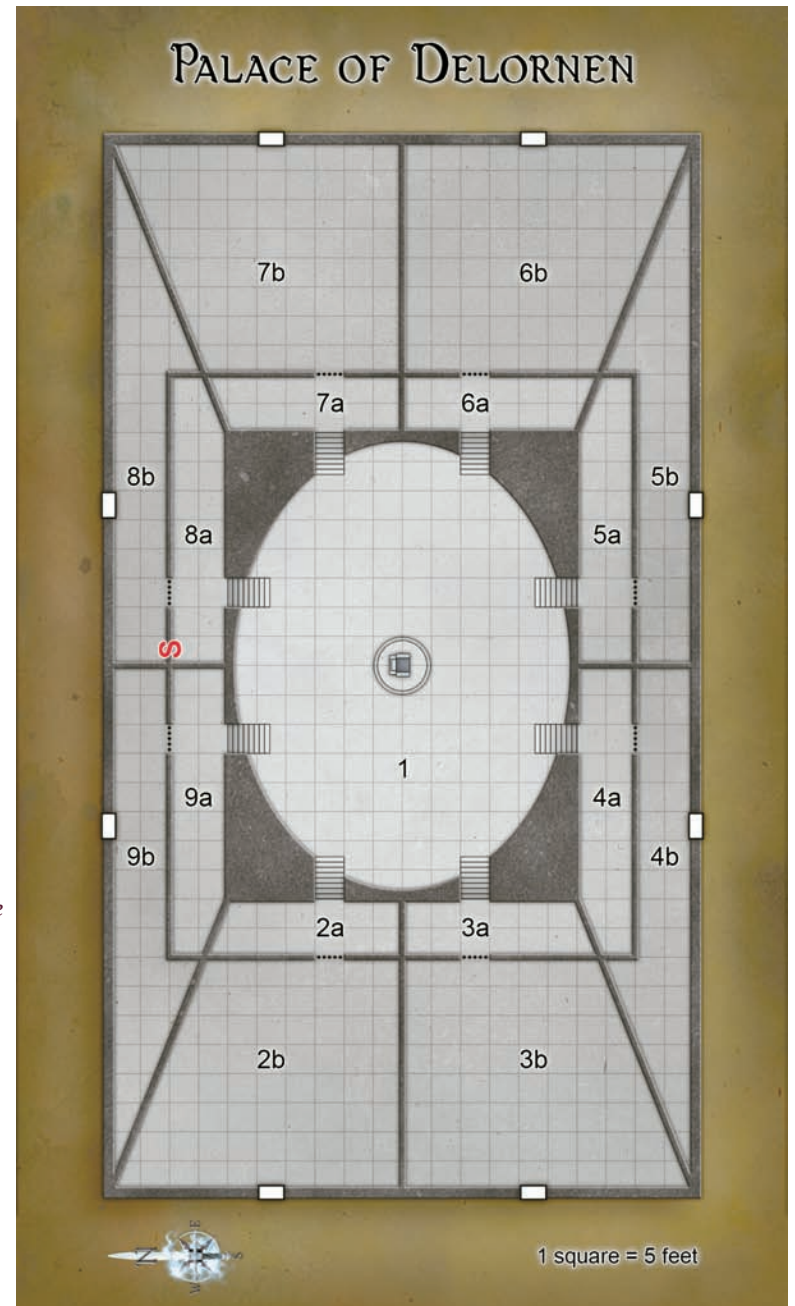
*A young messenger boy's body has been unceremoniously dumped in the corner. He is covered in blood, his left hand has been severed, and his left eye has been plucked out.*

**Treasure:** The room is decorated with expensive furniture, silver, and tapestries. The total value is about 5,000 gp, though only about 1,000 gp could be carried, at a total weight of 100 lb. Apportion the value of the treasure if a PC chooses to take some of it.

### AREA 3A AND 3B: ANTECHAMBER AND MEETING ROOM

**Read the following if a PC gets past a guard.**

*The stairs lead down to a landing similar to the one through which you entered on the way to the throne room. A portcullis bars the way into a lavish meeting chamber. The chamber is dominated by a massive, irregularly shaped cherry wood table with numerous chairs. It is sumptuously decorated, with tapestries, silver, and expensive furniture.*





Treasure: The room is decorated with expensive furniture, silver, and tapestries. The total value is about 6,000 gp, though only about 800 gp could be carried, at a total weight of 200 lb. Apportion the value of the treasure if a PC chooses to take some of it.

#### AREA 4A AND 4B: ANTECHAMBER AND MEDITATION ROOM

Read the following if a PC gets past a guard.

*The stairs lead down to a landing similar to the one through which you entered on the way to the throne room. A portcullis bars the way into a small, austere garden and meditation chamber. It houses exotic plants from faraway lands, an elegantly arranged rock garden, and a bubbling central fountain.*

#### AREA 5A AND 5B: ANTECHAMBER AND GUESTROOM

Read the following if a PC gets past a guard.

*The stairs lead down to a landing similar to the one through which you entered on the way to the throne room. A portcullis bars the way into a lavish guest bedchamber. It is sumptuously decorated, with tapestries, silver, and expensive furniture.*

Treasure: The room is decorated with expensive furniture, silver, and tapestries. The total value is about 6,000 gp, though only about 1,200 gp could be carried, at a total weight of 300 lb. Apportion the value of the treasure if a PC chooses to take some, but not all of it.

#### AREA 6A AND 6B: ANTECHAMBER AND CHAPEL

Read the following if a PC gets past a guard.

*The stairs lead down to a landing similar to the one through which you entered on the way to the throne room. A portcullis bars the way into an ornate chapel to Erathis. It is fantastically decorated, with tapestries, silver, gems, and expensive furniture.*

Treasure: The room is decorated with expensive furniture, silver, and tapestries. The total value is about 10,000 gp, though only about 1,500 gp could be carried, at a total weight of 700 lb. Apportion the value of the treasure if a PC chooses to take some of it.

#### AREA 7A AND 7B: ANTECHAMBER AND BALLROOM

Read the following if a PC gets past a guard.

*The stairs lead down to a landing similar to the one through which you entered on the way to the throne room. A portcullis bars the way into a massive ballroom, which is lavishly appointed with tapestries, suits of armor and weapons, expensive furniture, gold, silver, and gems.*

Treasure: The room is decorated with expensive furniture, silver, gold, gems, and tapestries. The total value is about 15,000 gp, though only about 1,900 gp could be carried, at a total weight of 900 lb. Apportion the value of the treasure if a PC chooses to take some of it.

#### AREA 8A AND 8B: ANTECHAMBER AND KITCHEN

Read the following if a PC gets past a guard.

*The stairs lead down to a landing similar to the one through which you entered on the way to the throne room. A portcullis bars the way into the kitchen. A closet sits to the left of the portcullis.*

The closet is locked, requiring a DC 18 Thievery check to open. Even an untrained eye notices that the floor of the closet is false.

*The floor of the closet is false. Below it is a tunnel leading off below the palace. Torches lining the walls of the dank tunnel have been lit recently.*

If the PCs don't open the closet, but instead pull up all the levers, read the following:

*As you pull up the last lever, the doors of the palace open.*

## ESCAPING THE PALACE

### Encounter Level 3 (900 XP)

#### SETUP

Avonathemon has magically locked the eight doors leading out of the palace by pulling down levers in each of the outer rooms of the palace. To escape the palace, the PCs must locate the secret tunnel that can be found in a closet that can be opened from both landing 8a and room 8b, which is the kitchen.

All but two of the eight stairways leading out of the throne room are blocked by a guard. (Two guards left earlier to escort Founder Neelani out.) The guards do not respond to any questions or requests. They stand firm in front of their posts. The guards were hired by Avonathemon. (At least one of them can be a Vecnite convert, at your discretion.) They do not wish the PCs to escape, and are also not particularly loyal to the vizier.

Alternatively, the PCs can pull down levers in each of the outer rooms. This requires them to make DC 20 Strength checks to lift each portcullis, enter the room, and pull each lever up.

It's important that the battle not seem stationary. The guards should follow the PCs if they go exploring the rooms for an exit. It's possible to use these rooms to gain a tactical edge, both on the part of the guards and on the part of the PCs. The guards try to fight in groups if possible.

### 6 human guards (G)

6 Human Guards (G)		Level 3 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid		XP 150 each
Initiative +5	Senses Perception +6	
HP 47; Bloodied 23		
AC 18; Fortitude 16, Reflex 15, Will 14		
Speed 5		
⚔ Halberd (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
Reach 2; +10 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the human guard's next turn.		
⚔ Powerful Strike (standard; recharge ⚡) ♦ Weapon		
Requires halberd; reach 2; +10 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage, and the target is knocked prone.		
↪ Crossbow (standard; at-will) ♦ Weapon		
Ranged 15/30; +9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 2 damage.		
Alignment Any	Languages Common	
Skills Streetwise +7		
Str 16 (+4)	Dex 14 (+3)	Wis 11 (+1)
Con 15 (+3)	Int 10 (+1)	Cha 12 (+2)
Equipment chainmail, halberd, crossbow with 20 bolts		

#### TACTICS

If one of the guards is attacked, that guard responds with melee attacks. The other guards use their crossbows, or, if they are close enough, their halberds. The guards do not pursue the PC unless one of them somehow breaks past a guard down the stairs. At that point, the guards split up, some of them fighting the PCs and others pursuing those who have tried to escape.

The guards do not fight to the death unless Founder Neelani or Delornen is threatened. An individual guard who becomes bloodied parlays, revealing that they are acting on strict orders from the vizier. The guards do not pursue the PCs into the secret tunnel or out of the palace, so if they find the secret passage or pull up all the levers, they are safe to exit the palace.

It is possible to tumble over a guard down the stairs with a DC 22 Acrobatics check. This brings on pursuit as if the PC had attacked a guard.

#### FEATURES OF THE AREA

**Illumination:** The entire palace is well lit by ever-burning torches.

**Portcullises:** To lift a portcullis, a character must succeed on a DC 20 Strength check. Portcullises are found in all "b" rooms.

**Lever:** If one of the PCs examines the lever, allow a DC 18 Thievery check. Success indicates that the lever is one of many, all of which must be pulled up to unlock the doors to the palace. Each consecutive time a PC performs this check in a different room, the DC goes down by 1. Levers are found in all "b" rooms.

## PART 2: BEYOND THE PALACE

If the PCs take the tunnels, they might encounter monsters. The tunnels connect to a number of tributary passages that lead to the Underdark. Roll three times.

*The tunnel winds on, dripping with heavy water that leaves raised lumps of calcium where it concentrates. Occasionally, you hear the sounds of scrabbling feet in the darkness.*

### TUNNEL ENCOUNTERS

d%	Monsters Encountered
0-50	No Encounter
51-60	3 wererats and 2 shadowhunter bats
61-70	3 specters
71-80	3 dark creepers
81-90	3 cavern chokers
91-00	8 kruthik hatchlings, 2 kruthik adults

The tunnels eventually end in an opening in a small drainage ditch on the main road. If the PCs took the tunnels, they should not have any further random encounter on the road.

**If the PCs escaped using a palace exit, read the following:**

*You make your way through the town toward the main road. As you leave the town, the enormity of your challenge lies before you. If Avonathemon swears the edict on the holy altar of Relkingham, it will ruin the lives of thousands of innocent people.*

Once the PCs are out of the town, roll once on the Road Encounters table.

## PART 3: HAMONA

The following area descriptions might be useful either during or after the skill challenge (see encounter T2). If referred to before the villagers change into undead creatures, adjust as needed.

### AREA 1: STREETS

**Read the following to remind the PCs of what the area looks like.**

*The seemingly deserted streets of the village have come to life with undead villagers, who are clamoring for your blood and your flesh. The rope bridge connecting the inn to the jail seems tantalizingly close, yet impossibly far.*

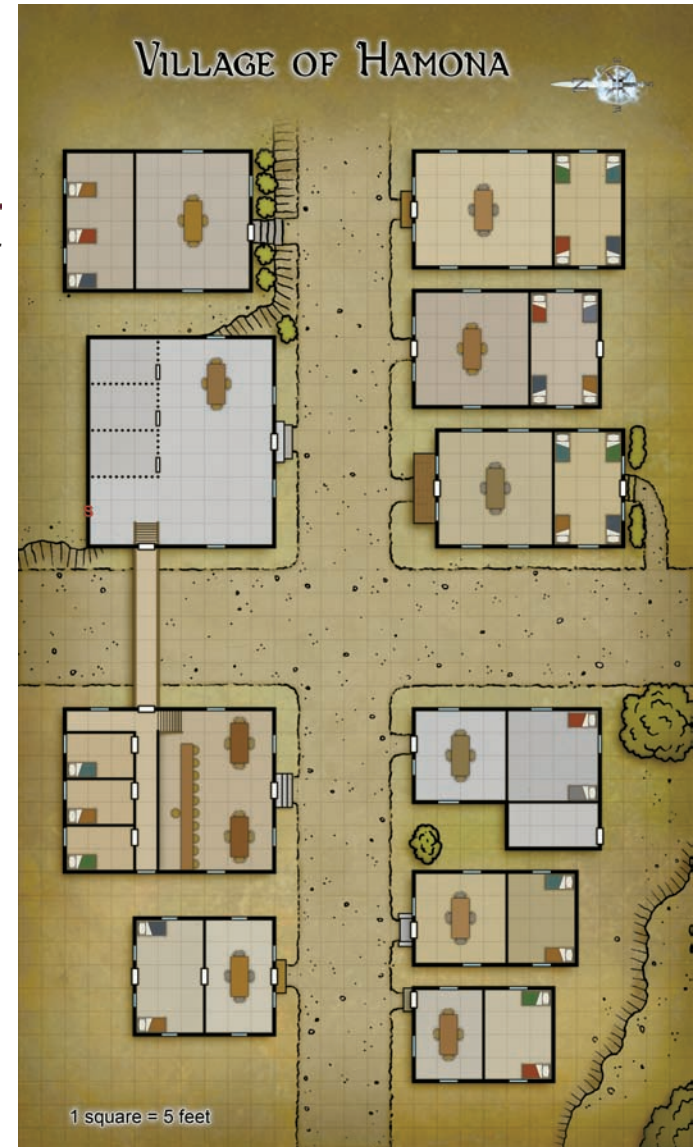
### AREA 2: JAIL

**Read the following if the PC unlocks the door.**

*A small, single story village jail opens from the door. Three barred cells sit unused. The rope bridge from the inn comes to an end at the jail's only window.*

A DC 25 Thievery check is required to open the lock on the front door. A successful DC 22 Perception check is required to detect the secret door that leads to the tunnels out of the village. **If the PC finds the secret door and looks into it, read:**

*You find a secret trapdoor that leads down into a tunnel.*



## POTENTIAL VILLAGER RESPONSES

**Old Woman:** You bring swords to chop off our limbs, and daggers to poke out our eyes. Get out! GET OUT!

**Young Boy:** Are you going to save us from the bad men?

**Village Elder:** How do we know we can trust you? You could be in league with . . . with “them.”

**Young Woman:** They don’t seem like the people who hurt us. We can trust them.

**Wise Old Man:** You must hurry before sundown—before it’s too late.

**Spinster:** Look! There! One of them is trying to sneak into the jail!

**Priest:** Give us a sign that you serve the powers of light and good.

The rope bridge requires a successful DC 10 Acrobatics (balance) or Athletics (climb) check or the PC falls 15 feet, taking 1d10 + 3 damage. Falling automatically alerts the villagers. The PC can sneak to the other side of the bridge with a Stealth check opposed by the Perception of the villagers.

## AREA 3, 5-11: HOMES

**Read the following if a PC opens the unlocked door.**

*You open the door to find a simple one-room home. One half of the room is used for dining and cooking and the other half contains beds and personal belongings.*

Each home contains 3d10 gp worth of personal belongings.

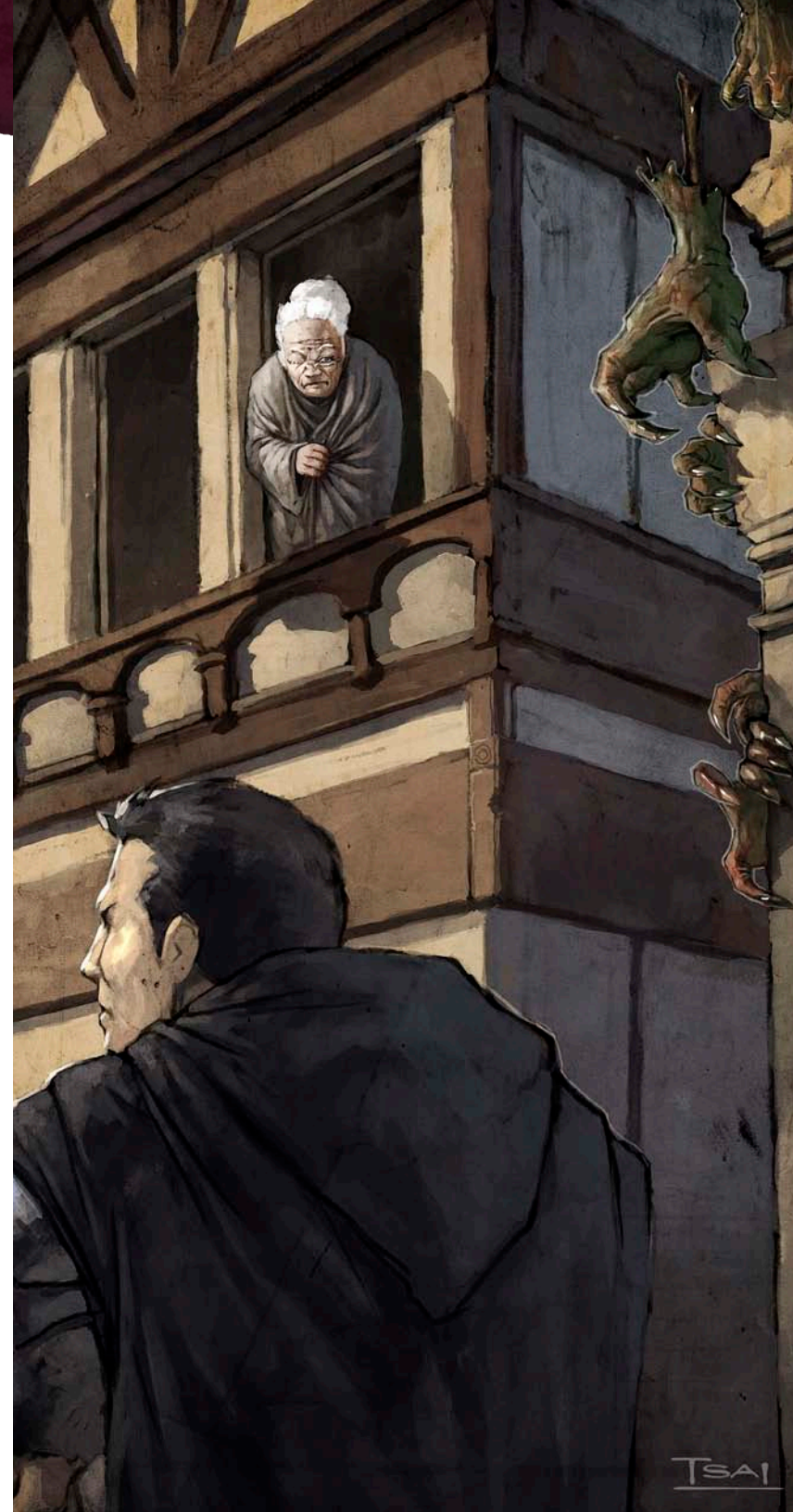
## AREA 4: THE INN

**Read the following if a PC moves past the undead and enters the inn.**

*A typical well-worn inn spreads out from the door. Except for the reek of the undead, the inn is a strange bastion of calm. It has two large tables for meals and a number of barstools at the long bar. A short flight of stairs leads up to the rooms. You can see the rope bridge that leads to the jail at the top of the stairs.*

At least half of the remaining undead try to follow the character into the inn if the PC hasn’t somehow barricaded the door. Only undead with flesh can open the door, which precludes skeletons from doing so. Any undead can try to bash the door down by making a DC 20 Strength check.

If the PCs fight the undead and win, they can leave by the road or they can go through the tunnel. If they succeeded in the challenge, the villagers let them leave through the tunnel or road just in the nick of time.



## TRAGEDY AT HAMONA

Encounter Level 3 (806 XP)

### SETUP

Whether the PCs took the tunnels or left by the village, they eventually make their way down the main road toward Relkingham. They arrive near Hamona about half an hour before dusk. **Read the following:**

*Off the road, you hear a large number of crows squawking. The smell of rotting flesh drifts from somewhere nearby.*

If the PCs investigate, they arrive at Hamona. **Read the following when they are entering the outskirts of the village:**

*You come upon a seemingly deserted village. The entire village consists of an intersection of two roads. About eight two-story townhouses line both roads. On either side of the road leading north is a two-story inn and a one-story jail. Leading down from the inn to the jail is a short, but sturdy ladder-bridge. Crows are pecking at numerous piles of refuse. Closer examination reveals severed hands, fingers, and eyeballs. The smell of rotting flesh is unbearable, and you feel that you are being watched.*

Pause for a few moments. Then continue:

*The sense of being watched increases. Shutters open a crack. Windows are lifted an inch. Suddenly, an elderly woman appears for a moment in a second-story townhouse. She is covered from head to toe in black sackcloth.*

If the PCs move to investigate or try to leave, people come out of the houses to intercept them.

*Twenty villagers of all ages emerge from their homes. All are dressed from head to toe black sack cloth. They are congregating in front of the inn door, clearly wanting to prevent you from getting inside.*

The villagers are extremely distrustful of outsiders and are terrified that the cultists of Vecna have come back to harm them further. The Vecnites surrounded the village, forcing each villager to submit to losing one hand and eye or die. They even blocked the secret trapdoor in the jail that would have allowed the villagers to escape.

Allow PCs to make DC 15 Perception checks to notice that each of the villagers is missing their left eyes and left hands. (You can decrease the difficulty as the PCs interact with the villagers.)

If the villagers are not convinced of the PCs truthfulness, they trap the PCs and then transform into undead creatures at sundown. If they are convinced, they show the PCs the secret door to a shortcut tunnel.

During the skill challenge, there are two possible actions PCs can take to circumvent the villagers and move to the secret door. Some of them could sneak to the jail and try to pick the lock, opening the door and finding the secret entrance to the tunnel. Alternatively, one of them could tumble past the crowd in front of the inn door, go up the stairs in the inn, walk through the skywalk to the jail, climb down to the floor, and enter the secret door. Neither of these is easy, but they are possible alternatives to dealing with the wary villagers.

**12 zombie rotters (Z)**  
**1 corruption corpse (C)**  
**1 deathlock wight (W)**

This skill challenge covers the PCs attempt to convince the villagers to let them go.

**Distrustful Villagers**  
Skill Challenge

**Level 3**  
XP 806

*An old man comes forward, a distrustful look on his face. For the villagers to let you go and tell you what happened to them, you must convince them of your trustworthiness.*

**Complexity 5** (requires 12 successes before 3 failures).

**Primary Skills** Diplomacy, Insight, Intimidate.

**Other Skills** Acrobatics, Stealth, Thievery.

**Victory** The villagers show the PCs the secret tunnel just in time and the PCs do not have to fight them. If the PCs don't fight the undead, check the success box.

**Defeat** The villagers turn into undead. If the PCs harm any of the undead, check the failure box under undead. This is because the Vecnites gain strength when their evil deeds cause others to harm innocents, even if it is necessary.

**Diplomacy** DC 15 (1 success). One result of 20 or higher eliminates one failure. The PCs discuss that they are on a mission to prevent another tragedy like what befell Hamona from occurring. They might say that they suspect the Vecnites of this treachery and are out to stop them before they hurt anyone else.

**Insight** DC 16 (1 success, maximum 6 successes). One result of 20 or higher allows the group to understand that any Bluff check results in automatic failure, or that Stealth checks might allow them to sneak and search for other ways out, or that Acrobatics checks might result in them getting past the villagers and into the inn.

The party empathizes with the loss felt by the villagers and their individual trauma.

**Filth Fever**

Level 3 Disease

Endurance stable DC 16, improve DC 21

The target is cured. **Initial Effect** The target loses 1 healing surge. **Final State** The target takes a -2 penalty to AC, Fortitude defense, and Reflex defense. The target takes a -2 penalty to AC, Fortitude defense, and Reflex defense. The target loses all healing surges and cannot regain hit points.

**Intimidate** DC 16 (1 success, maximum 2 successes). Additionally, a success on DC 20 allows the PCs to each gain a +1 bonus to their next checks. The PCs try to bully the villagers into letting them pass.

**Acrobatics** DC 10 (0 successes). When successful, the other PCs take a -1 penalty to social checks for them until the end of the encounter.

The PC tries to tumble or squeeze past the villagers and go up into the inn or leave.

**Stealth** DC 10 (0 successes). The PC uses Stealth to sneak off and look for another way out. After trying a number of doors and finding them open, but leading to nowhere of note, the PC stumbles onto a locked door.

**Thievery** DC 10 (0 successes). The PC opens the locked door to the jail and discovers the secret door to the tunnel.

If the PCs succeed in their skill challenge, continue to the section titled The Road to Relkingham. If they fail, they are attacked by the villagers, who turn into undead.

**Read the following if they failed:**

*One by one, the villagers transform into horrible undead monstrosities. Most appear similar, with shambling gaits and rotting flesh, but two appear more powerful and more intelligent. One of these has a globule of rotting flesh in its remaining hand. The other, and most animate, has tendrils of eldritch energy running from its hand to its eyes. All seem ravenous for your flesh!*

**TACTICS**

If the villagers transform, they attack the PCs viciously, with little regard for their own safety. No vestige of their humanity during the day remains with them at night. The undead try to stop the PCs from opening the door to the inn by blocking it or bull rushing PCs away from it.

**Corruption Corpse (C) Level 4 Artillery**  
Medium natural animate (undead) XP 175

**Initiative** +3 **Senses** Perception +3; darkvision  
**Grave Stench** aura 1; living enemies in the aura take a -5 penalty to attack rolls.  
**HP** 46; **Bloodied** 23; see also *death burst*  
**Regeneration** 5 (if the corruption corpse takes radiant damage, its regeneration doesn't function on its next turn)  
**AC** 17; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14  
**Immune** disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant  
**Speed** 4  
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)  
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.  
↗ **Mote of Corruption** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Necrotic**  
The corruption corpse hurls a black glob of necrotic filth. Ranged 10; +7 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).  
⚡ **Death Burst** (when reduced to 0 hit points) ♦ **Necrotic**  
The corruption corpse explodes. Close burst 1; +7 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 3 necrotic damage.  
**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –  
**Str** 16 (+5) **Dex** 13 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+3)  
**Con** 16 (+5) **Int** 4 (-1) **Cha** 3 (-2)

**12 Zombie Rotters (Z) Level 3 Minion**  
Medium natural animate (undead) XP 38 each

**Initiative** -2 **Senses** Perception -1; darkvision  
**HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.  
**AC** 13; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 9, **Will** 10  
**Immune** disease, poison  
**Speed** 4  
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)  
+6 vs. AC; 5 damage.  
**Alignment** Unaligned **Languages** –  
**Str** 14 (+2) **Dex** 6 (-2) **Wis** 8 (-1)  
**Con** 10 (+0) **Int** 1 (-5) **Cha** 3 (-4)

**Deathlock Wight (W) Level 4 Controller**  
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 175

**Initiative** +4 **Senses** Perception +1; darkvision  
**HP** 54; **Bloodied** 27  
**AC** 18; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 17  
**Immune** disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant  
**Speed** 6  
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Necrotic**  
+9 vs. AC; 1d6 necrotic damage, and the target loses 1 healing surge.  
↗ **Grave Bolt** (standard; at-will) ♦ **Necrotic**  
Ranged 20; +6 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).  
↗ **Reanimate** (minor; encounter) ♦ **Healing, Necrotic**  
Ranged 10; affects a destroyed undead creature of a level no higher than the deathlock wight's level + 2; the target stands as a free action with a number of hit points equal to one-half its bloodied value.  
⚡ **Horrific Visage** (standard; recharge ☹☹☹) ♦ **Fear**  
Close blast 5; +7 vs. Will; 1d6 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.  
**Alignment** Evil **Languages** Common  
**Skills** Arcana +10, Religion +10  
**Str** 10 (+2) **Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 9 (+1)  
**Con** 14 (+4) **Int** 16 (+5) **Cha** 18 (+6)

## PART 4: THE ROAD TO RELKINGHAM

Regardless of how the PCs got out of Hamona, the road eventually passes by a burned-out schoolhouse. Tendrils of smoke can be seen for miles around coming from the schoolhouse. See encounter T3 for more information on what occurs before the group reaches Relkingham.

### VECNITE AMBUSH

**Encounter Level 3 (825 XP)**

#### SETUP

If the PCs left by the road, they continue on toward Relkingham. Roll once on the Road Encounters table. If the PCs left through the secret tunnel in the jail, roll once on Tunnel Encounters table.

- 3 Vecnite thugs (T)
- 1 cult berserker (B)
- 1 Vecnite mage (M)
- 1 dire rat (D)

They come upon a mostly charred, but still partially intact, schoolhouse. Its supports and overall structure are intact, but there are gaping holes in the floor and loose, smoldering beams that could fall down at any moment.

**Read the following when they move near the building:**

*A few hundred feet from the road, you can see a burned-out schoolhouse, and some of its beams are still smoldering with dying flames. The building appears mostly intact, though it is probably not very stable.*

**If the PCs investigate around the building, read the following:**

*Parts of the schoolhouse floor appear to have caved in under the weight of falling beams. These holes descend about 10 feet to pits. The door of the schoolhouse is slightly ajar.*

If all the PCs enter the building, the Vecnites ambush them. If after a while, only a few PCs enter, the Vecnites still conduct their ambush, but leave out one or two of their number to search for the other PCs.

When the PCs enter the schoolhouse, read the following:

*Desks and chairs are overturned or smashed. Some have fallen into 10-foot deep pits in the floor. Roof beams are hanging down into the room, seeming ready to fall at any moment. There appear to be no other exits in the room.*



<b>Dire Rat (D)</b> Medium natural beast	<b>Level 1 Brute</b> XP 100
<b>Initiative</b> +2 <b>Senses</b> Perception +5; low-light vision	
<b>HP</b> 38; <b>Bloodied</b> 19	
<b>AC</b> 15; <b>Fortitude</b> 15, <b>Reflex</b> 13, <b>Will</b> 11	
<b>Immune</b> filth fever (see below)	
<b>Speed</b> 6, climb 3	
↓ <b>Bite</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Disease</b> +4 vs. AC; 1d6 + 2 damage, and the target contracts filth fever (see below).	
<b>Alignment</b> Unaligned	<b>Languages</b> –
<b>Skills</b> Stealth +7	
<b>Str</b> 14 (+2)	<b>Dex</b> 15 (+2) <b>Wis</b> 10 (+0)
<b>Con</b> 18 (+4)	<b>Int</b> 3 (-4) <b>Cha</b> 6 (-2)

<b>3 Vecnite Thugs (T)</b> Medium natural humanoid	<b>Level 2 Skirmisher</b> XP 125 each
<b>Initiative</b> +6 <b>Senses</b> Perception +1; low-light vision	
<b>HP</b> 37; <b>Bloodied</b> 18	
<b>AC</b> 16; <b>Fortitude</b> 12, <b>Reflex</b> 14, <b>Will</b> 12	
<b>Speed</b> 6	
↓ <b>Club</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Weapon</b> +6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 1 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.	
↗ <b>Dagger</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Weapon</b> Ranged 5/10; +6 vs. AC; 1d4 + 3 damage.	
↓ <b>Dazing Strike</b> (standard; encounter) ♦ <b>Weapon</b> Requires club; +4 vs. AC; 1d8 + 1 damage, the target is dazed until the end of the Vecnite thug's next turn, and the Vecnite thug shifts 1 square.	
<b>Combat Advantage</b> The Vecnite thug deals an extra 1d6 damage on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.	
<b>Alignment</b> Any	<b>Languages</b> Common
<b>Skills</b> Stealth +9, Streetwise +7, Thievery +9	
<b>Str</b> 12 (+2)	<b>Dex</b> 17 (+4) <b>Wis</b> 11 (+1)
<b>Con</b> 13 (+2)	<b>Int</b> 10 (+1) <b>Cha</b> 12 (+2)
<b>Equipment</b> leather armor, club, 4 daggers	

<b>Vecnite Mage (M)</b> Medium natural humanoid	<b>Level 4 Artillery (Leader)</b> XP 175
<b>Initiative</b> +4 <b>Senses</b> Perception +5, low-light vision	
<b>HP</b> 42; <b>Bloodied</b> 21	
<b>AC</b> 17; <b>Fortitude</b> 13, <b>Reflex</b> 14, <b>Will</b> 15	
<b>Speed</b> 6	
↓ <b>Dagger</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Weapon</b> +4 vs. AC; 1d4 damage.	
↗ <b>Thunder Blast</b> (standard; at-will) ♦ <b>Thunder</b> Close blast 3; +8 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 5 thunder damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.	
↗ <b>Lightning Arcs</b> (standard; encounter) ♦ <b>Lightning</b> The mage makes a separate attack against 3 different targets: Ranged 10; +8 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 5 lightning damage.	
<b>Alignment</b> Any	<b>Languages</b> Common
<b>Skills</b> Arcana +11	
<b>Str</b> 10 (+2)	<b>Dex</b> 14 (+4) <b>Wis</b> 17 (+5)
<b>Con</b> 12 (+3)	<b>Int</b> 18 (+6) <b>Cha</b> 12 (+3)
<b>Equipment</b> robes, quarterstaff, wand	

### TACTICS

The Vecnites are prepared for a quick and brutal ambush, but don't want to stick around for a protracted battle. If the PCs start to gain the advantage in the battle, the Vecnites try to flee. If the PCs prevent the Vecnites from fleeing, check the success box under ambush. If any escape, check the failure box because the Vecnites flee to the cult and send aid to Avonathemon.

### FEATURES OF THE AREA

**Illumination:** Sunlight comes through some of the boarded up windows, but the entire area is considered low-light unless the PCs pull out a light source. The Vecnites are all half-elves, so they have no difficulty with the lack of light.

**Rough Terrain:** Any square adjacent to a pit is considered rough terrain.





## PART 5: RELKINGHAM

After the group deals with the ambush, the remaining journey to Relkingham is short. Include a random encounter from the Road Encounters table if you think it's necessary. Otherwise, proceed to Relkingham.

### When the PCs arrive, read the following:

*As you approach Relkingham, you sense that something is amiss. When you move closer, you see a large crowd gathered in the town square opposite the temple.*

### When they are closer, read:

*Sharona, a maiden known for her beauty and love of gossip, comes up to you and says, "Have you heard? The vizier has come to Relkingham on official business. Isn't it exciting!?" Giggling, she continues, "Apparently, he kicked all the priests out of the temple of Erathis and has locked himself in with his supporters from Wyllea. I think he's praying for a miracle from Erathis to end the drought. Oh, how did the petition to Founder Neelani go?"*

The PCs can make small talk with Sharona or move on toward the temple. When the PCs approach the temple, they see that the priests have indeed been kicked out of the temple. Two of the senior priests are arguing over how to proceed. The conversation starts as follows, but adjust it as needed if the PCs decide to join in.

*One priest, a grizzled man in his forties, says to another one who is about a decade older, "I can't stand for this anymore.*

*Avonathemon has crossed a line. The sacrifice tariff must not go through. It is not what's best for our flock."*

*The older man looks thoughtful and says, "It is not our place to question the high priest, Father Bartok. He speaks for our lord and his word is the law."*

*Father Bartok opens his mouth to say something, then sees you. "Lads! You've returned!! What did Founder Neelani say? Did she listen to our petition?"*

*As he's speaking, the mayor rushes up to you, in a panic. "So what did she say? Did she agree with our arguments?"*

*The mayor is cut short by a massive explosion. Glass explodes from the roof of the temple as a column of darkness descends from the sky into the temple. All the townsfolk start rushing around in a panic, screaming, "Do something! The high priest is under attack!"*

The high priest is not under attack. He is the source of the column, which represents Vecna's approval of the numerous sacrifices placed upon the altar.

## THE TEMPLE IN RELKINGHAM

The following areas are in the temple. When the PCs enter the temple, they are in area 1. However, this information is secondary to the encounter that takes place here, so in most cases you might need to refer to encounter T4 before you read aloud any of the text below.

### AREA 1: TEMPLE

#### If the PCs enter the next room, read:

*The temple is a scene out of a nightmare. Previously, murals of peace and civilization decorated the walls. These are splattered with blood and gore. The numerous magic torches do little to lighten the room because of the column of darkness streaming from the hole in the ceiling down to the*

*altar. The altar is pure black, with pulsing purple veins that beat in time with the column. Human body parts, especially eyes and hands, spill out from atop the altar. Some are being consumed in flames.*

A ritual circle sits in the northwest corner of the room untouched, as does a ritual pool. A number of braziers barely add light to the dim temple.

Avonathemon is kneeling in supplication. He wears a black body-length robe with pulsing purple veins similar to those of the altar. He has significant bulk under the clothes from his physique and his chain armor. Hanging from his neck are both the armor symbol of Erathis and the severed hand and eye symbol of Vecna. He has both of his hands and eyes intact and is holding these out in a traditional prayer expression. A wide arc of floating severed hands and disembodied eyes surround him, seeming to protect him and to menace any who come near him. Sitting on the altar, pristine above the severed flesh, is the edict.

As you enter, his eyes flash upon you and he screams, "Keep them away from the edict!" He continues to chant rapidly as the guards and undead servitors charge you.

Depending on the results of the Event Success or Failure table, the guards rushing the PCs might be Vecnite thugs or cult berserkers. Whichever they are, there are two guards, one deathlock wight, and four zombie rotters.

If a PC touches the column of darkness, that PC is weakened (save ends). If the PC moves through it, that PC is stunned until the end of his or her next turn, falls (taking 1d10 damage), and is weakened (save ends).

## AREA 2: COMMUNAL BEDCHAMBER

**When they enter, read:**

*You enter into what looks like a communal bedchamber. Six beds are neatly made in the room, and everburning torches light each corner as well as the middle. Chests sit next to each bed. The door leading to the next room is closed, but it does not appear to be locked. Sounds of chanting are coming from the next room.*

A DC 20 Perception check reveals droplets of blood leading from this room into the next.

**Treasure:** The chest contain a total of 500 gp and a number of ritual items sacred to .

## AREA 3: STOREROOM

**If the PCs enter the next room, read:**

*This is a small storeroom full of crates.*

**If the PCs open the crates, read:**

*The crates contain frankincense, myrrh, and other priestly ritual components.*

**Treasure:** The PCs probably won't steal the temple's ritual components, but if they do, the components are worth about 500 gp.

## AREA 4: OFFICE

**If the PCs enter the next room, read:**

*This is a large and opulent office. Numerous books are housed on six tall bookcases, which surround a heavy desk covered in papers.*

**Treasure:** The PCs probably won't steal the temple's documents and books, but if they wish to, the only value might be historical.

## AREA 5: STOREROOM

**If the PCs enter the next room, read:**

*This is a large storeroom with numerous barrels.*

An investigation of the barrels reveals that they contain ale. A successful DC 20 Perception check reveals a secret trapdoor that leads into tunnels under the village.

**Treasure:** The ale is worth about 25 gp.

## AREA 6: BEDCHAMBER

**If the PCs enter the next room, read:**

*This is an opulent bedchamber, the back half of which is taken up by a massive bed. Three chests sit at the foot of the bed and a brazier sits near the door.*

**Treasure:** The chest contains simple clerical vestments, personal effects, and other belongings of Father Porel.

## AREA 7: MEETING ROOM

**If the PCs enter the next room, read:**

*This is a simple meeting room with a long, rectangular table surrounded by eight stools.*

Nothing of particular interest is contained in this chamber.



## FINAL CONFRONTATION

Encounter Level 4 (927 XP or 1,179 XP)

### SETUP

At this point, it is likely that the PCs go to the temple to see what is causing the massive column of darkness that is streaming down into the temple. To determine the difficulty of the encounter with Avonathemon and his lackeys, consult the Event Success or Failure and Results tables.

**Avonathemon (A)**

**2 Vecnite thugs or cult berserkers (T)**

**1 deathlock wight (D)**

**8 zombie rotters (R)**

If the PCs investigate around the temple, read:

*Despite the column of darkness, the rest of the temple seems untouched. There appears to be only one entrance on the side of the building.*

If any of the PCs are from Relkingham, or are priests of Erathis, it's reasonable to give them an approximate layout of the building.

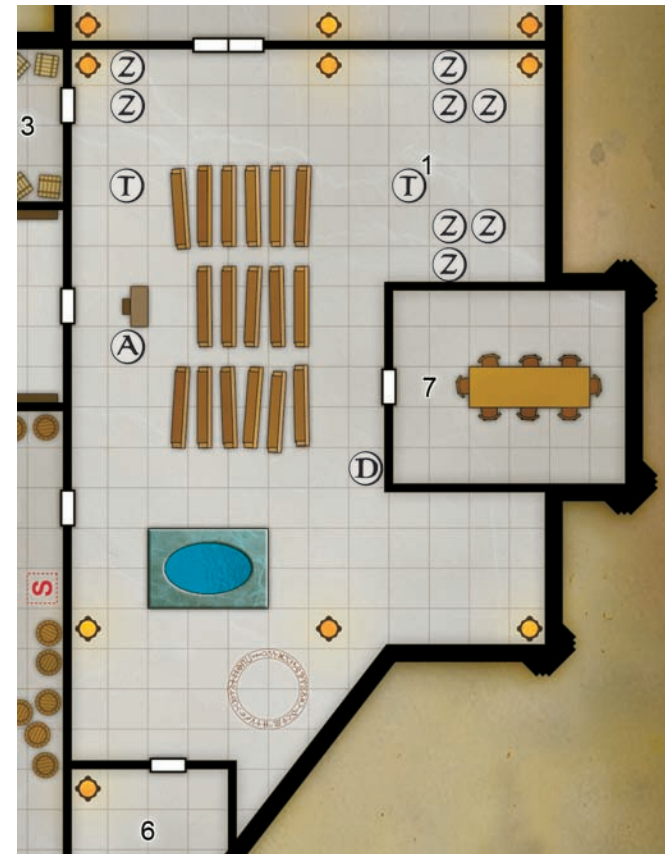


<b>2 Vecnite Thugs (T)</b>	<b>Level 2 Skirmisher</b>
Medium natural humanoid	XP 125 each
<b>Initiative</b> +6	<b>Senses Perception</b> +1
<b>HP</b> 37; <b>Bloodied</b> 18	
<b>AC</b> 16; <b>Fortitude</b> 12, <b>Reflex</b> 14, <b>Will</b> 12	
<b>Speed</b> 6	
⬇ <b>Club</b> (standard; at-will) ⬆ <b>Weapon</b>	
+6 vs. AC; 1d6 + 1 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.	
⤴ <b>Dagger</b> (standard; at-will) ⬆ <b>Weapon</b>	
Ranged 5/10; +6 vs. AC; 1d4 + 3 damage.	
⬇ <b>Dazing Strike</b> (standard; encounter) ⬆ <b>Weapon</b>	
Requires club; +4 vs. AC; 1d8 + 1 damage, the target is dazed until the end of the Vecnite thug's next turn, and the Vecnite thug shifts 1 square.	
<b>Combat Advantage</b>	
The Vecnite thug deals an extra 1d6 damage on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.	
<b>Alignment</b> Any	<b>Languages</b> Common
<b>Skills</b> Stealth +9, Streetwise +7, Thievery +9	
<b>Str</b> 12 (+2)	<b>Dex</b> 17 (+4) <b>Wis</b> 11 (+1)
<b>Con</b> 13 (+2)	<b>Int</b> 10 (+1) <b>Cha</b> 12 (+2)
<b>Equipment</b> leather armor, club, 4 daggers	

<b>2 Cult Berserker (T)</b>	<b>Level 4 Brute</b>
Medium natural humanoid	XP 175
<b>Initiative</b> +3	<b>Senses Perception</b> +2
<b>HP</b> 66; <b>Bloodied</b> 33; see also <i>battle fury</i>	
<b>AC</b> 15; <b>Fortitude</b> 15, <b>Reflex</b> 14, <b>Will</b> 14	
<b>Speed</b> 7	
⬇ <b>Greataxe</b> (standard; at-will) ⬆ <b>Weapon</b>	
+8 vs. AC; 1d12 + 4 damage (crit 1d12 + 16).	
⬇ <b>Battle Fury</b> (free, when first bloodied; encounter)	
The cult berserker makes a melee basic attack with a +4 bonus to the attack roll and deals an extra 1d6 damage on a hit.	
⤴ <b>Handaxe</b> (standard; at-will) ⬆ <b>Weapon</b>	
Ranged 5/10; +5 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.	
<b>Alignment</b> Any	<b>Languages</b> Common
<b>Skills</b> Athletics +9, Endurance +9	
<b>Str</b> 17 (+5)	<b>Dex</b> 12 (+3) <b>Wis</b> 11 (+2)
<b>Con</b> 16 (+5)	<b>Int</b> 10 (+2) <b>Cha</b> 12 (+3)
<b>Equipment</b> hide armor, greataxe, 2 handaxes	

<b>Deathlock Wight (D)</b>	<b>Level 4 Controller</b>
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 175
<b>Initiative</b> +4	<b>Senses Perception</b> +1; darkvision
<b>HP</b> 54; <b>Bloodied</b> 27	
<b>AC</b> 18; <b>Fortitude</b> 15, <b>Reflex</b> 16, <b>Will</b> 17	
<b>Immune</b> disease, poison; <b>Resist</b> 10 necrotic; <b>Vulnerable</b> 5 radiant	
<b>Speed</b> 6	
⬇ <b>Claw</b> (standard; at-will) ⬆ <b>Necrotic</b>	
+9 vs. AC; 1d6 necrotic damage, and the target loses 1 healing surge.	
⤴ <b>Grave Bolt</b> (standard; at-will) ⬆ <b>Necrotic</b>	
Ranged 20; +6 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).	
⤴ <b>Reanimate</b> (minor; encounter) ⬆ <b>Healing, Necrotic</b>	
Ranged 10; affects a destroyed undead creature of a level no higher than the deathlock wight's level + 2; the target stands as a free action with a number of hit points equal to one-half its bloodied value.	
⬅ <b>Horrific Visage</b> (standard; recharge ⓂⓂⓂⓂ) ⬆ <b>Fear</b>	
Close blast 5; +7 vs. Will; 1d6 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.	
<b>Alignment</b> Evil	<b>Languages</b> Common
<b>Skills</b> Arcana +10, Religion +10	
<b>Str</b> 10 (+2)	<b>Dex</b> 14 (+4) <b>Wis</b> 9 (+1)
<b>Con</b> 14 (+4)	<b>Int</b> 16 (+5) <b>Cha</b> 18 (+6)

<b>8 Zombie Rotters (Z)</b>	<b>Level 3 Minion</b>
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 38 each
<b>Initiative</b> -2	<b>Senses Perception</b> -1; darkvision
<b>HP</b> 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
<b>AC</b> 13; <b>Fortitude</b> 13, <b>Reflex</b> 9, <b>Will</b> 10	
<b>Immune</b> disease, poison	
<b>Speed</b> 4	
⬇ <b>Slam</b> (standard; at-will)	
+6 vs. AC; 5 damage.	
<b>Alignment</b> Unaligned	<b>Languages</b> -
<b>Str</b> 14 (+2)	<b>Dex</b> 6 (-2) <b>Wis</b> 8 (-1)
<b>Con</b> 10 (+0)	<b>Int</b> 1 (-5) <b>Cha</b> 3 (-4)



**Avonathemon**    **Level 4 Elite Controller (Leader)**  
 Medium natural humanoid    XP 350

**Initiative** +6    **Senses** Perception +13

**Ring of Hands** aura 5; creatures in the aura cannot regain hit points. Undead in the aura gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls, damage rolls, and defenses.

**HP** 110; **Bloodied** 55  
**AC** 18; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 21  
**Saving Throws** +2  
**Speed** 5  
**Action Points** 1

⊕ **Dagger** (standard; at-will)  
 +9 vs. AC; 1d4 + 4 plus 1d6 necrotic damage

↗ **Death Bolt** (standard; at-will) ◆ **Necrotic**  
 Ranged 10; +8 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 6 necrotic damage and the target is immobilized (save ends).

↗ **Hurl into Darkness** (minor; encounter) ◆ **Necrotic**  
 Ranged 10; +8 vs. Will; 3d6 + 6 necrotic damage and the character teleports into the column of darkness that is streaming down on the altar. The character is stunned until the end of Avonathemon's next turn and weakened (save ends). Afterward, the character falls to the floor next to the altar, taking 1d10 falling damage.

⊕ **Touch of Corruption** (standard; recharge ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞)  
 +8 vs. Will; the target is dominated (save ends).

**Alignment** Evil    **Languages** Common

**Skills** Bluff +10, Insight +12, Intimidate +10, Religion +9  
**Str** 16 (+5)    **Dex** 11 (+2)    **Wis** 20 (+7)  
**Con** 15 (+4)    **Int** 15 (+4)    **Cha** 16 (+5)

**Equipment** chain mail, dagger, holy symbol, cloak, scroll of Speak with Dead, scroll of Detect Secret Doors

## TACTICS

Avonathemon prefers to let the guards and undead take care of the PCs. In the beginning, he relies on his ranged attacks, trying to neutralize PCs temporarily by hurling them into the column. If the PCs move close, he starts to use his touch of corruption. If that doesn't recharge, he strikes with his dagger.

Avonathemon doesn't intend to surrender. He fights until either the PCs are dead or he is.

## FEATURES OF THE AREA

**Illumination:** Everburning torches flicker along the walls, but because of the area's current conditions, only dim light is available.

**Doors:** None of the doors, including the front door to the communal bedchamber, are locked.

**Walls:** The DC to climb the inner and outer walls is 20. The walls have easy handholds.

## CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the PCs defeat Avonathemon, the edict never gets instated. He is too occupied during the battle to finish the chant to invoke the edict. If he defeats the PCs, the edict is invoked and he can claim that the PCs were responsible for the column or that he drove the responsible party off.

If the PCs are successful, Relkingham's drought ceases and the town throws them a banquet and a parade, attended by the mayor and Founder Neelani. Investigations are begun about the Vecnites and this might lead to further adventurers in Delornen where the PCs try to root out the cult.

The mayor is likely to provide an additional reward. You might choose for him to give more money or to entertain requests of the PCs, based on the type of campaign you are running. ✕

### About the Author

**Eytan Bernstein** hails from exotic Long Island and spends his days writing and editing projects for numerous game companies. In addition to his work on *Dragons of Faerûn*, *Adventurer's Vault*, and numerous other projects, Eytan serves as a partner and PR and Marketing Manager for Silven Publishing. Eytan enjoys hunting for gems and minerals in rock quarries, studying religion and theology, composing music, and playing with his many pets. For more information about Eytan, check out [www.eytanbernstein.com](http://www.eytanbernstein.com).