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TOM CARTOS



# NECROMANCER'S SANCTUM

*BATTLE THE UNDEAD EMPRESS AND DETHRONE HER REIGN OF  
TERROR.*

# NECROMANCER'S SANCTUM



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# Adventure Primer

## CREDITS

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## RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

To run this adventure, you need the Fifth Edition core rulebooks.

Text that appears in a box like this is meant to be read aloud or paraphrased for the players when their characters first arrive at a location or under a specific circumstance, as described in the text.

The core 5th Edition monster book contains stat blocks for most of the creatures found in this adventure. Monster stat blocks created specifically for this adventure will be included at the end. When a creature's name appears in **bold** type, that's a visual cue pointing you to its stat block in the core monster book. If the monster is not included in the core monster book, it will be included in the appendices of the adventure.

### Adjusting Encounters

This adventure contains advice for adjusting encounters based on the number of characters in the party. You are empowered to modify the number of enemies in an encounter and their hit point totals as you see fit. If you need to adjust the difficulty of an encounter during combat, you can alter hit point totals without the player characters ever knowing and have enemies retreat or reinforcements arrive as needed.

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this adventure:

|     |                     |
|-----|---------------------|
| hp  | hit points          |
| AC  | Armor Class         |
| DC  | Difficulty Class    |
| XP  | experience points   |
| pp  | platinum piece(s)   |
| gp  | gold piece(s)       |
| ep  | electrum piece(s)   |
| sp  | silver piece(s)     |
| cp  | copper piece(s)     |
| NPC | nonplayer character |
| LG  | Lawful Good         |
| NG  | Neutral Good        |
| LN  | Lawful Neutral      |
| N   | Neutral             |
| CN  | Chaotic Neutral     |
| LE  | Lawful Evil         |
| CE  | Chaotic Evil        |
| NE  | Neutral Evil        |

# Necromancer's Sanctum

*Necromancer's Sanctum is a Fifth Edition adventure for 3 to 7 characters of 13th to 14th level, and is optimized for 5 characters with an average party level (APL) of 13.*

## BACKGROUND

Seipris the Soulkeeper holds dominion over a subterranean empire of ghouls, vampires, and other undead. Deep beneath the surface in lightless tunnels and vast chambers, the civilized ghouls of the empire carved glory from flesh and stone under Seipris' leadership. She led the empire to victory against the humanoids, and now that race is all but extinct in any territory the ghouls control.

The ghouls are content to reside in the lightless depths beneath the earth for now, but Seipris muses about what prizes exist under the sky. To this end, she tends to operate out of an enchanted sanctum capable of teleporting throughout the material plane in places where the underworld meets the surface.

Seipris' activities near the surface have earned her a fearsome reputation, drawing the attention of adventurers throughout the realm.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

You can use the following adventure hooks to key your players up for this adventure.

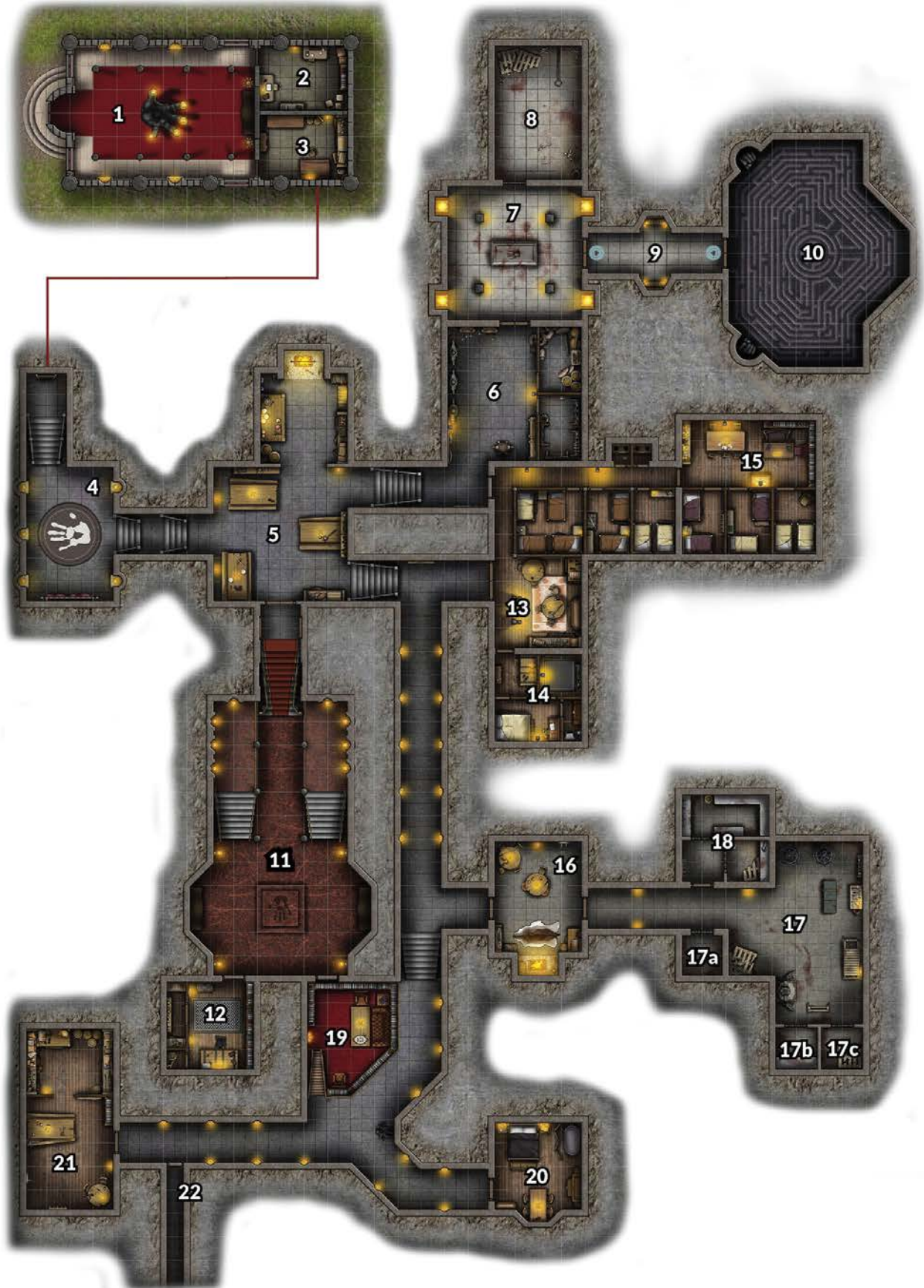
**Infiltration.** Use this hook if the characters want to use subterfuge to enter the necromancer's sanctum. The characters are hired off-the-record by city guard to investigate a temple that appeared out of nowhere nearby. The characters make contact with a gullible cultist named Hew (male human **cultist**) that knows where the necromancer's sanctum is currently located. With Hew's assistance, the characters can enter the sanctum without drawing too much attention.

While Hew is with the characters, they have advantage on checks made to deceive creatures into believing that they're evil cultists.

**Unnatural Corruption.** Use this hook if the characters have good-aligned paladins, clerics, or druids. A halfling **druid** named Lily reaches out to the characters through an animal messenger (a badger, crab, or other regionally-appropriate beast). The beast conveys Lily's desire for them to investigate the presence of a temple that spontaneously appeared above a set of caves. Kidnappings and undead sightings have spiked since the temple appeared. If the characters agree, Lily escorts them to within 600 feet of the necromancer's sanctum.

**Merchant's Bane.** Use this hook if the characters are primarily motivated by monetary compensation. A grumpy merchant lord (**commoner**) named Nadya has traced the necromancer's sanctum to its current location based on how it's disrupting trade and inflating missing persons reports. They offer the characters 2,000 gp to eliminate the sanctum's inhabitants. They mark the sanctum's present location on a map for the characters.

# NECROMANCER'S TEMPLE



TOM CARTOS | PATREON

## NECROMANCER'S SANCTUM

The necromancer's sanctum is a building enchanted with powerful conjuration magic that allows it to be teleported throughout the realm.

### General Features

Unless otherwise noted, locations in Necromancer's Sanctum have the following features.

**Ceilings and Walls.** The stone ceilings and walls are 9 feet tall and 5 feet thick.

**Floors.** The floors are composed of stone tiles that have become cracked and dirtied from neglect.

**Doors.** All of the sanctum's stone doors are 4 inches thick, 5 feet wide, and 6 feet tall. The doors lack handles, and instead have hand-shaped indentations to push from either side. Except where otherwise noted, all of the doors are unlocked.

A locked door can be opened by succeeding on a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. A creature that is proficient with thieves' tools can pick a locked door with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check.

**Lighting.** The halls of the necromancer's sanctum are dimly lit by *continual flame* lanterns.

**Climate.** The air in the sanctum is perpetually cold and damp, regardless of the conditions outdoors.

**Desecrated.** The entire sanctum was desecrated by Seipris. The sanctum is under the effects of a 9th level *hallow* spell. The *hallow* spell can only be removed by *wish*. Casting *dispel magic* on the sanctum suppresses the *hallow* spell for 1 hour. The sanctum is subject to the following effects, which affect creatures that are not loyal to Seipris:

- Celestials, elementals, fey, and fiends can't enter the area, nor can such creatures charm, frighten, or possess creatures within it. Any creature charmed, frightened, or possessed by such a creature is no longer charmed, frightened, or possessed upon entering the area.
- **Energy Vulnerability.** Affected creatures have vulnerability to necrotic damage.

When a creature that would be affected enters the sanctum for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there, it can make a DC 19 Charisma saving throw. On a success, the creature ignores the Energy Vulnerability effect until it leaves the area.

The following locations are keyed to the map of Necromancer's Sanctum.

## 1 - The Black Hand

A wide red carpet stretches from the entrance to the far wall of this 80-foot-long, 60-foot-wide room. At its center is a preserved and blackened giant's hand with braziers at the tips of its outstretched fingertips. There are two doors on the eastern wall, one to the north and one to the south.

**Encounter: Cultists.** There are two **commoners** and three **cultists** praying before the black hand, all of whom are wearing plain robes.

## 2 - Office of the Occult

Two large desks are pushed up against the north and west walls. Boxes are stacked against the eastern wall and a stack of chairs is shoved into the southeast corner.

## 3 - Storage

Desks, chairs, and shelves are placed against all four walls of this room.

**Secret: Trapdoor.** A character standing within 5 feet of the desk along the southern wall that succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check or has a passive Perception of 17 discovers a pressure-sensitive tile beneath the desk. Putting 5 pounds of force on the tile causes a 5-foot square of tiles to curl into the floor, revealing a ladder that leads below ground.

If the characters fail to discover the trapdoor, after 1 minute a **cultist** opens the trapdoor from the other side. They are surprised by the characters and fall prone at the bottom of the ladder in the sanctum foyer (area 4).

## 4 - Sanctum Foyer

Candle-lit alcoves cast dim light on a large, round platform with a white hand painted onto it. To the north, a set of stairs leads up to a ladder. To the east, a flight of stairs descends further into the necromancer's sanctum.

## 5 - Dining Room

Three 12-foot-long dining tables lit by candles placed at their center fill this room. Shelves above the tables are lined with simple mugs, tins, and other eating implements. In an attached room to the north, a fire pit is crackling, spreading warmth and the aroma of fresh meat through the area.

**Encounter: Vampires and Cultists.** Seated at separate tables sharpening their weapons and chatting about their latest victims are two **vampire spawns** and two **cultist bruisers** for every two characters in the party. Additionally, there is one **commoner** in the attached kitchen preparing a meal.

The vampires and cultists are hungry to prove themselves to their superiors, eagerly taking up the opportunity to strike down intruders. If half of them are killed, one of the remaining creatures flees to the lounge (area 13) to alert their superiors of the characters.

**Attached Kitchen.** The commoner in the kitchen is an old human named Ralph that cooks, cleans, and performs all manner of menial tasks for the residents of the necromancer's sanctum. Ralph does this on the promise that one day the vampires will turn him into a thrall, granting him eternal life—he has served them for 40 years waiting on the delivery of this promise, and he will wait for the remainder of his life.

The food being prepared is a mixture of veel and elven flesh, paired with a variety of herbs and spices. A character that tastes the food and succeeds on a DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) check recognizes the meats for what they are.





## 6 - Armory

This room is equipped with three armored straw dummies, a wooden dummy, and two archery targets placed around the perimeter of the room.

**6a. Armor Room.** This room is filled with shields haphazardly set against the walls of this room. There are 15 wooden shields set out and 4 sets of studded leather armor inside of boxes.

**6b. Weapons Room.** This room features four weapon racks. There are 4 pikes, 10 spears, 1 greataxe, and 10 longswords.

## 7 - Bloodletting Chamber

Four large braziers in the corners of the room and four smaller candlesticks placed on pillars illuminate a rectangular stone coffin with a hand etched into its center. Dried blood stains the coffin and the pale stone tiles around it.

**Encounter: Ghoulish Sacrifice.** There are four **ghouls** standing around the stone coffin (see “Stone Coffin” below). They have just sealed the stone coffin shut with a sacrificial human (**commoner**) trapped inside. The human man can be heard shouting and banging on the stone, which does not budge. The ghouls attempt to fend off any intrusions. The characters have three rounds to remove the coffin’s lid, otherwise the trapped man goes silent as a burst of necrotic magic kills him.

The man trapped inside the coffin is named Olenor. He’s a portly man that’s constantly stressed out, with due reason at the moment.

**Stone Coffin.** The stone coffin is magically linked to the ritual chamber and used to sacrifice humanoids (see area 10 for more details). Humanoids trapped inside the stone coffin for 3 rounds experience a burst of magic; If the humanoid has 100 hit points or fewer, it dies. Otherwise, the coffin has no effect. Removing the lid disables the necrotic magic that kills creatures inside the coffin. The lid of the stone coffin weighs 40 pounds and requires a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to push open. Alternatively, a *dispel magic* spell suppresses the coffin’s magic for 1 minute.



## 8 - Holding Cell

This 60-foot-deep, 40-foot-wide chamber stretches north from the bloodletting chamber. There are 13 **commoners** (human, orc, elves, and halflings) and one **ettin** huddled in chains against the walls.

## 9 - Enchanted Hall

This hall is protected by enchantments carved into the floor on either end. In the center, there are two alcoves lined with wooden candle-lit altars.

**Enchantment of Terrors.** Glowing runes etched into the floor protect this room. A successful DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the enchantment is embedded into the fiber of reality and cannot be permanently removed without the use of *wish*. A *dispel magic* spell can suppress the hall's magic for 1 minute. When a creature that has not been designated by Seipris steps into this hall, they must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a creature becomes frightened for 1 minute. The illusion calls on the creature's deepest fears, manifesting its worst nightmares as an implacable threat. At the end of each of the frightened creature's turns, it must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or take 4d10 psychic damage. On a successful save, the spell ends for that creature.

## 10 - Ritual Chamber

This room is plunged in magical darkness. Its obsidian floor is etched with a maze connected to two stone statues of closed fists set in alcoves to the north and south.

**Blood Maze.** A creature that succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check can find a few droplets of blood left in the maze. When a creature is sacrificed in the stone coffin in the bloodletting chamber (area 7), their blood is funneled into the statues of closed fists, which ekes out of their grip and collects in the maze below. After two medium-sized creatures are sacrificed, the blood fills the maze and reaches its center. Once the blood has settled, a creature can cast the *create undead* spell, which consumes the maze's blood in addition to the standard components. Undead created this way obey the caster's commands indefinitely.

**Encounter: Seipris the Soulkeeper.** Seipris (**Empress of the Ghouls**) is in this room preparing to conduct a ritual in the chamber to create more undead.

If the characters successfully prevented the sacrifice from occurring in the bloodletting chamber (area 8), Seipris is inspecting the dry stone fist to the southwest, trying to determine why blood isn't flowing. If they did not prevent the ritual, Seipris has spent her 9th level spell slot to create [# undead], which fight alongside her.

Seipris has a soul of steel and hunger like the deepest chasms of the underworld. Despite her ambition, she is extremely civilized and urbane, treating even hated enemies with strict courtesy even up to the moment that she devours their bones. She allows the characters an opportunity to leave her lair unharmed if they cause no further damage. Otherwise, she relishes in the opportunity to turn such strong creatures into undead of her own.



## 11 - Gathering Room

An ornate staircase with a burgundy runner descends from the northern door between a set of balconies toward an open floor made of red marble. In the center of the floor is a small platform with a hand etched into it. To the south, there are two stone doors.

**Platform.** While a creature stands on the platform, their voice booms up to three times as loud as normal.

## 12 - Office

The other side of the door is flanked by a chest to the west and a fully-stocked bookshelf that runs the length of the eastern wall. Against the southern wall is a large blood-stained wooden desk bathed in candlelight. The western wall is cut off by a wooden divider with two doors.

**Desk.** A **+2 dagger** and three notebooks lay on the blood-stained desk. The notebook is sealed by magic. To open a notebook, a creature must use the knife to drip their blood onto its cover, taking 2 slashing damage. Alternatively, a character can remove the magic with a *dispel magic* spell (treat the magic seal as a 5th level spell). Each notebook detail a long list of nobles, merchants, sailors, and more that serve as informants for the necromancer's cult. The list includes the leverage that the cult holds over each person.

**Divider.** The wooden divider contains two rooms: a small closet with a broom and bucket, and a shrine with a row of slow-burning candles that smell like oil and salt.

## 13 - Lounge

Two round tables with three chairs each occupy the bulk of this square room. Pushed against the eastern and southern walls are several shelves occupied by small chests, trinkets, beer kegs, and more. A hall to the north winds around a block of three guest rooms and a latrine.

**Encounter: Cultist Bruisers.** There is one **cultist bruiser** for every two characters in the party idling in the lounge, drinking ale over dry bread. If a fight breaks out here, the **vampire** in the head office (area 15) approaches, their footsteps echoing through the northern hall.

**Rooms.** There are three rooms, each outfitted with beds and nightstands. There are two **cultist bruisers** fast asleep. They can only be woken by shaking them awake.



## 14 - Bodyguard's Quarters

This area is composed of four interconnected rooms divided by a wooden wall. The northwest room connected to the lounge features a large wooden table, two chairs, a small drawer, and a door to the south. Through the southern door is a wide room with a bed, desk, and two more doors. Northeast, there's a training dojo with a weapon rack, and due east there's a closet with a wardrobe and mirror.

**Bedroom.** A small chest at the base of the bed contains a pouch of 30 pp and fine silks worth 20 gp. An open notebook on the desk contains notes on martial techniques.

**Dojo.** A soft gray mat fills the center of the room. On the periphery there's a weapons rack holding a mace, two longswords, a shortsword, and a greatsword. In front of the weapons rack is the **ghost warrior** of an elven woman named Aredhel. She stands at attention wearing half-plate armor, arms clasped behind her back. She's stern and speaks curtly, not wasting energy mincing words. Aredhel is bound to a magical longsword (*Aredhel's sword of wounding*), which is mounted on the wall nearby, and cannot move further than 60 feet from the sword.

Aredhel prevents creatures from taking her sword unprompted, standing in their way and striking them down if necessary. Characters that introduce themselves can attempt to earn Aredhel's respect by sparring with her. To complete a sparring match, a character must make three rolls, which are contested by Aredhel: a Strength (Athletics) check, a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, and an attack roll with a martial weapon. A character that succeeds on all three checks earns her respect and the right to wield her sword.



If Aredhel is reduced to 0 hp or killed as a ghost, she returns to the sword and becomes unresponsive for 1d4 days, after which she recovers and behaves normally.

**Closet.** Inside of the closet's wardrobe are four sets of traveler clothes and a muddied set of leather armor.

## 15 - Head Office

This room can be entered from the west and has three doors to sleeping quarters to the south. It features a desk with a black upholstered chair and table with six chairs placed around it. Along the western wall is a row of candles set out on a thin table. To the far east is a row of bookshelves that round the north wall behind the desk.

**Encounter: Vampire.** Unless he has been alerted by noise in the lounge (area 13), a stout man with sparkling green eyes and curly white hair is seated in the upholstered chair fussing with papers. His name is Armando Vossen and he is 700 years old.

## 16 - Waiting Room

Two round tables are placed to the north of this room. To the south, a bearskin rug is laid out before a slowly burning fire that's filling the room with the nauseating smell of burning flesh.

**Encounter: Ghouls.** There is one **gladiator** for each character in the party seated at the tables. Additionally, there's one **mage** is heating up metal rods in the fire. All of these creatures have the following changes:

- Their creature type is undead
- They are immune to poison damage
- They are immune to the Charmed, Exhaustion, and Poisoned conditions

These creatures are cooking human flesh and preparing to torture commoners in the torture chamber (area 17).



## 17 - Torture Chamber

Metal cages, tables, carving implements, and an iron maiden are set out in this large room. The stone tiles are stained with blood, both fresh and old.

**Encounter: Ghuls.** There are is one **ghuls** for each character in the party. These undead sorcerers have an affinity for the elements and excel at frightening and torturing others on behalf of the ghoule queen. In exchange, they're allowed to feast on the expired subjects.

**Iron Maiden.** A creature that is enclosed in the iron maiden takes 14 (4d6) piercing damage the first time they are put inside the iron maiden and at the start of each of their turns that they're trapped inside of it. A creature can attempt to forcefully open the iron maiden with a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. The check is made at disadvantage if they are within the iron maiden.



**17a.** An empty cell, small chunks of flesh scattered across the floor.

**17b.** A human man (**commoner**) missing his left leg and right forearm is tied to the metal table at the rear of this room. He's survived extensive rounds of torture and is inconsolably frightened from the experience. To bring his attention back to the present, characters can either use magic that suppresses the frightened condition or succeed on a DC 17 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If he's calmed down, he can provide the following information:

- His name is Jacob. He's a merchant that was traveling by land to another city to do business.
- He and his caravan were attacked by ghouls. Most of them were eaten alive, but a few, including himself, were captured and taken here.
- It's been 3 weeks since they were captured.
- The ghouls torturing are after information about his clients in major port cities. He's unsure what they intend to do with the information.

**17c.** A kind dwarven man (**common**) and a dead human man are kept in short chains in this cell. The dwarf's name is Nedem; he knows that the human was named Glival and that Glival expired four days ago.

## 18 - Butcher Cells

This area is divided into three smaller rooms divided by thin stone walls. Through the northern door, is a wide chamber with metal benches along each wall, and to the east is a smaller chamber with a metal bench along the far wall.

**Encounter: Ghouls.** There are two **ghouls** in the northern chamber hungrily picking at the remains of a body. Until a creature gets within 15 feet of them, they don't pay attention to anything except the meal in front of them.

## 19 - Library

Stocked, 6-foot-tall bookshelves run the perimeter of this room, its floor covered in vibrant red carpet. A low-lying table with a food tray and candles is set before a 3-seater couch and an armchair in the northeast corner.

**Hidden Door.** A creature standing within 5 feet of the hidden door that succeeds on a DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check notices seams in the shelving in the outline of a doorway. To open the door, a creature must spend 5 minutes prodding at the shelf's books. Pulling out "The Grimoire of Black Magic" from the shelf triggers a hidden mechanism that unlocks the door.

**Books.** There is a huge trove of books in this area. A few notable titles are listed here:

- **Children's Guide to Necromancy.** A colorful picture-book illustrating various necromantic rituals and caricatured undead monsters.
- **The Domestic Use of Novel Black Magics.** This 80-page thesis extensively details applications of necrotic magic for completing household tasks. For example, an animated hand that skitters aimlessly throughout rooms picking up garbage.
- **The Weeping Rites.** A collection of blood rituals for summoning extraplanar creatures, creating undead, and other horrific magics.
- **The Digestive System of The Hydra.** An informative book with uncomfortably detailed artistic renderings of a hydra's internal organs.
- **The Manual of Important Black Magic.** This 650-page tome dedicates most of its words to issuing backhanded compliments to the research and rituals developed by other necromancers.



## 20 - Necromancer's Quarters

This expensively-decorated room features a queen bed, a wide trunk, a bath, a four-person table, and a wardrobe. Soft candlelight from the dining table and two nightstands illuminates the room in dim light.

**Trunk.** The trunk at the foot of the bed has a mechanical lock as well as an arcane lock spell cast on it. The Strength (Athletics) check to defeat the arcane lock is DC 30, and the Dexterity check to bypass the magical lock using thieves' tools is DC 25. Casting a knock spell on the door suppresses the magical lock for 10 minutes, lowering the DCs by 10 during that time. The mechanical lock remains intact if the magical lock is bypassed, requiring another knock spell or the use of the key. The key, which bypasses the magical lock as well as the mechanical one, is held by Seipris. Inside of the trunk are three bags of holding, a granite box, and a rod. Each bag of holding contains 5,000 gp and 300 pp. The granite box is worth 100 gp and contains thirteen 500 gp gemstones (alexandrite x2, aquamarine x3, black pearl x4, blue spinel x2, peridot x2). The rod is a *rod of the pact keeper*, +2.

**Wardrobe.** Inside the wardrobe is a sparse selection of gloomy-looking selection of black cloaks, dresses, and robes.

**Bathtub.** The bathtub is empty, with the exception of remnants of dead skin, and there's no source of water connected to it. However, the tub is magical. A creature that uses *detect magic* or similar magic detects conjuration magic coming from the tub.

When a creature speaks the command word "satiata", water begins filling from the bottom of the tub, conjured from the plane of water. When a creature speaks the command word "vacuus", the water begins to empty, conjured back to the plane of water. Repeating the active command word nullifies the command, leaving the water in place. To learn the command word, a creature can spend 1 hour meditating in the tub.

## 21 - Private Lounge

The door to this room is locked.

Inside, there is a long rectangular table with weapons and candles laid out atop it, a round table in the southeast corner, and a partitioned area to the north containing countertops and pantries stocked with various foods, wines, and tools.

**Encounter: Ghouls.** There are three **ghouls** in this room. Two are seated at the round table in the corner and one is organizing the shelves in the northern partition. These ghouls are loyal creations of Seipris' that have been cultivated from ravenous creatures into budding conversationalists. The ghouls are detailed as follows:

- Kell was a talkative human man. He wears singed overalls and a bloodied straw hat. He's the most articulate of the ghouls, owing to his nonplussed acceptance of his newfound condition in life.
- Emeryn was a kind gnomish woman. She wears a tattered cloak and a silk headwrap.
- Somir was a brooding human woman who's disposition has remained gloomy in undeath. She wears a plain dress with knives stuffed in its pockets.

The ghouls are reluctant to talk about Seipris or their own condition with strangers and are reluctant to attack creatures strong enough to invade the sanctum. If possible, they attempt to escape through area 22 and return later.

## 22 - Escape Route

The door to the escape route is sealed by a *glyph of warding (explosive)* and reinforced by the *arcane lock* spell. The glyph is nearly invisible and requires a successful DC 19 Intelligence (Investigation) check to be found. Creatures of the sanctum are exempt from the glyph and know the door's password, "by the night", which suppresses the arcane lock for 1 minute. The Strength (Athletics) check to defeat the arcane lock is DC 25, and the Dexterity check to bypass the magical lock using thieves' tools is DC 20. Casting a knock spell on the door suppresses the magical lock for 10 minutes, lowering the DCs by 10 during that time. The mechanical lock remains intact if the magical lock is bypassed, requiring another knock spell or the use of the key.

The narrow hall is 100 feet in length, at which point it degrades into natural cavern pathways that splinter into dozens of directions. Checks made to track a creature through the caves are made at disadvantage. After traveling 800 feet through the caves, the floor climbs its way to the surface, the sanctum visible in the distance.

## CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

**Infiltration.** If the characters can report back with proof of the cult's criminal activity, the town guard pay them as agreed upon. It's clear that the ghoulish empress poses a great threat, and they may seek to hire the characters to dispatch her, either now or when the characters are more capable.

**Unnatural Corruption.** If the characters rely on the gruesome details of the goings-on in the temple, Lily is appalled, but thanks the characters for dealing with the threat. She rewards them with a *Staff of Swarming Insects*.

**Merchant's Bane.** If the characters provide evidence that the ghoulish empress is slain, the merchant happily pays out the 2,000 gp that was promised.





# Appendix

The appendix contains monsters and magic items for this adventure.

## CULT BRUISER

Medium humanoid (any race), lawful evil

**Armor Class** 16 (Studded Leather, Shield)

**Hit Points** 112 (15d8 + 45)

**Speed** 30 ft.

| STR  | DEX  | CON  | INT  | WIS  | CHA     |
|------|------|------|------|------|---------|
| 18   | 15   | 16   | 10   | 12   | 15 (+2) |
| (+4) | (+2) | (+3) | (+0) | (+1) |         |

**Saving Throws** Str +7, Dex +5, Con +6

**Skills** Athletics +10, Intimidation +5

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Any one language (usually Common)

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Brave.** The cult bruiser has advantage on saving throws against being frightened.

**Brute.** A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the cult bruiser hits with it (included in the attack).

**Dark Devotion.** The cultist has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

## Actions

**Multiattack.** The cult bruiser makes three melee attacks.

**Warhammer.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage or 15 (2d10 + 4) if used with two hands.

**Shield Bash.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. If the target is a Medium or smaller creature, it must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

## Reactions

**Parry.** The cult bruiser adds 3 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the cult bruiser must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

## GHOST WARRIOR

Medium undead, neutral

**Armor Class** 18 (Breastplate, Shield)

**Hit Points** 127 (15d8 + 60)

**Speed** 20 ft.

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

**Skills** Perception +4

**Damage Resistances** Necrotic; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from Nonmagical Attacks

**Damage Immunities** Poison

**Condition Immunities** Exhaustion, Frightened, Poisoned, Unconscious

**Senses** Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

**Languages** the languages it knew in life

**Challenge** 8 (3,900 XP)

**Martial Fury.** As a bonus action, the ghost warrior can make one weapon attack, which deals an extra 9 (2d8) necrotic damage on a hit. If it does so, attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn.

**Turning Defiance.** The ghost warrior and any other ghost warriors within 30 feet of it have advantage on saving throws against effects that turn undead.

**Ethereal Sight.** The ghost can see 60 feet into the Ethereal Plane when it is on the Material Plane, and vice versa.

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

## Actions

**Multiattack.** The ghost warrior makes two weapon attacks.

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

**Etherealness.** The ghost enters the Ethereal Plane from the Material Plane, or vice versa. It is visible on the Material Plane while it is in the Border Ethereal, and vice versa, yet it can't affect or be affected by anything on the other plane.



## Empress of the Ghouls

Empress of the ghouls, Seipris the Soulkeeper, rules a subterranean empire. Deep beneath the surface in lightless tunnels and vast chambers, the civilized ghouls of the empire carved glory from flesh and stone under Seipris' leadership. She led the empire to victory against the humanoids, and now that race is all but extinct in any territory the ghouls control.

The ghouls are content to reside in the lightless depths beneath the earth for now, but Seipris muses about what prizes exist under the sky. To this end, she tends to operate out of an enchanted sanctum capable of teleporting throughout the material plane in places where the underworld meets the surface.

**Unexpected Courtesy.** The ghouls are content to reside in the lightless depths beneath the earth for now, but the empress muses about the what prizes exist under the sky. Empress Seipris has a soul of steel and hunger like the deepest chasms of the underworld. Despite her ambition, she is extremely civilized and urbane, treating even hated enemies with strict courtesy even up to the moment that she devours their bones.



## EMPRESS OF THE GHOULS

Medium undead, neutral evil

**Armor Class** 20 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 204 (24d8 + 96)

**Speed** 30 ft., burrow 15 ft.

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| STR     | DEX     | CON     | INT     | WIS     | CHA     |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 18 (+4) | 14 (+2) | 19 (+4) | 20 (+5) | 17 (+3) | 21 (+5) |

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**Saving Throws** Dex +8, Wis +9

**Skills** Deception +11, Insight +9, Perception +9, Persuasion +11

**Damage Resistances** Cold, Necrotic

**Damage Immunities** Poison; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing damage from Nonmagical Attacks

**Condition Immunities** Charmed, Exhaustion, Frightened, Poisoned

**Senses** Darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 19

**Languages** Common, Draconic, Gnoll, Undercommon

**Challenge** 20 (25,000 XP)

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**Legendary Resistance (3/day).** If the empress fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

**Spellcasting.** The empress is a 17th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting attribute is Charisma (spell save DC 19, +11 to hit with spell attacks). The empress knows the following sorcerer spells:

Cantrips (at will): *blade ward*, *chill touch*, *message*,

*prestidigitation*, *shocking grasp*, *true strike*

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

2nd level (3 slots): *mirror image*, *phantasmal force*

3rd level (3 slots): *fear*, *fireball*

4th level (3 slots): *blight*, *dimension door*

5th level (2 slots): *cloudkill*, *hold monster*

6th level (1 slot): *circle of death*

7th level (1 slot): *finger of death*, *teleport*

8th level (1 slot): *power word stun*

9th level (1 slot): *power word kill*

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

**Turn Resistance.** The emperor has advantage on saving throws against effects that turn undead.

## Actions

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**Multiattack.** The empress makes one bite attack and two claw attacks. She can make one attack with its scepter in place of a claw attack.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage, and the creature must make a successful DC 18 Constitution saving throw or contract ghoul fever.

**Claw.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage, and a creature must make a successful DC 18 Constitution saving throw or be paralyzed for 1 minute. A paralyzed creature repeats the saving throw at the end of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

**Scepter.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 17 (5d6) necrotic damage.

## Reactions

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**Blood Armor.** When the empress takes damage from a creature she can see within 60 feet, the attacker takes necrotic damage equal to half the damage it did to the empress.

## Legendary Actions

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The empress can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The empress regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

**Attack.** The empress makes one claw or bite attack.

**Cantrip.** The empress casts a cantrip.

**Font of Power (3 actions).** Roll 1d8. The empress regains a spell slot of that level or lower.

## Crescent Blade

*Weapon (longsword), very rare (requires attunement)*

Hit points lost to this weapon's damage can be regained only through a short or long rest, rather than by regeneration, magic, or any other means.

**Attunement.** This weapon can only be attuned by creature's of Aredhel's choice (see "Sentience" below). Characters that spend 1 hour with the weapon can introduce themselves and attempt to earn Aredhel's respect by sparring with her. To complete a sparring match, a character must make three rolls, which are contested by Aredhel: a Strength (Athletics) check, a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, and an attack roll with a martial weapon. A character that succeeds on all three checks earns her respect and the right to attune the weapon.

**Finesse.** The *crescent blade* has the finesse property.

**Song Craft.** Whenever the *crescent blade* strikes a foe, its bearer hears a fragment of an ancient elven song.

**Wounds.** Once per turn, when you hit a creature with an attack using this magic weapon, you can wound the target. At the start of each of the wounded creature's turns, it takes 1d4 necrotic damage for each time you've wounded it, and it can then make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, ending the effect of all such wounds on itself on a success. Alternatively, the wounded creature, or a creature within 5 feet of it, can use an action to make a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check, ending the effect of such wounds on it on a success.

**Sentience.** *Aredhel's Sword of Wounding* is a sentient chaotic neutral weapon with an Intelligence of 14, a Wisdom of 15, and a Charisma of 19. The sword's conscience manifests as Aredhel, an elven woman that wears mythril half-plate armor. She has hearing and darkvision out to a range of 120 feet.

She can speak, read, and understand Common and Elvish, and can communicate with the weapon's wielder telepathically. Her voice is deep and echoing. While you are attuned to the weapon, she also understands every language you know.

**Personality.** Aredhel is stern and curt, sparing no special treatment for others, least of all those that haven't earned her respect in contest. She was originally bound to the sword to serve and protect elven interests, and as such seeks the advancement of elvenkind and elven ideals; Courage, loyalty, beauty, music, and life are all part of this purpose. If Aredhel is unhappy with the wielder, she is capable of suppressing the Wounds property of this weapon.

Attempts to consecrate the sword or otherwise remove Aredhel may succeed, but doing so removes the Wounds, Sentience, Personality, Ghost Manifestation, and Training properties.

**Ghost Manifestation.** Aredhel is capable of manifesting as a ghost within 60 feet of the sword, but she reserves this for dire circumstances or for training. If Aredhel's ghost is reduced to 0 hp or killed, she returns to the sword and becomes unresponsive for 1d4 days, after which she recovers and behaves normally.

**Training.** A character that trains with Aredhel can acquire proficiency with a martial weapon of their choice by training with Aredhel for 8 weeks minus their Intelligence modifier. To train, characters that are not proficient with martial weapons are possessed and the ghost uses its knowledge to move their body through exercises. Otherwise, if the character is proficient with martial weapons, Aredhel trains them by sparring.



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