

**Bonus quest: The betrayed**

You crouch at the edge of the rooftop, studying the ashen wasteland that was once Talanost. The city lies utterly still. Only smoke moves, curling between the charred rafters of the burnt out buildings. In the street below, a lone knight appears from a rubble-choked alley, guiding his steed with care through the ravaged ruins. The beast's hooves clatter on the loose stone and masonry, its breath snorting clouds into the cold, morning air.

You turn away, your gaze shifting across the formless wreckage, to finally rest on the mansion – its white-washed walls untouched by the devastation that surrounds it. Your shadow mark tingles, its icy fingers crawling beneath your skin. Since you absorbed Sharroth's power, the mark has been a constant irritation – an itch that refuses to be scratched. You glare down at it angrily, knowing what it wants. What it desires.

'I can't wait any longer,' you state grimly. 'They're here; I feel them.'

Your companion shifts nervously beside you. His usual garb has been replaced by wraps of grey and black cloth, turning him near invisible against the wasted backdrop of the city.

'We were told to wait,' he replies, his hood shifting to reveal a thin face, pointed and angular. 'It's not wise to upset Mathis.'

You grunt with derision, the buzzing from your arm becoming more insistent. 'The fool will only get in the way.'

Nyms sighs. 'I know. Once your course is set, you seldom give ear to counsel.' He pauses for a moment. 'In truth, your nature has rarely led us awry.'

'Nor will it.' Your eyes remain rooted to the mansion. Every shred of evidence, every clue that you have scavenged over the last few days, has led you to this place – the last bastion of the enemy. 'But why here?' you mutter to yourself, frowning. The building is nothing special, save

that it is perfectly intact. Around it, the other estates have fared less well, their broken remains stabbing like claws into the ashen sky.

'I've seen worse neighbourhoods,' grins Nyms. 'Real shame the king didn't stick around to enjoy the sightseeing.'

You favour him with a bitter laugh. 'Ah yes, the king...'

A week has passed since the king's army broke camp and rode home, leaving yourself and Ravenwing's militia to pick up the pieces. 'Cleansing the city,' Mathis had called it, making it sound a noble and grandiose task. But the reality quickly proved otherwise – long days scrabbling across rubble, wading through miles of stinking sewers and dark catacombs, hunting for every last shadow spawn that survived the battle. Some of them talked, before their life was ended. Those that still had some humanity, at least.

Cleansing the city. Not the great heroic ending that you had imagined – but then, your disappointments have been many. After closing the gate, you assumed you would be heralded a champion, given a seat at the king's side, showered with gold and glory – and respect. But at the feast, the king never deigned to acknowledge you; his men treated you with the same suspicion and contempt as the others.

A Nevarin. Stained by the past. By what you were...

What you still are.

'I'm tired of waiting.' You rise to your feet, finding balance on the shattered rooftop. Across the avenue, the spiked wall of the mansion looms arrogantly before you, an imposing height of sheer stone and barbed iron. It might deter some thieves, perhaps. But not you.

Magic sparks at your fingertips as you contemplate blasting your way through, ripping each and every spike from their very foundations. But you clench your fist, letting the magic dissipate. 'Let's do it your way, Nyms.'

'Ah, appreciated at last.' He levels a crossbow, aiming for the gnarled yellowwood tree that dominates the courtyard. A click of the trigger sends the bolt streaking through the air, its course marked by the glittering rope that trails behind it. There is a thud as the bolt embeds

itself deep into the body of the tree, stretching the rope taut. You follow its length to where the rope has been securely knotted around an exposed gable post. 'Is that thing seriously going to hold our weight?' you ask, scratching your chin.

'Providing you laid off the king's pies,' smiles Nym, slapping your stomach with the back of his hand. 'Watch and learn.'

Nym grabs the rope, swinging beneath it to hook his boots over the top. Then he proceeds to scurry across, moving hand over hand with practised ease. You watch tensely as the rope and wood creak in protest. But the make-shift bridge appears to be holding.

The nimble swordsman passes over the spiked wall and then drops into the courtyard below with barely a whisper of noise. You follow suit, hooking both legs over the rope and shimmying along its length. A minute later and you have joined your companion in the courtyard, weapons drawn and ready.

A set of stairs lead up to a pillared porch, where a pair of cedar-wood doors offer an obvious route inside the mansion. You about to start towards them, when you feel a touch on your arm. Nym nods towards the second storey, where a wrought iron balustrade juts out from the wall. Between its bars, you see what the sharp-eyed rogue has spotted: a half-open window leading though into the interior of the house.

Will you:

**Enter the mansion through the main doors? 22**

**Climb up to the second floor balcony? 43**



The shadow spawn surge forward, presenting a single, black wall of snarling death. You grip your weapons, waiting tensely for the inevitable. Above their horned helmets and grisly standards, you see the last of the mages streaking towards the doom orb that hangs above Talanost. The dark moon of flesh and sinew is firing a torrent of black fire across the city. You can only assume that it is destroying the last of Ravenwing's camp and hampering any attempt at reinforcement.

Then the wave of shadow spawn crashes down upon you, drowning you in a mass of filthy bodies and snapping jaws. With a surge of magic, you break free – springing up into the air. Daarko's power is nearly spent, but there is just enough, pulsing within your shadow mark, to make a worthy last stand.

Great tentacles of shadow spiral out from the writhing serpents on your arm, smashing into the legion's ranks and sending bodies flying. A giant looms close, trying to bat you with its spiked club. You flip over, blasting it with bolts of magic. The giant gives a booming cry, as its smoking body crashes down, sending shadow spawn scampering in all directions.

You hang in the air, your magic surrounding you in a halo of purple light. From here, you are able to take in the battlefield. At the far side of the square, amidst the blackened craters inflicted by the airstrike, the dark general sits astride their armoured mount. The warrior has sighted you, levelling their bow to fire a stream of enchanted arrows in your direction. Your shield blocks the deadly projectiles, their magic fizzing and sparking harmlessly on impact. But you know that your barrier will not hold for long.

To your right, a knot of Ravenwing's forces are battling the shadow spawn. Even though they are outnumbered ten to one, they are managing to push back the enemy forces. Behind them, you see more warriors hurrying into the square – Ravenwing and Caeleb amongst them. Suddenly, a jagged boulder smashes down amongst their ranks, throwing

up dust and sending them hurrying for cover. The missile came from the edge of the square, where an ogre-like monster is swinging a huge ball and chain in an angered frenzy, smashing up buildings and sending broken masonry toppling towards the knights.

Ravenwing and Caeleb emerge from the dust, attempting to close in on its position, but they are headed off by a group of shadow spawn. The ogre gives a deafening roar as it lumbers towards the fight, its heavy iron-shod boots crushing the stone beneath its feet.

Will you:

**Attack the general? 12**

**Attack the ogre? 51**

### 3

Your magic spears into the brain, sending its grey matter spraying in all directions. Then the chamber begins to shake violently, throwing you from side to side. Desperately, you struggle back to Avian's side, slipping and sliding as the ground continues to tremble. Taking hold of the unconscious mage, you summon a shield with the last reserves of Daarko's stolen magic...

Then the chamber explodes, throwing you out into empty space.

All around you, black smoke and debris whirl through the air, accompanied by a deafening boom of thunder. Then you are falling at tremendous speed, buffeted by strong winds – and the giant wads of charred flesh that slam against your shield. For several minutes you are caught in a spin. When you finally manage to right yourself, you see the city of Talanost stretching far, far below, like a grimy black stain across the landscape.

Your shield stutters and fails, winking out in a flurry of sparks. Clinging to Avian, you continue to drop through the smoggy clouds, plummeting towards the ruined rooftops. Even with your supernatural abilities, you doubt you will survive such a fall.

Below you, the market square tilts into view. The shadow spawn appear to be routing, scampering like a plague of rats through the narrow streets of the city. Ravenwing's men follow close on their heels, slashing and blasting at their fleeing enemy. It is a sight that brings some small satisfaction – the legion's attempt to wrest control of the city has clearly failed.

The buildings are rising towards you now at an unsettling speed. You close your eyes, bracing for impact, wondering – in these final moments – if Avian is the lucky one, not to have witnessed this ignoble end. The mage is still slumped in your arms, his head lolling against your chest.

Then some force hits you with the power of a sledgehammer. You are dragged sideways, away from the jagged rooftop that would surely have spelled your end. Twisting round, you try and see what has a hold of you, but there is nothing there. And yet, you can feel something pressing in on you, holding you in a constricted bubble. Then the force is gone and you are falling the rest of the way, slamming down into the dusty street. From your shadow mark, a purple light flows quickly across your broken body, mending the splintered bones and torn muscle.

You slide out from beneath Avian, staggering back to your feet. Amongst the smoking mounds of rubble, you spy some of the doom orb's pulpy remains. You may now help yourself to one of the following rewards:

**Thalamus tiara**

(head)

+2 speed +5 magic

Ability: haste

**Cortical bulb**

(left hand: wand)

+3 speed +5 magic

Ability: brain drain

**Stria of Genna**

(ring)

+1 magic +2 armour

Ability: shock!

A rattle of armour forces you to turn. Someone is stumbling through the mist towards you. If you have the word *rival* on your hero sheet turn to 24. Otherwise, turn to 35.

At the foot of the stairs, two spluttering torches frame a grotesque creature, its back hunched over to allow its hulking form to fit under the low ceiling. It is humanoid, with coarse black hair covering much of its body. Tendrils of gooey saliva drip from beneath its fanged muzzle, as it drags a whetstone back and forth across a black-bladed sword. The beast appears to be guarding an iron door, set into the earthen wall behind it.

‘Wha...?’ The beast looks up, its beady-yellow eyes squinting towards you.

Without slowing, you raise your hands and release a blast of shadow magic. The beast is blown backwards, smashing the door off its hinges and taking part of the wall with it. The air fills with the stench of brimstone and burnt hair. Wrinkling your nose, you step past the charred body and enter the room beyond.

Through the dust and smoke, you see that you have entered a large cave. Dark shapes are silhouetted by a bright golden light, pulsing from a circular object that rests on an ornate podium. There is something in its design that reminds you of the shadow gate; perhaps the steam that belches from holes around its edge or the glyphs that shimmer and crackle with magic.

For now, the dark shapes are of more immediate concern – a horde of misshapen creatures, each one a different aberration of nature. They clutch a makeshift assortment of mean weapons, their snarls and hisses echoing in the chamber.

But they hold their ground. Uncertain. A few eyes dart sideways, looking back towards the rear of the cave, where a black figure stands guard next to the strange machine. This one looks human, clad in black plates of armour, their face hidden in the shadows of their cowl.

‘You cannot stop us, betrayer!’ The voice is rasping, weak-sounding, its words carried on short, ragged breaths. ‘Did you really think the legion could be defeated – that the black guard would be denied its

revenge?’ Armour and leather creak as the warrior raises an arm, pointing a finger towards you. ‘Forward my fiends. Bring me its head!’

The monsters break ranks, rushing forward in an undisciplined mob. As their stinking bodies descend on your position, you feel the shadow mark blossom into life, relishing in the battle to come.

You weave in amongst the beasts’ clumsy strikes, moving with uncanny speed. Your weapons slice through armour and hide, leaving a deafening clamour of pained cries in your wake. A reptilian creature hefts a claymore above its head. You dodge aside as the weapon is brought down, with enough strength to have hewn a man in two. Stepping onto the blade, you leap into the air, kicking the beast backwards into a crowd of its brethren. You land in a spin, cutting down more of the infernal creatures, your laughter mingling with their howls and roars.

You edge slowly towards the back of the cave, where the hooded warrior presides over the battle, his thick arms folded across his chest. ‘You cannot stop us,’ wheezes the voice in your ear.

Suddenly, the flat of a blade catches you across the back. You stagger, knocked forwards by the strength of the blow. Turning, you see a mountain of muscle bearing down on you, a sword held in each of its four hands. You dodge the first strike, catching the next and turning it away with your weapon. But the other blows hit home, drawing blood and beating you back against the wall.

Then you hear the crackle of magic and a hollering cry. Something is moving quickly through the ranks of shadow spawn, glowing swords exploding through weapons and armour. ‘Nyms!’ you call with relief. ‘A welcome sight.’

The swordsman fights with a brutal efficiency, his quick arcs and jabs downing his stunned opponents. ‘Hate to see you have all the fun,’ he grunts, vaulting off the back of one of the creatures, to spin into your four-armed adversary. ‘Get the hooded one!’ he shouts. ‘I’ve got your back.’ He cuts down the giant, his magic swords blazing trails through the air.

You advance on the leader, smashing through the remaining shadow spawn that get in your way. As you near, you realise the warrior is a veritable giant, standing over two metres tall. His entire body is encased in thick sheets of shadow-forged armour; even his face is masked by an iron plate, its surface carved with intricate runes.

'So it comes to this,' wheezes the voice. The warrior uncrosses his arms, revealing a metal disc embedded in his chest. 'You know nothing of power, Nevarin.' He puts a gloved hand to the disc and then turns it. Suddenly his whole body changes, shifting into a ghostly shadow of purple light. With dark laughter echoing all about you, the warrior summons crackling flames to his hands. 'The black guard will have its victory,' he hisses. 'And all of Valeron will fall!'

You must now fight this dark general:

|                    | Speed | Magic | Armour | Health |
|--------------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| <b>Daarko</b>      | 15    | -     | -      | 140    |
| <b>Shadow form</b> | -     | 11    | 12     | -      |
| <b>Flame form</b>  | -     | 16    | 10     | -      |
| <b>Rock form</b>   | -     | 13    | 20     | -      |

### Special abilities

✧ Elemental master: Daarko can change his form, giving him different abilities and strengths. At the start of each combat round roll a die. If the result is [1] or [2] he assumes his shadow form, [3] or [4] the flame form, and [5] or [6] the rock form. Daarko starts the first round of combat in his shadow form.

✧ Shadow form: Each time you take health damage from Daarko you must lower your *brawn* or *magic* (whichever is highest) by 2.

✧ Flame form: At the end of every combat round, you must take 4 damage from the flames that surround Daarko. This ability ignores *armour*.

✧ Rock form: If your hero takes health damage from Daarko, you are

knocked to the ground. You must reduce your *speed* by 1 for the next combat round only.

If you defeat Daarko, restore any lowered attributes and then turn to 27.

## 5

'Like the gate. Yes, yes. They made it. The elves.' He gestures to the alabaster statues, carved to resemble men and women, dressed in ornate headdresses and robes. 'We should not have ended such a great people.' He looks back at you, then at the staff. 'They were creators – made things. We could have learned so much from them. Instead, we take, take, take – put back the pieces again.'

'That still doesn't explain what it does,' you interject impatiently.

'The shroud, fool!' He snaps suddenly, veins cording in his neck.

'What else would it do? It takes me back there. Takes me back to the shroud.' He sucks in a deep breath. 'I still hear it. I still... Yes, still hear the shroud. Still feel it calling. I hear him. He tells me what to do.'

'The shroud is a place of demons – of magic,' you insist. 'How is it possible to exist there? I thought it was dangerous.'

Lorcan looks at you intently. 'This is not real... no, not real. The shroud is real. Where everything is possible. I have seen things... such wondrous things.' His words break into a cackle of maniacal laughter.

'You're insane,' you growl, your hands inching closer to your weapons. 'You speak of fever dreams. Nothing more.'

Lorcan's laughter dies. 'You don't think, Nevarin – don't think of the possibilities. I wish I could show you. Open your eyes. But you must die so that I can go home.'

Return to 13 to ask Lorcan another question, or turn to 25 to attack this deranged mage.

## 6

Suddenly, a bright flash of light draws your attention skywards. From out of the smog, you see white shapes swooping down over the ruined city, their vapour trails blazing like bright comets. Beneath them, a series of explosions swell out across the square, cutting a vicious swathe through the tightly-packed ranks of shadow spawn.

'The airborne regulars!' You punch the air as the mages hurtle past on their flying carpets.

Then, at the far side of the square, you hear the resonating blast of a horn. From your vantage point, it is difficult to see through the thronging masses, but it looks like a battalion of Ravenwing's militia have made it across the city. You catch the glimmer of polished armour and a fluttering standard, proudly displaying the black raven. Aid has finally arrived. Turn to 52.

## 7

You approach the strange podium, its whirring and clicking almost deafening in the sudden silence. Occasionally, whistling jets of steam belch out from the many cavities around its side, expelling a foul-smelling gas into the air. Warily, you lean over, to inspect the glowing orb that rests on top of the pedestal. Through the clouded glass, you glimpse a ball of fleshy tissue, beating rhythmically like a heart. Metal hooks dig into its fatty folds, anchoring it to a metal base where glyphs and runes glimmer with magic.

'That looks pretty. What's it do?' asks Nyms, picking his way over to the machine.

'It reminds me of the shadow gate,' you reply, noting the strange tubes that extend from the base of the podium. They snake across the cavern floor, disappearing into the ground at various points, like the roots of a tree.

'It looks... alive,' says Nyms, tapping the side of the glass. 'I suppose we should go find the others.'

'No need,' you reply with a grimace. There is the crunch of boots on the stairs, accompanied by clinking armour and muffled voices. A second later and Mathis marches in through the blasted hole, his white enamelled armour streaked with blood and dust. In his hands he grips a mighty warhammer, its stone head rippling with holy magic.

Behind the inquisitor, you recognise Redguard's medic, Lansbury, and Avian Dale, your master. Both are clad in similar armour to the inquisitor, the polished white plate spattered with mud. Finally, bringing up the rear, is a group of nervous-looking guards, their white tabards stitched with the black raven of Ravenwing's militia.

'You started without us,' scowls Inquisitor Mathis, glaring at the piles of corpses that litter the room.

'They weren't that keen on waiting,' you retort, meeting his cold glare with one of your own. 'Glad you could finally make it.'

'Indeed,' sniffs the inquisitor. 'And what have you found?' He strides over to the glowing podium. 'Avian?'

The mage hurries forward, his eyes wide with interest. 'It's elven,' he gasps, running his hands over the glyphs that adorn the side of the podium. 'I've seen their like before, but this is new. Zul must have found it in the Dune Sea. I can't believe...' He moves around the glass sphere, inspecting the beating organ trapped inside. 'This is a magic anomaly. Pressed into service... but for what I can't fathom.'

Lansbury appears at your side. She places a hand on your own and squeezes it tight. 'Good to see you,' she whispers. You glance her way, noting her tired expression. The past week has been trying on the elderly medic's reserves of strength, healing those who have fallen foul of the shadow spawn. But she has never complained or faltered from her duty. She grins with mischief, as she flicks her eyes towards Mathis. 'I'm afraid the company has been a little trying of late.'

'Lansbury!' snaps the inquisitor. 'Your thoughts please.'

The medic quickly releases your hand and moves forward. 'Yes,

Inquisitor Mathis. Hmm, I'd say, these are not unusual.' She taps one of the tube-like tentacles with the end of her staff. 'A distortion of druidic practice. They're anchoring this thing to ley lines, tapping into deep magic.' She looks up at the ceiling of the cavern, bathed in the golden glow from the machine. 'This whole place is acting as a fount of power – but for what?'

Mathis raises his warhammer, its inscribed headpiece crackling with lightning. 'I have heard enough. Any fool can see this is the work of demons. It is a thing of evil – and must be destroyed!'

'No!' Avian tries to intercede, but the inquisitor shrugs him aside, bringing his weapon down hard onto the machine. There is a deafening boom as the orb shatters, dispelling its magic out into the cave. The force of the blast blows you backwards, slamming you into the far wall. The golden light winks out and then there is darkness.

The cavern begins to shake, dislodging rock and dust from its ceiling.

'What's happening?' cries a voice – one of the guardsmen.

Suddenly, a cold blue light flashes into being, glimmering around Avian's outstretched palms. The mage is still standing, although blood from a cut streams down one side of his face.

'A good question,' snarls Mathis, pushing himself up from the rubble. He turns to the machine, which is now a twisted carcass of metal and flesh. 'At least this abomination is dead.'

From somewhere above, you hear a noise – loud and powerful enough to loosen more rocks from the ceiling. 'We have to get out of here,' you shout, helping Lansbury to her feet. 'Or we'll be buried alive!' Lansbury stoops to pick up her staff, then follows you towards the stairs. Ravenwing's guards are already scrambling to get out of the cave, jostling each other in their haste to escape.

'You fool, Mathis!' barks Avian, his voice echoing in the chamber. 'We needed to study it – to understand why it was being guarded. I fear this was a grave mistake...' Turn to 31.

8

Searching the general's armour, you find a leather pouch containing 150 gold crowns. You may also help yourself to one of the following special rewards:

**Fortune's favour**  
(main hand: dagger)  
+2 speed +5 magic  
Ability: radiance

**Unstable element**  
(necklace)  
+1 speed +2 armour  
Ability: disrupt

**Misery cord**  
(ring)  
+2 magic +1 armour  
Ability: thorns

When you have made your decision, turn to 56.



9

You sprint to the end of the building, then kick off from its edge, soaring effortlessly over the glittering sea of bodies. You twist in mid-air, sending bolts of black fire into the ranks of shadow spawn, your dark magic ripping through their bodies and leaving charred craters in the earth.

As you level out into a dive, you draw your weapons, flipping over at the last moment to land in front of Lansbury's shield. Surrounding you are the decayers – giant-sized undead; their mummified bodies cloaked in a thick cloud of green noxious gas. From between the creatures' damp, rotted bandages, you see worm-like parasites twisting and snaking around their diseased bodies, spewing forth an endless swarm of deadly spores into the foul-smelling air.

‘The spores!’ shouts Lansbury desperately. ‘They explode on contact. Keep them away from the shield!’

With a snarl of fury, you charge into the pestilent undead, hoping to buy time for your companions until help arrives. You must fight:

|                    | <b>Speed</b> | <b>Brawn</b> | <b>Armour</b> | <b>Health</b> |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Decayers</b>    | 15           | 13           | 7             | 100           |
| <b>Spore cloud</b> | -            | -            | 4             | 40 (*)        |
| <b>Shield</b>      | -            | -            | -             | 25            |

### Special abilities

✧ A swarm of spores: It takes three combat rounds for the spore cloud to reach the shield. At the end of the third combat round, the shield takes 1 damage for each health point the cloud has remaining. A new cloud is then released (with 40 *health*), taking 3 rounds to reach the shield (and so on).

✧ Disease: Once you have taken health damage from the decayers, at the end of every combat round you must automatically lose 2 *health*.

✧ Natural immunity: The spore cloud is immune to all passive effects, such as *bleed*, *burn* and *venom*.

In this combat, you roll against the decayers’ speed. If you win, you can roll for damage against the decayers or the spore cloud (or both, if you have an ability that lets you do so). If you lose the round, then the decayers attack you.

If you manage to survive to the start of the seventh combat round, with Lansbury’s shield still intact (i.e. it still has *health*), then turn to 46. (Special achievement: If you defeat the decayers before the end of the sixth round with the shield still intact, then turn to 20). If you are defeated, then you may return to an earlier point. Restore your *health*, then turn to 57.

Ravenwing’s men pursue the routed shadow spawn, slashing and blasting at their fleeing enemy. The battle is won. But at what cost? You look around at the men that have remained behind – not only the wounded and the dead, but those who have simply hung back from exhaustion. Many have a haunted look about them, their bodies blackened by soot and grime. You can’t imagine what devastation awaits beyond the walls of the city – where the doom orb’s magic was turned against the camp. The men’s expressions tell you enough.

Across the rubble-strewn square, you see Mathis lying on his side. The inquisitor looks badly wounded. Possibly fatal. Caeleb kneels at his side, his ear pressed close to the warrior’s fevered ramblings. Ravenwing stumbles past, helping to support an exhausted Lansbury. You notice that Nymys is not with her. The grizzled warrior glances your way, shaking his head sadly.

‘Nevarin!’ Caeleb trudges through the rubble towards you. The cavalier’s armour is raked with black scars, his shield battered and dented. ‘It’s over for your kind,’ he sneers, hobbling closer. ‘I swore to Mathis... to the One God... that I’d destroy all shadow spawn this day...’

‘Caeleb?’ You shake your head in confusion. ‘What madness is this? I’m not your enemy.’

He raises his inscribed sword. ‘Mathis told me everything...’

Suddenly, you catch movement out of the corner of your eye. A man is standing on the edge of a rooftop, his scarlet coat billowing in the wind. He raises his hand and suddenly you feel an invisible force closing in around you, pinning your arms and legs tightly together.

Then the man is moving, running through the air as quickly and deftly as if it was solid ground. And like a dog on leash, you find yourself being dragged after him, floating in a magical prison.

‘More demons!’ screams Caeleb. ‘Don’t think you can escape!’

You are pulled across a broad plaza, its fountains and pathways now charred and cratered, towards an officious-looking building clinging to a rise of grey rock. You try and discern its purpose – but the invisible bonds shift, spinning you around. Then something hard strikes you across the head, plunging you into darkness. Turn to 13.

11

Searching Daarko's remains, you find a leather pouch containing 100 gold crowns. You may also help yourself to one of the following special rewards:

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>The dread mask</b><br/>(head)<br/>+1 speed +3 brawn<br/>Ability: overpower</p> | <p><b>Boots of black fortune</b><br/>(feet)<br/>+2 speed +2 armour<br/>Ability: feint</p> | <p><b>Ring of rebirth</b><br/>(ring)<br/>+2 brawn<br/>Ability: kick start</p> |
|--|---|---|

When you have made your decision, turn to 7.



12

With a burst of magic, you propel yourself forward, aiming straight for the legion's general. As your shield sputters and dies, one of the arrows slams into your chest, sending you spinning back through the air. You land roughly, tumbling and sliding through the dust to finally lie in a smoking heap at the base of one of the craters.

The ground trembles as the general's mount advances. It is a huge, grey-scaled beast, its horned face sloping back to form a spiked crest. Along its flanks, black plates of steel are bolted into its flesh, oozing dark blood and rust.

Frantically, you scramble to your feet, tugging the arrow from your chest. You feel no pain, no discomfort, only an icy tingling as your shadow mark closes up the wound, flooding you with fresh energy.

'Nevarin!' The general reins in the armoured beast, its splayed feet skidding in the thick ash. 'You... you fight against us?' The muffled voice is that of a young woman's – surprise evident in her tone.

You brush the dirt and dust from your clothes. 'What ever gave you that impression,' you sneer, drawing your weapons.

'Humph! So be it!' The general barks a word of command. The beast gives an answering roar as it lowers its head and starts to charge, looking to run you through with its horns:

|                        | <b>Speed</b> | <b>Brawn</b> | <b>Armour</b> | <b>Health</b> |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Styraxian steed</b> | 15           | 13           | 16/6          | 90            |

#### Special abilities

✧ **Blindside:** If you use a speed ability *and* win the combat round, you can strike at the steed's unprotected rear using the lower *armour* attribute (6). Otherwise, you are unable to outflank your foe and must strike against an *armour* of 16.

✧ **Sharp shooter:** The general is firing arrows in your direction. For each [1] result you roll for attack speed, you are hit by an arrow and must take 4 damage, ignoring *armour*. (If you have an ability that lets you change or reroll die results, you may use it to avoid this damage.)

If you manage to bring down the general's mount, then you must continue with the *health* that you have remaining. Turn to 50. If you are defeated, then you may return to an earlier point. Restore your *health*, then turn to 2.

You awake to find yourself lying on your side. The room is dark and smoky – a vaulted hall lined with flickering oil lamps. A row of alabaster statues stand in silent vigil against one wall, their faces grim-set and mean. Next to them, the dim light catches on the bared ribcage of some ancient beast, its skeleton reconstructed and strung on wires. Its jaws hang open in a silent roar, the blade-sized teeth mirrored in the glass display cases that litter the rest of the dusty space.

‘Oh yes. Be back soon. Oh yes...’

You arch your neck, seeking the source of the voice. The man in the red coat is leaning over one of the cases. Shards of glass sparkle on the ground around his feet.

‘Hush, hush. This is the one, yes? Just like he said – just like we thought.’ He lifts out a rectangular shield, its lower end tapering to a point. He holds it awkwardly, turning it over in his hands. ‘Are we sure? The sun, sun, sun.’ He scratches the back of his head, where you see his grey hair balding around an ugly scar. ‘Yes, like he said. Be back soon. So soon, pretty thing.’

He twists something set in the shield. There is a loud click, echoing in the empty chamber. Carefully, the man lifts a golden disc from out of the shield, fashioned to resemble a sun. He puts the shield aside and holds the disc aloft, gazing at its underside. ‘Lily, lily, lotus... lily, lily, lotus.’ The man licks his lips, chuckling to himself as he turns it round, seemingly counting patterns carved into the gold. ‘Lily, lily, lotus... ah.’ He touches something. There is a spark of magic and suddenly the disc begins to twist and fold in on itself, the sculptured rays of the sun forming the petals of a golden flower. Reaching into his coat, the man produces an ivory-and-gold rod which he slides into a hole beneath the head-piece, forming a wand-like staff. It flickers with golden light as soon as the two pieces connect.

‘I was right,’ the man sighs, shaking his head. His voice hints at disappointment. ‘More magic. Need more...’

You realise you still have your weapons. Gingerly, you shift your weight, preparing to spring at the man while he is still unawares. But even making this miniscule movement causes the man to flinch.

‘I hear you. Scrape, scrape, scraping. Sound is so very loud. So very loud.’ He spins round, his long coat snapping around his gaunt frame. ‘Breathing much softer. Calm. Softer.’ The man raises a finger and shakes it in a reprimanding fashion. ‘You’re not doing things you’re supposed to.’

You realise that the man is clearly deranged. But there is something familiar about him. A thin scar cuts down his left cheek, disfiguring his mouth into a perpetual sneer. Resting against his forehead is a gold crown, shaped to resemble three entwined serpents.

‘Who are you?’ you rasp hoarsely. ‘Why did you bring me here?’

‘Many name, name, names,’ he replies, his eyes glittering in the glow from the staff. ‘In the shroud, the name doesn’t matter, not so much. But... Lorcan... that’s what they used to call me.’ He points a trembling finger in your direction. ‘And you. You’re important because I have to kill you.’

Will you:

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Ask why he has to kill you?</b>            | <b>32</b> |
| <b>Ask if he is a Nevarin, like yourself?</b> | <b>48</b> |
| <b>Ask about the staff’s purpose?</b>         | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Ask about Daarko’s strange machine?</b>    | <b>42</b> |
| <b>Attack this deranged mage?</b>             | <b>25</b> |

## 14

You expose your mark, dragging the Nevarin’s shadowy remains towards the waiting jaws of your own branded serpents. You have gained the following special ability:

**Snakes alive! (sp):** You may entangle your opponent in coils of dark magic, lowering their *speed* by 2 for one combat round.

Across the hall, Nym has dispatched the shadow spawn but is now fending off the magical attacks of the female mage. As you suspected, she is a Nevarin – and her mark has brought her back to life. You jump the distance, your body fuelled by your absorbed shadow magic – but as you land on the other side of the balcony, you discover your effort has been wasted. The swordsman has already landed a lucky blow, forcing the woman to stagger backwards. He follows up with a twin strike, driving both blades through her dark robes, exploding her body into flickering clouds of shadow.

You stride past him, lifting your shadow mark to drink in her essence, denying her a second chance to heal. Nym shivers and looks away.

‘I hate it when you do that.’

You close your eyes, feeling yourself drifting away on the euphoric currents of magic, losing yourself to a void of darkness...

‘Nevarin!’

*You hear a voice but it is distant, distorted. It belonged to someone you once knew – but perhaps that was another life. You see others now, bodies shimmering like stars against the backdrop of night. Other Nevarin. Other faces. They slide past you, blurring into streaks of light. You try and focus but they are moving too quick, eluding you. All except one... standing alone, burning brighter than the rest. A man. His eyes widen with surprise as he turns to face you. You catch a scar running down his left cheek and a circlet of gold resting on his brow.*

‘Nevarin!’

You feel something tugging at you. Pulling you back.

With a gasp, you lurch forward, your eyes snapping open – to find Nym’s gaunt face inches from your own. ‘Woah, you’re back!’ The rogue rocks back on his heels, surprised. ‘What happened?’ he asks, looking you over with concern. ‘You just passed out cold.’

You try and remember, but the gossamer images are already fading from memory. ‘The mark...’ You look down to see its swirling runes humming with energy, their bright glow shimmering across your body.

‘It... it was nothing,’ you state hastily, clambering back to your feet. ‘We need to move.’

Nym snorts, nodding towards the corpses of the shadow spawn. ‘Wouldn’t be surprised if the whole mansion doesn’t know we’re here now.’ He flashes you a crooked grin. ‘So much for the stealthy approach, eh?’

‘Agreed.’ You spring over the balcony, dropping into the hall below. You land in a crouch, your mark blazing with fire. ‘The time for skulking in shadows is over.’ Turn to 49.



15

(Make a note of the word *apprentice* on your hero sheet.)

These pitiful creatures are no match for your power. Overcome by a dark frenzy, you throw aside your weapons and launch yourself at the nearest scarron. Catching it around the tail, you spin around, dragging the creature with you, then proceed to use it as a club to pummel the rest of its nightmarish brood into a foul-smelling pulp. Once your grim work is done, you swing back your arms and then hurl your makeshift weapon into the advancing ranks of shadow spawn. ‘And good riddance,’ you scowl, flicking the goo from your hands.

Congratulations! With the scarrons defeated, you may now help yourself to one of the following special rewards:

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p><b>The sting</b><br/>(main hand: spear)<br/>+3 speed +5 brawn<br/>Ability: impale<br/>(requirement: warrior)</p> | <p><b>Scarron reapers</b><br/>(gloves)<br/>+1 speed +4 magic<br/>Ability: piercing<br/>(requirement: mage)</p> | <p><b>Fang of Vengos</b><br/>(left hand: dagger)<br/>+2 speed +4 brawn<br/>Ability: venom<br/>(requirement: rogue)</p> |
|---|--|--|

When you have made your decision, turn to 26.

16

Searching the ogre’s filthy belongings, you find a leather pouch containing 50 gold crowns. You may also help yourself to one of the following special rewards:

**Chains of the void**  
(necklace)  
+1 speed +1 magic  
Ability: shackled

**Seed of rage**  
(talisman)  
+2 magic  
Ability: dominate

**Aged acromion**  
(main hand: wand)  
+2 speed +5 magic  
Ability: rust

When you have made your decision, turn to 56.



17

You sprint to the end of the building, then kick off from its edge, soaring effortlessly over the glittering sea of bodies. You twist in mid-air, sending bolts of black fire into the ranks of shadow spawn, your dark magic ripping through their bodies and leaving charred craters in the earth.

As you fall out of your dive, you grab hold of the statue, swinging yourself around to land on the plinth, right next to the surprised inquisitor. ‘You started without me,’ you grin, drawing your weapons. Mathis glares at you as he blocks yet another blast from the knight’s bow.

‘They weren’t keen on waiting,’ he scowls.

You put your back to the statue, your mind now focused on the nightmarish creations that are clambering to reach you. They look like

ghouls, save their bodies have been fashioned from pure shadow, their red eyes burning with a ravenous evil.

‘Ghasts,’ snarls the inquisitor. He swings his warhammer in a deadly arc, sending four of the creatures spinning away in a sizzling explosion of holy light. ‘Watch their claws.’

‘Just watch those arrows!’ you shout back, ducking as one goes zipping past, to smash into an advancing monster. ‘I’ll handle these!’ With a snarl of fury, you hurl yourself against the devilish ghasts, hoping to buy time until aid can arrive. You must fight:

|               | Speed | Brawn | Armour | Health |
|---------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| <b>Ghasts</b> | 16    | 9     | 7      | 140    |

**Special abilities**

✧ A gathering of ghasts: The ghasts’ sharp claws ignore your *armour*. (If you have *second skin* then you may use half of your *armour* score, rounding up, to absorb the damage).

✧ Bolt from the blue: Roll a die at the end of each combat round. If you roll [4] or more, then Mathis has deflected the general’s arrows with his shield. Otherwise, an arrow has got through and you must take 5 damage (ignoring *armour*) from the magical blast.

If you manage to survive to the start of the seventh combat round, then turn to 41. (Special achievement: If you defeat the ghasts before the end of the sixth round, then turn to 36). If you are defeated, then you may return to an earlier point. Restore your *health*, then turn to 57.

18

You take Avian’s hand, joining him on the magic carpet. ‘I’ll pilot – you’re the cannon,’ he says, crouching down at the front of the vehicle.

‘Do you even know how to defeat that thing?’ you ask, gazing up

at the immense floating orb.

Avian glances over his shoulder. 'No. But that's never stopped me before. Here, you might need these.' He flips you pair of goggles.

'Are you serious?'

Avian grins. 'Hold tight.'

The carpet gives a sudden lurch as it jolts forward, speeding across the battlefield. The wind roars in your ears as it begins to pick up speed, accelerating over the rooftops of the city. Then, everything is plunged into a thick, gritty blackness. You choke as you swallow a mouthful of the smog, the grime stinging your eyes. Taking the goggles, you quickly strap them over your face, rubbing the dirt from their visor as you try and focus.

'I don't see anything,' you shout, struggling to get your bearings.

Suddenly, you see flashes of magic ahead. Something hurtles past in a ball of flames, accompanied by a high-pitched scream. Then the smog begins to thin and you find yourself speeding over a landscape of grey, bulbous flesh. The doom orb.

With a sickening lurch, the carpet veers to the side, missing a tentacle-like appendage by scant inches. The sudden movement throws you off balance, forcing you to grip the edges of the carpet to steady yourself.

Around you, there are explosions of light, as the other mages sweep across the face of the orb, flinging spells at its immense body. But each time the spells hit its flesh, a meshwork of magic flashes into being, causing them to spark and fizzle uselessly. 'It has a shield!' you shout above the roar of the wind.

'I know,' cries Avian, taking the carpet down towards the surface. 'The shield is blocking magic... but we can get past it.'

A column of black fire bursts out from a crater-sized hole. Avian swerves aside, dodging the blast. Several of the other mages are less lucky however, their carpets slamming into the flames and exploding into balls of spinning light.

'There!' Avian points to something below. Squinting through your grime-stained goggles, you see a trench of fatty tissue stretching out across the face of the creature's body. The floor of the trench is dotted with hundreds of circular holes, some of which are opening and closing, occasionally expelling geysers of gas into the air. 'One of those should take us through into the brain.'

You do a double-take. 'Take us through to *what?*'

The carpet tilts into a sickening series of spins, finally levelling out as one of the open holes speeds towards you. A second later and you are zooming down a circular tunnel, its slime-covered walls streaking past in a pink-white blur.

'Do you know where you are going?' you yell hoarsely, aware that you are now inside a vast maze of tunnels, branching out through the innards of the beast.

Avian swerves, guiding the carpet into a smaller side passage, its floor and ceiling pulsing with blue light. 'We need to follow these neural pulses,' says Avian, deviating down another passageway where the light is rippling in dazzling halos.

'I've done some crazy things, mage – but this...'

As you hurtle deeper into the doom orb, you become aware of an angry buzzing sound, getting louder and louder. Glancing back, you see a swarm of wasp-like creatures in close pursuit. 'We've got company!'

Avian looks back. 'Sentries. Hold on. We're almost—'

The mage's words are cut short as the carpet starts to brake suddenly, throwing you forwards. As you slam into Avian, you look over his shoulder to see what has caused the sudden interruption.

The tunnel ahead is covered by a large pink membrane, its bloated surface branched with veins. As the carpet slides to a halt next to it, you hear a loud hiss from above. Looking up, you see a cluster of tentacles dangling from the ceiling of the tunnel. Each one is secreting a glowing green resin, which starts to mist, forming dense clouds of vapour.

'Poison!' gasps Avian, summoning magic to his hands. 'We need to break through this membrane – quickly!'

'I think we have bigger problems...' You spin round, as the buzzing sentries swarm closer, their abdomens tapering back into sword-sized stingers. In order to continue deeper into the orb, you will have to overcome its deadly defences:

|                     | Speed | Magic | Armour | Health |
|---------------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| <b>Sentries</b>     | 15    | 12    | -      | -      |
| <b>Membrane</b>     | -     | -     | 19     | 80     |
| <b>Poison nodes</b> | -     | -     | 5      | 60     |

### Special abilities

✧ Endless swarm: The sentries cannot be defeated – as soon as one falls, there is another to take its place. You will need to concentrate on breaking through the membrane.

✧ Poison nodes: At the end of every combat round, if the poison nodes are still alive, you must automatically lose 4 *health*.

✧ Avian's aid: You may add 2 to your damage score, for the duration of this combat.

If you win a combat round against the sentries, you can choose to apply your damage to the membrane or the poison nodes (or both, if you have an ability that lets you do so). Once the membrane is reduced to zero *health*, you have broken through and automatically win the combat.

If you manage to break through the membrane before the sentries and poison defeat you, turn to 60.



19

Searching the ogre's filthy belongings, you find a leather pouch containing 50 gold crowns. You may also help yourself to one of the following special rewards:

| <b>Wrecking ball</b><br>(left hand: club) | <b>Primal gauntlets</b><br>(gloves)     | <b>Beast's harness</b><br>(chest)        |
|---|---|--|
| +2 speed +5 brawn<br>Ability: demolish    | +1 speed +4 brawn<br>Ability: merciless | +2 speed +4 armour<br>Ability: knockdown |

When you have made your decision, turn to 56.

20

(Make a note of the word *companion* on your hero sheet.)

The creatures are strong – but they are slow. Sidestepping yet another sluggish attack, you turn and hurry back towards the shield, leaping and kicking off from its side to back-flip through the air. The creatures snarl and curse as you sail over their heads, slicing and blasting as you go. Twisting round mid-air, you drop onto the leader's back, throwing aside your weapons to rip one of its growths free. Black slime geysers from its ruptured body, as you take the pulsating parasite and wrap it around the decayer's throat. There is a sickening crunch as the rotted head snaps free of its body, rolling away into the dust.

The decayer shakes and convulses, then starts to topple backwards. You leap free at the last moment, ripping another parasite from its back. The unnatural growth is still spewing out spores from its gaping maw, surrounding you in a dense cloud of floating bombs. Your slow-witted foes stumble into them, igniting their own mouldy wrappings and engulfing themselves in flame.

Congratulations! The decayers have been defeated. You may now help yourself to one of the following rewards:

**Parasitic plate**  
(left hand: shield)  
+2 speed +4 armour  
Ability: leech  
(requirement: warrior)

**Decayer's wraps**  
(chest)  
+2 speed +3 brawn  
Ability: disease

**Spore shoulders**  
(cloak)  
+2 speed +3 armour  
Ability: spore cloud  
(requirement: mage)

When you have made your decision, turn to 59.

## 21

Ravenwing's men pursue the routed shadow spawn, slashing and blasting at their fleeing enemy. The battle is won. But at what cost? You look around at the men that have remained behind – not only the wounded and the dead, but those who have simply hung back from exhaustion. Many have a haunted look about them, their bodies blackened by soot and grime. You can't imagine what devastation awaits beyond the walls of the city – where the doom orb's magic was turned against the camp. The men's expressions tell you enough.

Across the rubble-strewn square, you see Mathis lying on his side. The inquisitor looks badly wounded. Possibly fatal. Caeleb kneels at his side, his ear pressed close to the warrior's fevered ramblings. Nym's stumbles past, helping to support an exhausted Lansbury. As he passes by, he nods a silent word of thanks. You return the gesture, glad that your companions are safe.

'Nevarin!' You look up, to see Caeleb trudging through the rubble towards you. The cavalier's armour is raked with black scars, his shield battered and dented. 'It's over for your kind,' he sneers, hobbling closer. 'I swore to Mathis... to the One God... that, I'd destroy all shadow spawn this day...'

'Caeleb?' You shake your head in confusion. 'What madness is this? I'm not your enemy.'

He raises his inscribed sword. 'Mathis told me everything...'

Suddenly, you catch movement out of the corner of your eye. A man is standing on the edge of a rooftop, his scarlet coat billowing in the wind. He raises his hand and suddenly you feel an invisible force closing in around you, pinning your arms and legs tightly together.

Then the man is moving, running through the air as quickly and deftly as if it was solid ground. And like a dog on leash, you find yourself being dragged after him, floating in a magical prison.

'More demons!' screams Caeleb. 'Don't think you can escape!'

You are pulled across a broad plaza, its fountains and pathways now charred and cratered, towards an officious-looking building clinging to a rise of grey rock. You try and discern its purpose – but the invisible bonds shift, spinning you around. Then something hard strikes you across the head, plunging you into darkness. Turn to 13.

## 22

The doors are unlocked. Warily, you push them open, finding yourself in a vast, empty hall of white stone. You pause on the threshold, eyes scanning the high walls and vaulted ceiling.

At your bidding, your shadow mark pulses into life, flooding you with its power. You reach out, sensing for signs of shadow magic. The place reeks of it. But the tang of fear is more palpable. You look to Nym, who is eyeing his surroundings nervously, his fingers drumming against the pommels of his blades.

'I have a bad feeling about this,' he mutters.

'Are you... *afraid*?' you ask curiously. It is a sensation almost alien to you now.

Nym's bristles with affront. 'We don't all have your talent for coming back from the dead,' he replies sharply. 'Just watch my back.' His swords hiss out of their scabbards as he steps forward onto the marbled floor.

'No!' You put out a hand, but it is too late. The room swiftly darkens as shadows swirl from the corners of the room. They move with purpose, winding towards the centre of the chamber, where they coil together to form a spinning column of dark light.

'Allam's teeth, was it something I said?' growls Nyms.

'A trap,' you reply, edging cautiously forwards. 'Someone warded the door.'

As you approach, the column starts to shift and change, its centre moulding itself into the figure of a woman. She crosses her arms to her chest, allowing the shadows to wrap about her body, coating it in tattered folds of smoke and shadow.

Realising that you must destroy this dark spirit before it is at full strength, you raise your weapons and charge forward. As if in response, the woman throws back her head, her open mouth slowly distending into a yawning chasm of darkness.

'It's a banshee,' gasps Nyms. 'Don't let it scream, or we're done for!'

'Then let us silence it forever,' you reply, hurling your magic and steel against this sinister foe. You must fight:

|                | <b>Speed</b> | <b>Magic</b> | <b>Armour</b> | <b>Health</b> |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Banshee</b> | 14           | 13           | 8             | 76 (*)        |

### Special abilities

✧ Gathering darkness: The shadows are slowly merging together to form the banshee. At the end of each combat round, the banshee's *health* increases by 8. (Once the banshee is reduced to zero *health*, it can no longer heal.)

✧ Wail of the banshee: Once the banshee's *health* reaches 100 or more, it will have gained sufficient strength to issue its call – alerting the mansion to your presence. This will immediately summon guards, who will quickly overwhelm you – losing you the combat.

If you are able to defeat the banshee before it can sound its alarm, turn to 34.

## 23

(Make a note of the word *apprentice* on your hero sheet.)

Forced back against the shield, you are uncertain how long you will be able to hold off against these fearsome adversaries. Suddenly, a bright flash of light draws your attention skywards. From out of the smog, you see white shapes swooping down over the ruined city, their vapour trails blazing like bright comets. Beneath them, a series of explosions swell out across the square, cutting a vicious swathe through the tightly-packed ranks of shadow spawn.

'The airborne regulars!' You punch the air as the mages hurtle past on their flying carpets.

Then, at the far side of the square, you hear the resonating blast of a horn. From your vantage point, it is difficult to see through the thronging masses, but it looks like a battalion of Ravenwing's militia have made it across the city. You catch the glimmer of polished armour and a fluttering standard, proudly displaying the black raven. Aid has finally arrived.

For your victory over the scarrons, you may now help yourself to the following reward:

### Scarron bile (2 uses)

(backpack)

It smells bad. Very bad.

Ability: vitriol

When you have updated your character sheet, turn to 37.

## 24

It is Mathis. The inquisitor's armour is raked with black scars, his hair plastered to his face by blood and sweat. 'Nevarin,' he drawls, stumbling dizzily through the haze. 'I swore to the One God, the maker... that I'd destroy all shadow spawn this day...'

'Mathis?' You frown, taking a step backwards. 'You are not yourself...'

He raises his warhammer. 'Oh I am perfectly myself, demon!'

Suddenly, you catch movement out of the corner of your eye. A man is standing on the edge of a rooftop, his scarlet coat billowing in the wind. He raises his hand and suddenly you feel the strange force closing in around you once again. You try and struggle, but the invisible bonds hold you fast.

Then the man is moving, running through the air as quickly and deftly as if it was solid ground. And like a dog on a leash, you find yourself being dragged after him, floating in a magical prison.

'I'll find you!' screams Mathis. 'I'll find you, demon!'

You are pulled across a broad plaza, its fountains and pathways now charred and cratered, towards an officious-looking building clinging to a rise of grey rock. You try and discern its purpose – but the invisible bonds shift, spinning you around. Then something hard strikes you across the head, plunging you into darkness. Turn to 13.

## 25

You clamber to your feet, keeping a wary eye on the mage. He regards you with interest, fingers drumming against the rod of his staff.

'There won't be a peaceful outcome to this, will there?' you sigh, drawing your weapons.

Lorcan shakes his head. 'I need your magic. To power the staff.'

'Then I can't give you what you want.'

There is a tense silence as you both eye each other – knowing

that the next minute, the next few seconds, may decide both your fates.

You spring forward. The mage raises a hand, sending a concussive blast of air in your direction. It hits you in the stomach, blowing you back into one of the glass cases. You smash through it, tumbling over in an agile roll to land back on your feet.

'Agh! My magic is weak,' snarls Lorcan. 'I should have foreseen this... so ill-prepared. An oversight...' He continues muttering to himself as he aims the staff towards the nearest row of statues. Swirls of white mist drift from its flower-like head, settling around several of the alabaster figures. 'Defend your master!' cries the mage. He swings round to watch your next move, his shadow mark glowing with purple light.

You advance, crunching through the broken glass, aware that the stone figures are coming to life, staggering forward through a cloud of age-old dust. It is time to fight:

|               | Speed | Magic | Armour | Health |
|---------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| <b>Lorcan</b> | 15    | 13    | 8      | 100    |
| <b>Statue</b> | -     | -     | 10     | 24     |
| <b>Statue</b> | -     | -     | 10     | 24     |
| <b>Statue</b> | -     | -     | 10     | 24     |

### Special abilities

✧ Enduring spirit: At the end of each combat round, Lorcan heals 4 health. Once the Lorcan's *health* has been reduced to zero, he cannot heal. (This ability cannot take him above his starting health of 100.)

✧ Stomping statues: At the end of each combat round, each surviving statue inflicts 4 damage to your hero, ignoring *armour*.

✧ Magic of the makers: When each statue is destroyed, their magic returns to the staff. For each statue destroyed, Lorcan's *speed*, *magic* and *armour* are increased by 1.

✧ Enchanted stone: The statues are immune to all passive effects, such as *bleed*, *burn* and *venom*.

If you win a combat round against Lorcan, you can choose to direct your damage towards the mage or one of the statues. Once Lorcan is defeated, any remaining statues immediately crumble into dust.

If you manage to defeat this deranged opponent, turn to 58.

## 26

Suddenly, a bright flash of light draws your attention skywards. From out of the smog, you see white shapes swooping down over the ruined city, their vapour trails blazing like bright comets. Beneath them, a series of explosions swell out across the square, cutting a vicious swathe through the tightly-packed ranks of shadow spawn.

'The airborne regulars!' You punch the air as the mages hurtle past on their flying carpets.

Then, at the far side of the square, you hear the resonating blast of a horn. From your vantage point, it is difficult to see through the thronging masses, but it looks like a battalion of Ravenwing's militia have made it across the city. You catch the glimmer of polished armour and a fluttering standard, proudly displaying the black raven. Aid has finally arrived. Turn to 37.

## 27

Your blows batter the warrior to his knees. From behind the mask, you hear a wheezing gasp as the magic that surrounds his body flickers and dies. 'I always knew... it would be you,' he pants. 'You were the... last... the finest. You held out until... the end.'

You raise your weapons, ready to deliver the final blow.

'The legion took everything... and that is what broke you... made you the vessel for their power.' The warrior lifts a gloved hand to his mask. 'You cannot win this war, Nevarin. But I give to you... my strength.'

He pulls the mask away – and suddenly a stream of black magic floods out from beneath the hood, slamming into your shadow mark. You stumble back, gasping for breath as the magic burns through your body, searing along each and every vein.

And then a scene, a memory, flashes before your eyes.

*You stand before an empty shell of a building, blackened with soot. Flames still lick around its shattered walls, where bodies lie sprawled against the dark sand. You knew them. Family. And they have been taken from you. You look down, at the mark that shimmers along your arm, and the bloodied blade in your hand. It is then that you are reminded of what you have done – that this is your work. The laughter of your new master rings in your ears.*

*'You want to feel something, don't you?' spits Sharroth, the creature's immense shadow stretching across the sand. 'We will remake you, Nevarin. Together we will accomplish great things.'*

Then the memory fades, joining the other indistinct fragments that torment you each and every day. If you are a mage turn to 38. If you are a warrior, turn to 11. If you are a rogue, turn to 54.

## 28

You raise your weapons defensively. 'Who is it?' you call, flinching when you hear the sound of Lorcan's voice coming from your own lips.

*Take the staff, fool.*

And ringing inside your head.

'Shut up,' you growl between clenched teeth.

The figure steps forward out of the shadows. You had already guessed who it was – from the bulky armour and the lightning flickering across their warhammer. 'Mathis...'

The inquisitor has a mad look about his eyes, his movements sluggish from exhaustion. 'More Nevarin scum.' He gives his surroundings a wary once over, his gaze falling on the crumpled clothes that once belonged to Lorcan.

‘Wait!’ You lower your weapons, realising that the inquisitor is no longer seeing your own body, but that of the gaunt mage. ‘It’s me, Mathis. Remember? This is not my body!’

Mathis takes another step forward, bringing his warhammer up across his chest. He shakes his head, almost with regret. ‘You are a demon. And you must be stopped.’

‘But I saved your—’

The inquisitor charges, moving with a speed that belies his heavy armour. You barely have time to block the warrior’s first blow, his second lifting you off your feet and carrying you across the room. You smash through a clay urn, showering the ground with broken pottery.

You stumble to your feet woozily, aware that your wounds are not healing. A quick glance at your shadow mark confirms that its magic is not responding – its usual radiance reduced to a dull glow.

*I told you to take the staff.*

‘What are you doing?’ you scowl angrily. ‘Are you controlling the mark?’

*We have to leave. Leave. Leave. Now!*

The inquisitor charges again. You throw yourself aside at the last moment, his warhammer taking a huge gouge out the wall. He swings around, the head of the weapon slamming into your side. You are thrown backwards, tumbling across the broken rubble, your body wracked with pain. Something wet is running down your face. You put a shaking hand to it, surprised when it comes away coated in blood.

‘Heal me,’ you choke, spitting out a broken tooth. ‘Do you want us both to die?’

*I told you what to do.*

You find your feet again, only to see Mathis closing once more. You tangle together, smashing through wood and glass. His head butts into your own, sending it snapping back. Then his hammer cracks across your ribs, eliciting a strangled cry of pain. By luck rather than design, you stumble back, avoiding his follow-up swing.

*The shroud. The place between worlds. We must go! Go!*

Lorcan’s voice distracts you. The hammer smashes into your chest, hurling you back across the room. You crash down, spitting dust and blood, your hands grappling over broken rock and pottery. Then you feel something, cold to the touch.

*Yes. Yes. Take the staff.*

You struggle to raise your head. One eye is closed and it won’t open – the other struggles to focus, the room reduced to shreds of colour, whirling and reeling in a sickening spin. Boots crunch through the debris as the inquisitor advances. You can hear his laboured breathing.

*Take the staff. Just think of the possibilities, Nevarin. The shroud. The gateway to other worlds. Other dreams. Don’t let it end like this.*

‘Heal me...’ you croak, wincing as you try and move your shattered body. ‘Heal me.’

The boots crunch closer and then stop. Mathis stands over you, his warhammer raised. You look up, his blurred face swaying like a reflection in water. ‘Finally demon, I will rid this world of your taint...’

The warhammer comes down. You reach out and snatch the staff, gripping it to your chest. It flares into a brilliant golden light, the magic from your shadow mark pumping into it, filling it with new life. Your life...

*Yes, yes! The shroud calls us... the staff is working...*

The warhammer comes down. But it finds only rubble, crushing it to sand beneath its heavy weight. Mathis stumbles back, eyes wide with surprise. ‘It can’t be...’

All that remains of you is a faint outline of smoke, curling into the dusty air.

You have simply vanished.

‘Demons...’ he spins around, eyes scanning the shadows. ‘Where are you, demon? Where did you go?’ But the only answer he receives is the echo of his own voice. ‘Impossible...’ He shifts round, looking back to where you had been lying. A tattered roll of parchment lies crumpled amongst the dust. He reaches down and picks it up, unravelling it to reveal a letter. A letter of recommendation for a young knight to apprentice with the great Avian Dale. His brow furrows as he spots your

pack lying some metres away, its contents scattered throughout the rubble.

Mathis crumples the parchment in his fist. 'Wherever you go, Nevarin... I *will* find you. As the One God is my witness. This is not the end...'

## 29

'I understand,' nods Avian. 'Then take this. I suspect you will have need of it.' He reaches into his robes and pulls out a metal globe. 'Something I made myself.' He tosses it to you.

'What is it?' you ask, snatching it out of the air. Turning it over in your hands, you discover that the globe's surface is perfectly smooth, without marking or decoration.

'It will project a shield around you, for a limited time,' explains the mage. 'Use it wisely.'

### **Portable shield (1 use)** (backpack)

Use anytime in combat to raise a shield.

This shield will absorb 10 damage before it is destroyed. Any further damage is deducted from your own *health*

'Thank you.' You clasp Avian's hand.

The mage regards you gravely, as if troubled by something. 'You will travel to dark places, Nevarin. Of that I am sure.' He glances up at the doom orb, its magic glittering against the darkening sky. 'The time has come...' He sighs, his gaze shifting back to you. 'I think you have fulfilled your apprenticeship, don't you?'

He raises his hands and suddenly bright light flares around the edges of the carpet. A second later and the mage is speeding away, to join the rest of the airborne regulars gathering at the far side of the

square.

You glance down at the globe, and at your own wearied expression reflected in its metallic surface. Indeed, you have come a long way since you first walked across the drawbridge at Avian's castle, presenting the mage with your letter of recommendation. 'Dark places...' Pocketing Avian's gift, you turn your attention back to the square. Turn to 2.

## 30

Searching the ogre's filthy belongings, you find a leather pouch containing 50 gold crowns. You may also help yourself to one of the following special rewards:

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Sacrum of carnage</b><br>(main hand: fist weapon)<br>+2 speed +5 brawn<br>Ability: fatal blow | <b>Beast's backbone</b><br>(chest)<br>+2 speed +4 armour<br>Ability: savagery | <b>Hulking shoulders</b><br>(cloak)<br>+2 speed +3 brawn<br>Ability: barbs |
|--|---|--|

When you have made your decision, turn to 56.

## 31

You race from the mansion, struggling to keep your balance as the ground shifts and trembles beneath your feet. The booming sound has not abated, each thunderous bellow hinting at something impossibly large – and powerful – now loose in the city.

Stumbling through a series of rubble-filled halls, you finally make it out into the courtyard...

...to discover that day has turned to night.

Looking up, you see the cause of this dramatic change – a gargantuan orb-like creature hangs suspended above Talanost. You stagger, almost falling to your knees, as you struggle to take in its

enormity. The orb is a moon-sized mass of bloated grey flesh, its underside swelling into a vast number of tubular protrusions. From each one, black smoke pumps out into the darkening skies, enveloping the city in a veil of smog.

‘How did we miss that?’ croaks Nym, unable to tear his eyes away from the horror.

There is another thunderous boom from above, coming from the creature itself. Magic crackles over its body, coating it in a glimmering meshwork of light.

‘Judah, protect us!’ Mathis strides down the mansion stairs, his fists gripping his warhammer ‘Avian, speak to me. What is that thing?’

The mage stands in the doorway, his eyes wide with astonishment. ‘A doom orb. The most dangerous of the legion’s creations.’

‘Did that machine summon it here?’ you ask confused.

Avian struggles to order his thoughts. ‘I... I think so... I believe the machine was keeping it anchored... in the shroud.’ His gaze shifts to Mathis. ‘Destroying the machine would have severed the link, pulling it back to our world. We should not have interfered!’

Before the inquisitor can reply, there is a deafening roar from above. The creature’s tubes begin to swell, their sides flickering with spectral light – then, like a giant bellows, they deflate, expelling a huge blast of black fire from their gigantic apertures. The column of flame slams down in an area outside the city walls, sending up a vast cloud of ash and debris.

The resulting tremor forces you all to hug the ground.

‘That must have been the camp,’ chokes Lansbury. ‘Ravenwing’s forces...’

You catch her panicked expression. Then the world explodes in white light. You find yourself flying through the air, jagged rocks and broken masonry spiralling past you. Then you crash down on something hard, bones snapping and breaking beneath you. Before you can register

the pain, your shadow mark flares into life, knitting your shattered body back together again.

As you stagger to your feet, you see a figure running towards you through the smoke. One of Ravenwing’s guards. He looks frantic, as if he is being chased by something. A bright light flashes behind him, then he topples to the ground, his sword skittering away. You see that the back of his armour has been blown away, an arrow shaft protruding from his exposed back.

You hurry down the street, your magic slowly filling you with renewed strength. From somewhere up ahead, you can hear the clamour of battle – steel ringing on steel, and the wail of some bestial creature. The ground trembles as more explosions rip across the crumbling wasteland. You can’t detect their source, but clearly they are not the work of the monstrous orb, whose attention seems focused on the camp beyond the city walls.

Your shadow mark flashes once again, feeding off your adrenaline and Daarko’s absorbed magic. The world begins to blur as you race forward at impossible speed, your footfalls punching holes into the street. Ahead, you sight a ruined hall, one side reduced to a jagged slope of rubble. With a cry of exertion, you throw your body forwards, kicking off from a nearby wall to grab a splintered beam. You swing underneath it, somersaulting high into the air – the force of your momentum taking you spinning over the ravaged side of the hall, to alight on its roof.

Below you stretches Talanost’s famous market square.

Once it might have been a joyous sight – a gaudy collision of colour and noise, of eager shoppers bustling down makeshift aisles, to the accompaniment of minstrels and the hawking cries of merchants. But today...

Today it is teeming with shadow spawn. Turn to 57.



### 32

'For this,' grins the mage, tapping the side of the staff. 'Your power is strong – stronger than any I have seen.' He leans forward, the hollows in his face giving him a skull-like appearance. 'I absorb your essence then I am strong again. Yes? Make the staff work.' He nods his head quickly, his broken lips forming a mockery of a smile. 'There are no choices. No choices. He tells me to do it. He tells me...'

'Who?' you ask sardonically, not too surprised that this crazed man is hearing 'voices' in his head.

'The man in the shroud,' grins the mage, pacing up and down. 'I don't hear him now, but I know he is there. He told me that this was here,' he shakes the staff. 'Tells me the truth of things.' The mage stops pacing, standing rigid, holding his breath. For a moment there is an uneasy silence.

You go to speak, but the man puts out a hand. 'Shush, listen. Sometimes... I hear him, if I concentrate.' He frowns, then opens his eyes. 'I'll hear him again soon. I know I will. When I go home.'

Return to 13 to ask Lorcan another question, or turn to 25 to attack this deranged mage.

### 33

You raise your weapons defensively. 'Who is it?' you call, flinching when you hear the sound of Lorcan's voice coming from your own lips.

*Take the staff, fool.*

And ringing inside your head.

'Shut up,' you growl between clenched teeth.

The figure steps forward out of the shadows. You had already guessed who it was – from the bulky armour and the dented shield. 'Caeleb...'

The cavalier has a mad look about his eyes, his movements sluggish from exhaustion. 'More Nevarin scum.' He gives his surroundings a wary once over, his gaze falling on the crumpled clothes that once belonged to Lorcan.

'Wait!' You lower your weapons, realising that he is no longer seeing your own body, but that of the gaunt mage. 'It's me, Caeleb. Remember? We fought with Captain Redguard... Nyms... Lansbury. This is not my body!'

Caeleb takes another step forward, raising his scarred shield. In the other hand, a mighty broadsword hums with magic, its holy inscriptions glittering with a pale light. 'You are a demon. Mathis told me what you did.' He shakes his head, almost with regret. 'And you must be stopped.'

'Did what?' you insist.

'The machine. You brought the legion here. Just like you did before... when you stole the Nexus.'

You shake your head in dismay. 'I did nothing to the machine. It was Mathis. He destroyed it – that's what brought the black guard to the city. He lied to you!'

'And what is *this*?' he scowls, waving the point of his sword across your new body. 'You are a trickster. Your magic is a dark thing... evil.'

'Really?' You bristle with anger, hands clenching around your weapons. 'I don't remember you complaining when I was saving your life – saving everybody's life, all those times.'

Caeleb bares his teeth. 'While you live, there is still a shadow spawn in this city.'

'And what are planning to do about that?' you snipe. 'I do not wish to fight you, Caeleb. You are a friend. A companion. Do not make me...'

The cavalier charges, moving with a startling speed. You barely have time to block the warrior's first blow, his sword scraping against your own. Then his shield cuts in, its metal rim catching you in the midriff

and lifting you off your feet. You flail through the air, smashing through a clay urn and showering the ground with broken pottery.

'This has to end,' grunts the warrior, metal rattling as he advances. 'It ends today.'

You stumble to your feet woozily, aware that your wounds are not healing. A quick glance at your shadow mark confirms that its magic is not responding – its usual radiance reduced to a dull glow.

*I told you to take the staff.*

'What are you doing?' you scowl angrily. 'Are you controlling the mark?'

*We have to leave. Leave. Leave. Now!*

Caeleb charges again, leading with his shield. You sidestep, bringing your weapons across your body, hoping to knock him away. But they graze off metal, his shield blocking the blow. His sword quickly follows, swinging around in a cruel arc. You try and dodge the attack, taking a nick on the cheek. Another blow leaves a burning scratch across your leg.

'Stop this madness,' you cry, shaking with pain and anger. 'I am not what you think I am.'

His shield connects with your chest, sending you tumbling back into the broken rubble. As you struggle to rise, you become aware of something wet running down your face. You put a shaking hand to it, surprised when it comes away coated in blood.

'Heal me,' you choke, spitting out a broken tooth. 'Do you want us both to die?'

*I told you what to do.*

You find your feet again, only to see Caeleb closing once more. You tangle together, smashing through wood and glass. His head butts into your own, sending it snapping back. Then his shield cracks across your ribs, eliciting a strangled cry of pain. By luck rather than design, you stumble back, avoiding his follow-up swing.

*The shroud. The place between worlds. We must go! Go!*

Lorcan's voice distracts you. The rim of the shield smashes into

your side, hurling you back across the room. You crash down, spitting dust and blood, your hands grappling over broken rock and pottery. Then you feel something, cold to the touch.

*Yes. Yes. Take the staff.*

You struggle to raise your head. One eye is closed and it won't open – the other struggles to focus, the room reduced to shreds of colour, whirling and reeling in a sickening spin. Boots crunch through the debris as the cavalier advances. You can hear his laboured breathing.

*Take the staff. Just think of the possibilities, Nevarin. The shroud. The gateway to other worlds. Other dreams. Don't let it end like this.*

'Heal me...' you croak, wincing as you try and move your shattered body. 'Heal me.'

The boots crunch closer and then stop. Caeleb stands over you, his inscribed sword raised. You look up, his blurred face swaying like a reflection in water. 'Finally, demon, I will rid this world of your taint...'

The sword hums as it slices down through the air.

'No!' You reach out and snatch the staff, gripping it to your chest. It flares into a brilliant golden light, the magic from your shadow mark pumping into it, filling it with new life. Your life...

*Yes, yes! The shroud calls us... The staff is working...*

The sword slices through the rubble, lodging itself deep into the ground. Caeleb tugs it free, stumbling back in surprise. 'It can't be...'

All that remains of you is a faint outline of smoke, curling into the dusty air.

You have simply vanished.

'Demons...' he spins around, eyes scanning the shadows. 'Where are you demon? Where did you go?' But the only answer he receives is the echo of his own voice. 'Impossible...' He shifts round, looking back to where you had been lying. A tattered piece of parchment lies crumpled amongst the dust. He reaches down and picks it up, unravelling it to reveal a letter. A letter of recommendation for a young knight to apprentice with the great Avian Dale. His brow furrows as he spots your pack lying some metres away, its contents scattered throughout

the rubble.

Caeleb crumples the parchment in his fist. 'Wherever you go, Nevarin... I *will* find you. As the One God is my witness. This is not the end...'

### 34

You expose your mark, dragging the spirit's shadowy remains towards the waiting jaws of your branded serpents. You have gained the following special ability:

**Banshee's wail (co):** Use this ability to stop your opponent rolling for damage when they have won a round. You can only use this ability once per combat.

Nyms shivers and looks away. 'I hate it when you do that.'

You laugh as the newly absorbed magic surges through your body, healing your wounds and swelling your corded muscles. You close your eyes, feeling yourself drifting away on the euphoric currents of magic, losing yourself to a void of darkness...

*'Nevarin!'*

*You hear a voice but it is distant, distorted. It belonged to someone you once knew – but perhaps that was another life. You see others now, bodies shimmering like stars against the backdrop of night. Other Nevarin. Other faces. They slide past you, blurring into streaks of light. You try and focus but they are moving too quick, eluding you. All except one... standing alone, burning brighter than the rest. A man. His eyes widen with surprise as he turns to face you. You catch a scar running down his left cheek and a circlet of gold resting on his brow.*

*'Nevarin!'*

You feel something tugging at you. Pulling you back.

With a gasp, you lurch forward, your eyes snapping open – to find Nyms' gaunt face inches from your own. 'Woah, you're back!' The rogue

rocks back on his heels, surprised. 'What happened?' he asks, looking you over with concern. 'You just passed out cold.'

You try and remember, but the gossamer images are already fading from memory. 'The mark...' You look down to see its swirling runes humming with energy, their bright glow shimmering across your body. 'It... it was nothing,' you state hastily, clambering back to your feet.

As your gaze falls on the double doors leading deeper into the mansion, you can't help but feel that whatever lurks in this place, in this city, now knows you are coming.

'I've got a new plan' says Nyms, his hands flexing around his weapons. 'You lead the way and I'll watch *your* back. How does that sound – better?'

You stride towards the double doors and fling them open, their runes of protection fizzing and hissing in protest. 'Do not worry, my friend. The time for skulking in shadows is over.' Turn to 49.

### 35

It is Caeleb. The cavalier's armour is raked with black scars, his shield battered and dented. He staggers dizzily through the haze, his inscribed sword dragging through the dirt behind him. 'Nevarin,' he drawls, hobbling closer. 'I swore to Mathis... to the One God... that, I'd destroy all shadow spawn this day...'

'Caeleb?' You shake your head in confusion. 'What madness is this? I'm not your enemy!'

Suddenly, you catch movement out of the corner of your eye. A man is standing on the edge of a rooftop, his scarlet coat billowing in the wind. He raises his hand and suddenly you feel the strange force closing in around you once again. You try and struggle, but the invisible bonds hold you fast.

Then the man is moving, running through the air as quickly and deftly as if it was solid ground. And like a dog on leash, you find yourself

being dragged after him, floating in a magical prison.

'I'll find you!' screams Caeleb. 'I'll find you, demon!'

You are pulled across a broad plaza, its fountains and pathways now charred and cratered, towards an officious-looking building clinging to a rise of grey rock. You try and discern its purpose – but the invisible bonds shift, spinning you around. Then something hard strikes you across the head, plunging you into darkness. Turn to 13.

**36**

(Make a note of the word *rival* on your hero sheet.)

Overcome by a dark frenzy, you throw aside your weapons and turn to the statue. Black fire blazes in your hands as you grab the stone and rip it free from the plinth. As the remaining ghastrs scramble towards you, hissing with rage, you swing the statue like a giant club, smashing their screaming bodies across the square.

The weight and momentum of your swing spins you around, throwing you face-to-face with the final ghastr. It's lips pull back to emit a piercing shriek, blasting you with its noxious breath. Balking in disgust, you kick the creature away, then bring the remains of the crumbling statue down on top of it, smashing it to pieces. 'Now you're history,' you grimace, kicking away the statue's goo-stained head.

Congratulations! The ghastrs have been defeated. You may help yourself to one of the following rewards:

|                                   |                                  |  |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Drape of shadow</b><br>(cloak) | <b>Scissor hands</b><br>(gloves) | <b>Lexicon of bones</b><br>(left hand: spell book) |
| +2 speed +4 brawn                 | +1 speed +4 brawn                | +2 speed +5 magic                                  |
| Ability: chill touch              | Ability: piercing                | Ability: haunt                                     |

When you have made your decision, turn to 6.

**37**

Avian drops his shield with a pained gasp. You rush to his side, putting an arm out to support him. He bats you away impatiently. 'I'm fine, I'm fine.' Frantically, he begins rummaging around in his robes, his gaze fixed on the gargantuan doom orb which still floats above the city.

'Ah, yes!' The mage pulls out a small square of patterned cloth. With a flick of the wrist, he sends the cloth billowing outwards – its length rapidly unfurling into a full-sized magic carpet. 'We can't leave the doom orb unchallenged!' He steps onto the carpet, then offers out his hand. 'If your magic is strong, I could use your aid.'

If you have a *magic* score of 24 or above, you may accompany Avian Dale. (Turn to 18.) Otherwise, you decline Avian's offer, wishing to focus your efforts on the ground battle. (Turn to 2.)



**38**

Searching Daarko's remains, you find a leather pouch containing 100 gold crowns and one of the following special rewards:

|  |                                    |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Veil of dark synergies</b><br>(cloak) | <b>Elemental greaves</b><br>(feet) | <b>Conduit of shadow</b><br>(ring) |
| +2 speed +3 magic                        | +2 speed +2 armour                 | +3 magic                           |
| Ability: second wind                     | Ability: fire aura                 | Ability: overload                  |

When you have made your decision, turn to 7.

39

‘Stop dancin’ around and let me hit ya!’ snarls the ogre, attempting to crush you beneath its wrecking ball. As the huge weapon smashes into the ground, you leap onto it, racing up the rusted chain and hopping onto the beast’s hairy shoulders. ‘Wha... what yer doing?’

The ogre tries to knock you away, but your weapons have already found a vital spot at the base of its neck. You flip away as the ogre drops to its knees, its eyes assuming a cross-eyed expression. Then it topples face down into the dust, its legs and arms splaying to either side. If you are a mage turn to 16. If you are a warrior, turn to 19. If you are a rogue, turn to 30.



40

You kick off from the rooftop, spinning and twisting over the glittering sea of bodies, firing bolts of black fire into their ranks. As bodies are blown aside in a rising crescendo of shrieks and snarls, you come to a perfect landing in front of Avian’s shield. The creatures surrounding him pay you no mind – their black chitinous bodies a chaotic mishmash of scorpion and spider. Curved, barbed tails pummel against the glowing shield, whilst their giant mandibles spit sizzling globules of venom over its surface, attempting to burn their way through.

‘No, you must run!’ gasps Avian, his eyes going wide. ‘There’s too many of them!’

With a snarl of fury, you dive into the creatures’ midst, hoping to buy time until aid can arrive. You must fight:

|                | Speed | Brawn | Armour | Health |
|----------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| Scarron        | 16    | 15    | 10     | 30     |
| Scarron        | 15    | 12    | 8      | 25     |
| Scarron        | 15    | 14    | 10     | 30     |
| Scarron        | 15    | 12    | 8      | 25     |
| Scarron        | 15    | 14    | 10     | 30     |
| Avian’s shield | -     | -     | -      | 100    |

**Special abilities**

\* A siege of scarrons: At the end of each combat round, each surviving scarron inflicts 5 damage to Avian’s shield.

At the start of each round, choose the scarron you will be attacking. If you win, you can roll for damage against that scarron (or multiple scarrons, if you have an ability that lets you do so). If you lose the round, then your chosen scarron will strike back as a single opponent.

If you manage to survive to the start of the seventh combat round, with Avian’s shield still intact (i.e. it still has *health*), then turn to 26. (Special achievement: If you defeat all the scarrons before the end of the sixth combat round, then turn to 15). If you are defeated, then you may return to an earlier point. Restore your *health*, then turn to 57.

41

(Make a note of the word *rival* on your hero sheet.)

Forced back against the statue, you are uncertain how long you will be able to hold off against these fearsome adversaries. Suddenly, a bright flash of light draws your attention skywards. From out of the smog, you see white shapes swooping down over the ruined city, their vapour trails blazing like bright comets. Beneath them, a series of explosions swell across the square, cutting a vicious swathe through the tightly-packed ranks of shadow spawn.

'The airborne regulars!' You punch the air as the mages hurtle past on their flying carpets.

Then, at the far side of the square, you hear the resonating blast of a horn. From your vantage point, it is difficult to see through the thronging masses, but it looks like a battalion of Ravenwing's militia have made it across the city. You catch the glimmer of polished armour and a fluttering standard, proudly displaying the black raven. Aid has finally arrived.

For your victory over the ghastrs, you may now help yourself to the following reward:

**Spirit tincture (1 use)**

(backpack)

Use anytime in combat to lose  
4 *health* but increase your *brawn*  
or *magic* by 2 for the remainder  
of the combat

When you have updated your hero sheet, turn to 52.

**42**

'It was an experiment,' nods the mage. 'And we were the chosen. The black guard.' He lifts his head proudly, his eyes focusing on something distant, some other place and time. 'We were the first through the gate. We led the legion – a thousand to our name.' He blinks, his fingers caressing the scar on his cheek. 'Daarko built the machine. A genius. A master maker. Better at building than destroying. Always in that tower – the high, high, high tower.'

'So, the elves didn't create it?' you ask, surprised.

'It was built from what we found. The salvaged odds and ends from the elves, yes. From the first invasion.' He purses his lips, looking thoughtful. 'It could have worked. Zul's plan. But the mage shield.

It blocked us. Wouldn't bring us here in time. Wouldn't let us back from the shroud...'

'Why not use the shadow gate?' you shrug.

Lorcan sneers. 'Are you not listening to me? We were the first – the first to go to the shroud.' He waves a hand in an arc through the air. 'We didn't even know it was possible. To exist there. The elves... the elves did it, dragging their pyramids, their cities through it. Through... through... but not *existing* there. Not like us.' He pauses for a moment, letting the echo of his words reverberate throughout the chamber. Then he continues. 'The man who speaks. He told me it would fail. That the machine would be broken. Daarko would have waited... waited until the city was quiet. Dark of night. Then we would come. But it was broken. Broken.' He heaves a sigh. 'I must go back... I must.'

Return to 13 to ask Lorcan another question, or turn to 25 to attack this deranged mage.

**43**

You follow Nym, who's practised eye quickly spots a route up to the balcony. From a running start, you rely on speed to carry you up the side of a buttress, to where a gargoyle-like decoration provides a suitable hand-hold. From here, you leap across the face of the building, springing off the porch roof to propel yourself higher, grabbing the railings of the balustrade. With a grunt, you pull yourself over the side, where Nym waits by the window, weapons drawn.

'Blasting through the wall would have been easier,' you grimace, pushing yourself back to your feet.

Nym rolls his eyes at you, before ducking through the window. You follow, drawing your weapons in readiness. The room beyond appears to be a library, with dozens of shelves filled with books and scrolls. Nym has already crossed the space, taking position next to a half-open door. You hear voices coming from the other side.

At your bidding, your shadow mark pulses into life, flooding you with its power. You reach out, sensing for signs of shadow magic. The place reeks of it, as if every stone of the building is emanating a dark presence. But not as strong as the creatures outside this room. You see the outline of their bodies through the wall, marching along what you assume is a corridor. There is three of them, one shimmering more radiantly than the others. The most powerful – a Nevarin, perhaps.

You realise you must act quickly, before they sense your presence. You look to Nyms, raising three fingers. The swordsman nods, indicating his readiness.

You move to the door, waiting for them to move past. But the brightest one has slowed.

‘Wait!’ You hear a woman’s voice – cold and commanding. ‘Something is wrong.’

She turns back to the door. Then kicks it open.

You see an arm and grab it, pulling the woman into the room. She is clad in dark robes, shimmering with purple glyphs. With a snarl, she raises a gloved hand, a spell starting to form at the tips of her fingers. You slap it away, bringing your weapons down faster than she can react. From the other side of the door, you hear weapons clashing and sparking.

You leap over the woman’s body, ignoring the glimmering shadow magic that is starting to coalesce around it. Through the door, you find yourself on a balcony, stretching around the edges of a large, rectangular hall. Nyms is battling a shadow spawn, an ugly beast with a face full of fanged teeth. It wields twin axes which hiss and flare with an angry red magic. Its companion already lies dead, slumped against the wall.

‘Nevarin!’

There is the sound of wood splintering. You spin round, to see three black snakes springing towards you from the other side of the balcony. Their scaled bodies wrap around you, pinning your arms to your side and dragging you off your feet. Then you are flying across the hall, to where a grinning warrior has his arm extended. The snakes are flowing

out from his shadow mark, pulling you within range of his venom-dripping dagger. You must fight:

|               | <b>Speed</b> | <b>Brawn</b> | <b>Armour</b> | <b>Health</b> |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Viprus</b> | 14           | 13           | 10            | 100           |
| <b>Snakes</b> | -            | -            | 8             | 50            |

### Special abilities

✧ Tight spot: You are entangled in the snake’s shadowy coils, restricting your movement and sapping at your strength. Until the snakes are defeated, you must lower your speed by 1 and take 5 damage, ignoring armour, at the end of every combat round.

✧ Deadly venom: Once you have taken health damage from Viprus, you must automatically lose 3 health at the end of each combat round.

In this combat you roll against Viprus’s speed. If you win the round, you may choose to strike against Viprus or his snakes. Once Viprus is reduced to zero health, the combat is won.

If you are able to defeat this mutated monster, turn to 14.



44

Searching the general’s armour, you find a leather pouch containing 150 gold crowns. You may also help yourself to one of the following special rewards:

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Retribution</b><br/>(main hand: sword)<br/>+3 speed +6 brawn<br/>Ability: feral fury</p> | <p><b>Bone bow of grief</b><br/>(left hand: bow)<br/>+2 speed +5 brawn<br/>Ability: puncture</p> | <p><b>Bloodied chestguard</b><br/>(chest)<br/>+2 speed +4 armour<br/>Ability: bleed</p> |
|--|--|---|

When you have made your decision, turn to 56.

**45**

Ravenwing's men pursue the routed shadow spawn, slashing and blasting at their fleeing enemy. The battle is won. But at what cost? You look around at the men that have remained behind – not only the wounded and the dead, but those who have simply hung back from exhaustion. Many have a haunted look about them, their bodies blackened by soot and grime. You can't imagine what devastation awaits beyond the walls of the city – where the doom orb's magic was turned against the camp. The men's expressions tell you enough.

Across the rubble-strewn square, you see Ravenwing supporting Lansbury, as he guides her to the shelter of a building. She looks exhausted from her efforts, her shoulders sagging, head hung low. You notice that Nym's is not with her.

'Nevarin!' Mathis is trudging through the rubble towards you. The inquisitor's armour is raked with black scars, his hair plastered to his head by blood and sweat. 'We have unfinished business, you and I.'

'Mathis? You frown, taking a step backwards. 'You are not yourself...'

He raises his warhammer. 'Oh I am perfectly myself, demon!'

Suddenly, you catch movement out of the corner of your eye. A man is standing on the edge of a rooftop, his scarlet coat billowing in the wind. He raises his hand and suddenly you feel an invisible force closing in around you, pinning your arms and legs tightly together.

Then the man is moving, running through the air as quickly and deftly as if it was solid ground. And like a dog on leash, you find yourself being dragged after him, floating in a magical prison.

'More demons!' screams Mathis. 'Don't think you can escape!'

You are pulled across a broad plaza, its fountains and pathways now charred and cratered, towards an officious-looking building clinging to a rise of grey rock. You try and discern its purpose – but the invisible bonds shift, spinning you around. Then something hard strikes you across the head, plunging you into darkness. Turn to 13.



**46**

(Make a note of the word *companion* on your hero sheet.)

Forced back against the shield, you are uncertain how long you will be able to hold off against these fearsome adversaries. Suddenly, a bright flash of light draws your attention skywards. From out of the smog, you see white shapes swooping down over the ruined city, their vapour trails blazing like bright comets. Beneath them, a series of explosions swell out across the square, cutting a vicious swathe through the tightly-packed ranks of shadow spawn.

'The airborne regulars!' You punch the air as the mages hurtle past on their flying carpets.

Then, at the far side of the square, you hear the resonating blast of a horn. From your vantage point, it is difficult to see through the thronging masses, but it looks like a battalion of Ravenwing's militia have made it across the city. You catch the glimmer of polished armour and a fluttering standard, proudly displaying the black raven. Aid has finally arrived.

For your victory over the decayers, you may now help yourself to the following reward:

**Spore bombs (1 use)**

(backpack)

Sporelicious destruction!

Ability: spore cloud

When you have updated your character sheet, turn to 55.

**47**

Searching the general's armour, you find a leather pouch containing 150 gold crowns. You may also help yourself to one of the following special rewards:

**Final solution**

(left hand: sword)

+2 speed +5 brawn

Ability: acid

**Heartache**

(necklace)

+1 speed +1 brawn

Ability: disrupt

**Styrax sinew**

(ring)

+2 brawn +2 armour

Ability: webbed

When you have made your decision, turn to 56.

**48**

'They think us slaves. The Borellin-var.' The man glances down at his right hand, gripping the staff. You catch the glimmer of a shadow mark snaking around the wrist and palm. 'But in branding us, they made us gods.'

'Those creatures enslaved us,' you growl angrily, remembering your encounter with Sharroth. 'They destroyed our cities – our people. They tortured us. They made us no better than animals. There is nothing god-like about servitude to monsters!'

Lorcan waves his finger with a knowing smile. 'You've broken your bond with them. I feel it. Feel it like music under the skin. If you were to live...' He shakes his head, as if ridding it of some unwanted thought. 'No. The man tells me what to do. You... you must die so I can go home.'

Return to 13 to ask Lorcan another question, or turn to 25 to attack this deranged mage.

**49**

You pass through another hall into an opulent chamber, its walls lined with an extensive array of paintings and sculptures. Nearly all of them feature grisly scenes of battle or nightmarish monsters engaged in gruesome acts of cruelty and destruction.

'Quite the collector,' comments Nyms dryly. 'Dinner parties must be a scream.'

'This was Zul's home,' you reply, pointing to one of the larger paintings, which shows a portrait of the dark sorcerer, dressed in stately robes. 'Don't you sense it? His taint is everywhere...'

A side door immediately draws your attention. Pushing it open, you find yourself at the top of a set of stairs, which wind down into a cold and fetid darkness.

'This way,' you nod, feeling the magic of your shadow mark quicken. 'They're below the mansion.'

'Oh good,' remarks Nyms, patting the head of one of the beastly sculptures. 'Can I make a suggestion?'

You glance over your shoulder, an eyebrow raised. 'Will I like it?'

A guilty grin twists his lips. 'I'm just saying – we could go back, wait for Mathis and the others. I mean, it might be nice to have some extra healing around. We don't know what's down there. If *these* things are anything to go by.' He turns on the spot, taking in the grisly display of art. 'Then some back up would be appreciated. What do you...' His words

falter as he looks back across the room, realising that he no longer has an audience. You have already started down the stairs, the glow of your mark lighting the way. Turn to 4.

**50**

The general jumps free of her mount, somersaulting through the air on currents of magic. As she touches down at the base of the crater, tendrils of smoke begin to curl around her fists, forming themselves into two deadly scimitars.

‘You chose the wrong side,’ she states coldly, striding purposefully towards you. ‘The black guard will win this day. We will reclaim the Nexus – and all will kneel before the legion!’

Your weapons clash, sending dark waves of magic rippling out across the battlefield. ‘Your gate got destroyed,’ you hiss between blows. ‘The invasion is over!’

‘No, you fool,’ the general kicks you back, following up with another flurry of strikes. ‘There is another way.’ Before you can reply, the warrior’s blades come at you again. It is time to fight:

|               | <b>Speed</b> | <b>Brawn</b> | <b>Armour</b> | <b>Health</b> |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Sanrah</b> | 15           | 10           | 11            | 140           |

**Special abilities**

- ✧ Retaliation: Each time your damage score/damage dice causes health damage to Sanrah, she immediately retaliates by inflicting 1 damage die back to your hero, ignoring *armour*. (Note: if your blow reduces Sanrah to zero *health*, you do not take damage from *retaliation*.)
- ✧ Inquisitor’s wrath: If you have the word *rival* on your hero sheet, then Mathis will wade into the combat at the start of round 3, adding 2 to your damage score for the remainder of the combat.
- ✧ Healer’s gift: If you have the word *companion* on your hero sheet, then

Lansbury will heal you once anytime during this combat for 12 *health*.

If you manage to defeat this dark general, restore your *health* and turn to 53. If you are defeated, then you must return to an earlier point. Restore your *health*, then turn to 2.

**51**

With a burst of magic, you propel yourself through the air, landing in a roll ahead of the charging ogre. The slow-witted beast shows no signs of slowing, its ball and chain spinning in a grey blur above its ugly head.

Your weapons fly into your hands as you prepare to take on this formidable opponent:

|                    | <b>Speed</b> | <b>Brawn</b> | <b>Armour</b> | <b>Health</b> |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>The Wrecker</b> | 15           | 14           | 11            | 120           |

**Special abilities**

- ✧ Clobbering time: At the end of every combat round, the Wrecker spins his ball and chain. To avoid being hit, roll 4 dice. If the result is equal to or less than your *speed* score, then you have avoided the wrecking ball. If the result is higher, you have been hit and must take 15 damage. You can use half your *armour* score (rounding up) to absorb this damage.
- ✧ Inquisitor’s wrath: If you have the word *rival* on your hero sheet, then Mathis will wade into the combat at the start of round 3, adding 2 to your damage score for the remainder of the combat.
- ✧ Healer’s gift: If you have the word *companion* on your hero sheet, then Lansbury will heal you once, anytime during this combat, restoring 12 *health*.

If you manage to defeat the ogre, turn to 39. If you are defeated, then you may return to an earlier point. Restore your *health*, then turn to 2.

## 52

The inquisitor flings his shield away, then turns on you in a zealous rage. 'This changes nothing between us, shadow spawn,' he spits. You hear the creak of leather as his hands tighten around his mighty warhammer. For a second, the rest of the battle is forgotten as you stare each other down, tensed... ready to fight.

Then a voice cuts through the tension. It is Avian Dale. He circles past on a magic carpet, a trail of glittering light streaming behind him. 'We're heading for the doom orb,' he shouts. 'Are you with us?' Across the other side of the square, the airborne regulars have now gathered in tight formation, their glowing carpets streaking skywards, towards the gigantic sphere. Avian sweeps in closer, offering out his hand. 'If your magic is strong, I could use your aid, apprentice.'

If you have a *magic* score of 24 or above, you may accompany Avian Dale. (Turn to 18.) Otherwise, you decline, wishing to focus your efforts on the ground battle. (Turn to 2.)

## 53

The general is a skilled fighter, matching you blow for blow – but a lucky opening allows you to step in past her guard, kicking her leg away and throwing her off balance. Too late, she tries to recover but your weapons knock her blades aside, your follow-up blow sending her helmet rattling away into the dirt. At last, you finally look upon your enemy's face. It would have been beautiful once, but now it is a ruin of pulpy, scarred flesh. Her flat stare holds no emotion – no remorse. 'Finish it,' she hisses.

You back away, shaking your head. 'It doesn't have to be like this.'

The woman laughs bitterly. 'It has always been like this. Do you even think we remember another way?'

You raise your shadow mark, its demonic glow surrounding your body. 'I wish I did...'

Before you can stop her, Sanrah snatches a dagger from the dust and lunges. Your reaction is pure instinct, blasting her away with your magic. The general's body snaps back, flipping over to crash down onto the dusty ground. There is a groan of pain then silence.

Slowly, from between the black plates of armour, her essence seeps out – the purple tendrils of magic snaking into the air. You contemplate letting them reform, allowing her to live again. But you have not the strength to deny your shadow mark. It greedily absorbs the general's essence, filling you with its power. If you are a mage turn to 8. If you are a warrior, turn to 44. If you are a rogue, turn to 47.

## 54

Searching Daarko's remains, you find a leather pouch containing 100 gold crowns. You may also help yourself to one of the following special rewards:

**Shadow-woven kris**  
(main hand: dagger)  
+3 speed +5 brawn  
Ability: deep wound

**Dark slayer vest**  
(chest)  
+2 speed +4 brawn  
Ability: dominate

**The craven's head**  
(talisman)  
+1 speed +1 brawn  
Ability: sidestep

When you have made your decision, turn to 7.

## 55

Lansbury lowers the shield, moving quickly to Nym's side. The swordsman lies on his back, cursing as he kicks at the ground in pain.

'Stop struggling. Let me see,' insists the medic, bending close.

Nym lifts his bloodied hands away, his breath rattling in his lungs. 'Got... any miracles... left?' he rasps.

For the briefest moment, you see surprise on the medic's face as

she looks upon the full extent of the wound. Then she is lost in her art, pressing palms tight to his chest, weaving the skin and muscle back into place.

It takes only a few moments. Then Lansbury leans back with an exhausted sigh. 'It is done. Blessed be the light.'

With a groan, Nyms sits up on his elbows, looking down at the torn shreds of armour. Where there had once been an unsightly gash, there is now newly healed flesh. 'You know, Lans, I think I could become a believer.' He pushes himself back to his feet, retrieving his swords from the dust. 'That's almost as many lives as you now, Nevarin.'

'Well, don't grow too attached to your latest one,' you reply wryly, 'we're not out of this yet.' All around you, the shadow spawn are starting to regroup, their snarls and hollers rising once again.

'At least we won't be facing them alone,' states Lansbury, pointing. You follow her gaze to the battalion of magic carpets, sweeping over the battlefield. One of the riders looks familiar.

'Avian Dale!' You cry, waving a hand in the air. 'Over here!'

He breaks away from the others, gliding closer. 'We're heading for the doom orb,' he shouts. 'Are you with us?' Across the other side of the square, the rest of the airborne regulars are gathering in formation, preparing to take on the monstrous orb. Avian offers out his hand. 'If your magic is strong, I could use your aid, apprentice.'

If you have a *magic* score of 24 or above, you may accompany Avian Dale. (Turn to 18.) Otherwise, you decline Avian's offer, wishing to focus your efforts on the ground battle. (Turn to 2.)

## 56

Ravenwing rallies his men, pushing them deep into the ranks of the shadow spawn. Their dark general has fallen – and already they seem to have lost their edge, their ranks becoming confused and ill-disciplined. They are no match for Ravenwing's militia: drilled to the limits of perfection, flowing from defensive shield formations into penetrative

wedges of whirling death in an instant, giving the black guard no mercy, no chance for retaliation.

You are about to rejoin the battle when a deafening boom rips out across the sky, throwing you to your knees. For a moment, you cower, as the noise continues to bear down on you, almost a physical thing that pummels against your body, throbbing in your ears.

Then black snow begins to fall, settling across the blood-streaked ground. You look up to see that the doom orb is no more – where it had been hanging in the sky, there is now only a huge black cloud of ash, as big as an entire city.

'The mages did it,' you gasp. 'They destroyed the orb.'

There are cheers from all around you, as the resistance realise that their victory is now assured. For the shadow spawn, it appears they have arrived at a similar conclusion. Shrieking and wailing, the demoralised rabble turns and runs, scrabbling across the square like a dark plague of rats. Ravenwing's men are already finding their feet, quickly forming up again and ready to give chase. If you have the word *rival* on your hero sheet, turn to 45. If you have the word *companion*, turn to 21. If you have the word *apprentice*, turn to 10.

## 57

For several moments, you struggle to comprehend what you are witnessing. You had been sure that the city had been cleared – that every last shadow spawn had been destroyed. But here, crammed into the market square, is a veritable horde of the vile creatures. And they look different – more powerful and demonic than any of the creatures you have encountered already.

Through the chaotic mass of black bodies, you see beacons of hope – your companions struggling against the endless tide. To your left, Lansbury is pinned against a wall, with Nyms lying at her feet. His hands are pressed to the side of his chest, his expression pained. The healer has summoned a shield of holy light to protect them – but it is being battered

down by the creatures that surround her. They look like rotting undead, with parasitic growths sprouting from their decaying bandages. With her efforts focused solely on maintaining the shield, Lansbury is unable to heal Nyms' wounds.

To your right, Avian stands alone, encircled by a sizeable mound of blackened bodies. Overwhelmed by shadow spawn, he has now resorted to a similar magic shield, its green glow enfolding him in a protective dome. All around it, scorpion-like monsters are besieging the magic, spitting venom against its walls, and hammering at it with their barbed tails.

From the centre of the square, a white signal flare whizzes up into the dark skies, where it bursts into glittering shards of bright light. Following its trail, you see Mathis standing on the platform of a ruined statue. On all sides, shadowy ghouls are attempting to overwhelm his position, their sharp claws promising a painful end. The inquisitor is beating back their efforts with his warhammer, while using a filched shield to deflect incoming bolts of magic from the far side of the square. There, rising above the undulating tide of shadow spawn, is a black-armoured knight. They sit astride a giant four-legged beast, its black hide covered in thick plates of metal. In the knight's hands is a longbow fashioned from bone, which they are using to send a constant stream of magic towards the beleaguered inquisitor.

You must decide which of your companions you will aid.

Will you:

|                                |           |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Help Lansbury and Nyms?</b> | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Help Avian Dale?</b>        | <b>40</b> |
| <b>Help Inquisitor Mathis?</b> | <b>17</b> |



There was a time when you remember experiencing pain, exhaustion, even remorse – but now there is just the fire, filling every pore of your being, burning beneath the skin, blazing behind your berserk fury.

Lorcan is no match for you. With another swipe of your weapon, you knock his staff away, sending it skittering across the ground. The wounded mage sprawls backwards into the broken fragments of his stone guardians. He tries to roll over, to crawl away, but you plant a boot in his side, driving him back to the ground.

'He never told me... never told me it would end this way,' pants the mage bitterly.

'This wasn't the ending I was expecting either,' you growl, standing over him. 'Any last requests?'

Lorcan smiles then, his scar twisting it back into a sneer. 'If I die... I die on my terms, Nevarin.'

He throws himself forward, his body rushing out from the confines of his clothes in a torrent of dark energy. It slams into your shadow mark, pushing itself inside your skin, inside your body. You cry out in horror, clawing at the mark, trying to make it stop – but Lorcan is inside you now, his magic running through your veins... whispering inside your head.

*'You are me. I am you.'*

Your shadow mark flashes, and suddenly you feel your body changing – the bones shifting and realigning, the skin and muscle flowing like liquid to mould itself anew. 'Stop this!' you cry, watching as your arms and hands transform before your very eyes, growing paler... older; branched with dark veins.

You stagger towards the golden shield that the mage had discarded earlier. Holding it up, you turn its polished surface to look upon your reflection. The mage's face is staring back at you, his scar cutting down the left cheek, the mouth curled in a constant sneer. 'This is not

me!' You hurl the shield away, clawing at your scarred head, where the hair grows in bristly grey tufts. 'This is not me!'

Lorcan has fused his essence with your own. You have gained the following special ability:

**Windwalker (co):** If you win a round, you can use all your attack speed dice for your damage score (adding your *brawn* or *magic* as normal). You can only use this ability once per combat. (Note: you cannot use modifier abilities to alter these dice results once they are used for your damage score.)

Behind you a door slams, followed by the rattle of metal as boots scrape across stone. You spin round, almost losing your footing as your new body shifts balance quicker than the old. A figure strides towards you, their armoured features obscured by shadow. 'Nevarin?'

If you have the word *rival* on your hero sheet, turn to 28. Otherwise, turn to 33.

59

Suddenly, a bright flash of light draws your attention skywards. From out of the smog, you see white shapes swooping down over the ruined city, their vapour trails blazing like bright comets. Beneath them, a series of explosions swell out across the square, cutting a vicious swathe through the tightly-packed ranks of shadow spawn.

'The airborne regulars!' You punch the air as the mages hurtle past on their flying carpets.

Then, at the far side of the square, you hear the resonating blast of a horn. From your vantage point, it is difficult to see through the thronging masses, but it looks like a battalion of Ravenwing's militia have made it across the city. You catch the glimmer of polished armour and a fluttering standard, proudly displaying the black raven. Aid has finally arrived. Turn to 55.

60

After much effort, you finally manage to blast a hole in the membrane... but your success may be short-lived. The rupture is already closing back together again in an effort to heal itself.

Without hesitation, Avian throws the carpet forward, sending it careering towards the narrow gap. Your shoulders brush the gooey sides of the membrane as you sweep past, making it through the breach with scant seconds to spare.

'That was close!' you yell, ducking your head to avoid the ceiling of the tunnel. 'Tell me that's the last of those?'

'Hold on!' shouts Avian. 'We're almost there now. We have to destroy the brain!' Under his expert guidance, the carpet twists and turns through a tight forest of glowing stems, dodging the streaks of lightning that flicker between them.

Then, the forest is gone – the carpet shooting out into a huge, circular chamber dominated by a grey sphere of fatty tissue.

'That's it! shouts Avian 'Prepare yourself! The brain will try and defend...'

Suddenly, a wave of sizzling magic rumbles out across the chamber. It hits like a wall, slamming into the carpet and sending it spinning over through the air. You fall backwards, screaming out in agony as a thousand unseen needles lance into your body. With a whimpering cry, you crash down on the spongy floor of the cave, tears streaming from your eyes. 'Pain,' you gasp. 'I'd almost forgotten...'

Frantically you look around for Avian. The mage is sprawled several metres away, the tattered remains of his carpet strewn across the ground. He is still breathing, but looks to be unconscious. You struggle to your feet, hurrying to his side as another wave of energy tears through the cave. You draw on your reserves of magic, summoning a temporary shield to absorb the blast.

As the energy dissipates, you lower your shield and hurry

forward, using the momentary reprieve to press your own attack against the gargantuan brain of the doom orb:

|                 | Speed | Magic | Armour | Health |
|-----------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| Cerebral cortex | 15    | 10    | 8      | 180    |

### Special abilities

✧ Neural blast: At the end of each combat round, the cortex releases a neural blast. This automatically does 10 damage to your hero, ignoring *armour*.

✧ Magic shield: You can spend 2 *magic* to create a shield, to absorb the damage of the neural blast. Each time you use the shield, your *magic* score is lowered by 2 for the duration of the combat. If this reduces your *magic* to zero you fall unconscious and automatically lose the combat.

If you manage to destroy the cerebral cortex, restore any lowered attributes and then turn to 3.

