

Council of Thieves



Act 1 : Condemnation

A high-backed obsidian bench stands upcenter. As the curtain rises, HAANDERTHAN himself perches there, an awesome figure of power looming above the shackled forms of LARAZOD, TYBAIN, and DENTRIS. The other members of the COUNCIL including the sultry ILSANDRA, flank out stage right and left of HAANDERTHAN'S tribunal bench. The hulking bearded devil BAILIFF stands over them, spiked truncheon in his scabrous red, leather-like hands.

BAILIFF

Order in the Tribunal. The Court of His Honor Paraduke Montigny Haanderthan, Black Tongue of Asmodeus, Magistrate Maleficarum, now holds session. All rise.

HAANDERTHAN

Be seated, members of the Court. Today this court seeks truth, or at least shadows thereof, from one Larazod Rilsane, honored veteran of the Shadestar War, member of a once gloried house, of recent fallen in Asmodeus's regard. The accused stands on several counts of failed conspiracy, evidenced thereof by the industrious interrogations of the court's own Seeker, Drovalid Vorclune, administered with his usual diligence and severity. In these interviews Vorclune gathered from notable sources, only a few of whom survived their conversations with the lash, that Larazod of the Rilsane held audience with undesirables—the topic of their whispered covenant the activities of none other than myself. A most serious affair. Service to Asmodeus's ever-darkening glory is never without risk of menace, betrayal, and

threat of doom. My family and I have long suffered the bumbling attempts of assassins who would tear at our dark lord's visage as casually as they befoul their mothers' beds.

What they lack in cunning they bolster with sheer desperation, evidenced by consorting with all manner of Aroden-suckling knaves, and aged wiz-worms who trust in mystic secrets over the Dark One's love.

You hereby stand accused, Larazod, along with your illseeming compatriots, of conspiracy to undertake grievous harm to the institution of this tribunal, namely myself, Paraduke Montigny Haanderthan. How answer thee these charges, Larazod of House Rilsane? Be thou maligned by a scandal-brewer's wagging tongue, or dost thou cleave to my comings and goings as a bloat fly to a fresh cadaver?

Speak! And know that lies are my closest friends. They'll betray you before I. Speak the truth or do worse than die!

DENTRIS

Hold your tongue, boy, and we'll escape the firebrand yet. Your father was the model of a devil's squire. Summon his wiles now, and keep shut that Abyss you call mouth, before we all tumble down into its darkness. Had you been born deaf and dumb, this loyal servant would yet live to see another midnight.

TYBAIN

Hurl his arrogance and accusations back at him, Larazod. He wants precious golden-yoked truth? Give him more than he can choke down. For whether revealed by the brilliance of Aroden's eye, or the long red shadows cast by your Dark Lord's fiery gaze, a man false at heart and shrouded in hollow faiths is nothing

more than a traitor to all. Let him that judges false be judged by wraiths—smote by his own brand shall he fall.

LARAZOD

Larazod knows no lies, great magistrate, and no slanderer's tongue caresses my dignity. The accusations you speak are as true as Asmodeus's sword. They cleave clean through. Let the witnesses suffer no more lash. To burn their innards with pokers and steal their eyes is simply to waste precious toil better spent in Asmodeus's service. There is but one point misaligned in this dark constellation—I seek not your death, though the secrets you harbor in your feeble heart deserve a gruesome demise.

I carry no assassin's blade, nor breath-stealing spell to rob your mortality. To end you I need only know you, and to cast you in an honest shade. I pierce your "shadows of truth" and show you for what I know—a false knave, a demon-sipping wag-tail, a balor's bawd, a pus-leaking cataract in the eye of Asmodeus's justice, and subject to the multi-handed ministrations of a marilith whore, dretch-loving plunderer, and traitor to our great Dark Lord.

There is much commotion among the council.

ILSANDRA

(*Aside*) And to think I almost spent this session in the orgybaths of Kalrath. None of their fleshy delights could compare to the ecstasy this half-breed's words stroke within me! See his fierce aspect burn in fury, even below the tribunal's culling justice. But how shall Haanderthan answer?

HAANDERTHAN

Heavy words for a forked tongue to manage, boy. You juggle them well enough, but like a poor fool, offer jest and jape. I assume this glib outrage, obviously a threadbare attempt to throw off the keening blade of justice, is backed by the testimony of a thousand law-loving fiends? Perhaps the ancient augurer at your side, ever your father's faithful lap-lizard, probed the ancient secrets of the cosmos and uncovered my blasphemous treachery? Or have you a soulbonded scroll of bone-white parchment upon which my scrawled hand appears next to some Abyssal conspirator? You amuse me, half-breed, and it is the only reason your sniveling soul is not yet blasted away in hellfire and borne on a river of sorrow to some ignominious corner of the Nine. Whereof comes this lunacy? What disease vexes your broken mind? From what mystery of psychosis do you draw your lies?

TYBAIN

You mewl lies like a sullied maid on her wedding night, O Great One. Even a lord may be smote in darkness as Asmodeus sees the truth of you—a base and lowly thing, snivelling in crimson robes. These devil-bowing citizens about us are affront enough to Aroden's divine will, but ye, whose left hand clasps devil's claws, and right reaches out for demonic boon—oh double-dealing fiend-lover, who allies with the Abyss. Infernal oaths and Abyssal blasphemy spew in one breath from your twisting lips.

HAANDERTHAN

Does your Aroden arse-kissing pall-a-dine put you up to such resounding blasphemy? Have you no tongue of your own, half-breed, to answer my charge?

LARAZOD

Truth is spoken freely in many tongues, false magistrate, and by agents of light and dark. You know what you are.

HAANDERTHAN

You persist in this foolishness? It shall go hard for you and yours. Recant and your deaths shall be swift, your souls consigned to diligent service in Hell. Refuse, and enlist in agony's service, consign your soul to wallow in the most ignominious corner of the Nine, and take eternal suffering as your bedmate.

ILSANDRA

(*Aside*) He's to have a much more interesting bedmate, if I've anything to say. The fire that one shows at tribunal, will no doubt burn even stronger between my sheets.

DENTRIS

(*Aside*) That one grows hot betwixt her infernal thighs. Hope beyond hope. One voice of dissent on the council and the slenderest chance of salvation is ours to clutch. Let this waxen sliver of hope not melt until she does—let her find her tongue.

HAANDERTHAN

Speak, boy. Do you still baffle with false charges, or have your battered wits returned? Speak.

LARAZOD

I recant nothing. You, accuser, so stand accused. How do you answer?

HAANDERTHAN

Innocent, of course. And so judgment is passed. My right as magistrate puts you to the flames on my command. My word is law.

There is a minor commotion, Laratia runs on stage.

LARATIA

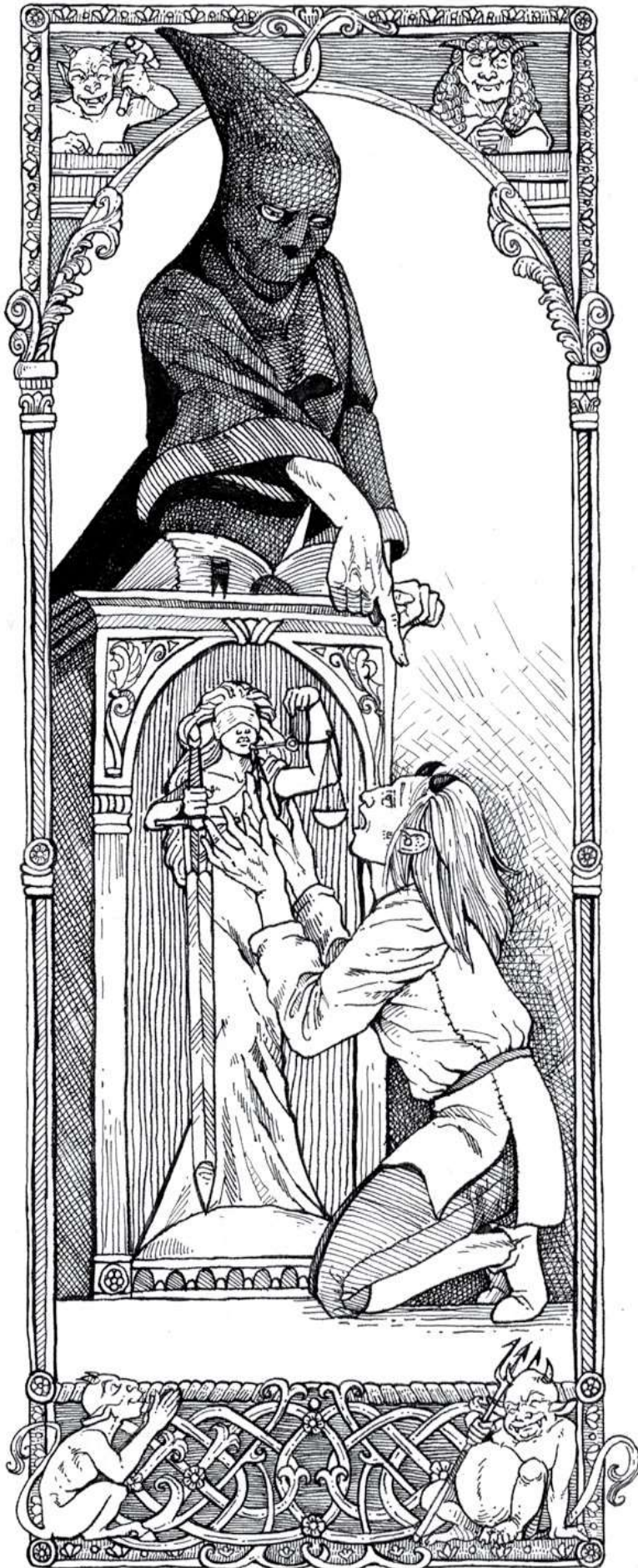
Larazod! There you are, sweet brother! I found you at last, though you hid me and spoke not to follow!

LARAZOD

Laratia, why are you here? What of your guardian? Why have you left your revels and the celebration of your birth and adulthood? You must away, now, sweet sister.

LARATIA

No my sweet older brother! I came to be with you.



HAANDERTHAN

Foolish sentimentality. Now for the judgment! Fire for fools and their ken, along with those who stand by wickedness with complacency.

TYBAIN

You dare defile such an innocent? A wicked magistrate indeed!

DENTRIS

Respectfully, my lord, when I was a barrister of the tribunal, it was common practice to ask Consular Consent in any judgement of a matter involving the Magistrate personally in the case. Has the ancient code of Asmodeus's court, scorched on the Tablets of Law by our Great Lord's own fiery talon, so fallen as to warrant its complete disregard in this tribunal?

HAANDERTHAN

Of course, you are correct, old man. I've no intention of affronting our Great Lord. Council, what say ye on this matter? Do you concur with my judgment? These heinous slanders cast upon my great name warrant utter annihilation. So sayeth I, Magistrate of this Gloried Tribunal. Do you agree?

Councilors mutter and call "Aye."

ILSANDRA

Nay.

HAANDERTHAN

My ears deceive me. Do you, august erinyes, daughter of Hell, speak against our cause?

ILSANDRA

I speak against your judgment. Our cause is yet undetermined by my mark. According to our oldest codes, truth can be drawn from an offender, as pus from a wound. Asmodeus's Trials show the true heart from the false. Why, simply put the half-breed to the flames. Let us try him properly in accordance with the old ways.

DENTRIS

Well done, lad. Your pretty infernal face is good for something, even if your tongue offends all who hear. We may live yet.

HAANDERTHAN

Tut, the business of the tribunal heaps higher day by day. We've cases waiting in the wings by the thousands. Penitent souls singing out for justice. Shall we delay their flight to Asmodeus's waiting embrace to engage in infantile contests? Nay, expediency is our charge when matters so lacking in evidence are brought before our bench.

ILSANDRA

Come, come, sweet magistrate. The spectacle of a few trials would do my poor heart well. I wane at these tiresome sessions. Let the trials commence. 'Twould arouse me. 'Twould tickle me. 'Twould drive me to distraction.

HAANDERTHAN

Trials you say? How now? If it is to be so, let us sweeten the pot. A price I would exact for trials as you insist. If this half-breed fails, not only is my name cleared of all preposterous charges, but you both shall compact to me for a full moon's service, to do my bidding and satisfy all my unwholesome needs.

ILSANDRA

Let it be so agreed. I hunger so for trials, I happily wager my body to your whim. We shall see if this half-breed's words strike true or false.

HAANDERTHAN

So be it. Larazod, you stand in trial. By my discretion you shall face six of Asmodeus's fell tests. You stand alone in the face of terrors over which no mortal has prevailed.

TYBAIN

Not alone, my lord. I stand with him.

HAANDERTHAN

You are under no obligation to do so, Arodenite. Back down and be discharged, to keep at your slobbering benedictions for a few more years at least.

TYBAIN

I am true to Aroden, my lord, but I am also true in loyalty and kinship. This man, though half-fiend his blood may turn, is bound to me in brotherhood, as I stand bound to him. Our blades both matched the enemies of Cheliox, and what faith divides, common cause unites. You cannot sunder me from his destiny. I stand trial at his side, as is my right, if I so beclaim it. Is it not so, Dentriss?

DENTRIS

'Tis true, my lord. If the half-brained, light-blinded knight wishes to perish alongside my good master, he is within his lawful right.

HAANDERTHAN

Very well. Burn with him, fool. Dentriss Maltrada, you are hereby discharged.

DENTRIS

Nay sir, though I wish nothing more. This boy, as wayward as his fancies take him, is in my care. I never waived from his father's service, and I shall not turn my back on the son.

HAANDERTHAN

Surely, you've no wish to die?

DENTRIS

There are worse fates, magistrate, than even can be promised on the deepest level of your Hell. To walk alive in a world, my duty undone, my sworn oath broken, is to walk through fires more smolderous than any Asmodeus keeps below. Though he be a fool, and possessed of a diseased wit, Larazod is my master, and I shall stand by him. Do your worst magistrate. I've rolled bones with demons, and gazed in dragons' hearts. Let us have these trials and be done with my life, if the lords of darkness so command.

HAANDERTHAN

Doddering old sacks of bones. No demon's dice, nor dragon's musings await you—only torment beyond the stars' most infinite imaginings.

LARATIA

Aye! Me to! I choose to walk by my brother's side!

HAANDERTHAN

What be this nonsense?

LARATIA

I waive my right to be discharged! I will stay with my brother! I claim the right to endure as he does!

LARAZOD

Laratia, no! I'll not have it!

LARATIA

That matters not! I'm with my brother!

HAANDERTHAN

Very well. Let this tribunal be witness, the infernal child has volunteered for the trials and waived her right to discharge. All have chosen to stand with this liar and fool!

LARAZOD

'Tis not your battle to fight, little sister.

LARATIA

Never fear, brother! I am with you! And Dentriss, as he always remains. And Tybain! Hello, good sir...

(Aside) How brave he is! Someday he will sweep me off my infernal feet! Perhaps now that I am an adult — as of this very day, in fact — and perhaps with my newfound bravery, he'll notice me at last!

TYBAIN

Err... hello, little miss Rilsane.

(Aside) Her... affections are sweet, but disconcerting. I've known her since she was a child. She still is a child! And besides, her blood runs with that of fiends!

HAANDERTHAN

Enough! All here have chosen their path. Make ready, supplicants. The trials begin anon. May Asmodeus take pity on your blighted souls.

Act 2: Trial by Torture

Enter DROVALID.

HAANDERTHAN

Good Keeper of Pain, Tormentor of Liars and Demon-suckling Miscreants, we are honored by your presence. Show these supplicants the favor of your stinging lash, and with rack and fire, purge lies from their lips. Break their souls, and let the mad and guilty appall our ears no more with ranting.

DROVALID

Magistrate Maleficarum, I come before you a simple hand whose lash is guided by the greater glory of Asmodeus; may my scourge and that of my fellows do him and this devoted tribunal proud. With your permission I shall begin our first trial.

ILSANDRA

(Aside) To whitt, if Laratia be permitted to suffer the lash, 'twill Larazod ignore my warm thighs for spite?

(Aloud) Lord magistrate! While the child did submit herself, can one submit another in her place? After all, she be not the accused.

HAANDERTHAN

What are you suggesting, Daughter of Hell?

ILSANDRA

Only that my slave take her place in the torment of the lash.

TYBAIN

I do believe my friend may have insight into this...

DENTRIS

One can be claimed for a substitute to one who has volunteered... supposing the one being replaced was not part of the original trial or sought for any crimes. Certainly, Laratia, foolish, ignorant Larazia, was not part of these trials until her own volunteering.

LARATIA

I need no substitute! I am brave enough to face and keep the truth! Like Sir Tybain!

(Aside) Now, surely my courage will be shown! Now surely I will endure with my brother and be seen as both grown and strong at last!

HAANDERTHAN

(Aside) If his precious young sister be in harm's way, perhaps he will recant, but he may be more stubborn if someone else suffers... though I cannot break the law before these fellow magistrates...

(Aloud) Ah, but he must volunteer himself for her stead, as she is not accused. Slave, will you face the torments in the stead of the child Laratia?

LARATIA

I do wish people would stop calling me a "child", as I am clearly the age of majority! As of today, in fact! I will not allow another to take my place; I am within my right to claim the same fate!

HAANDERTHAN

Very well, you shall face the lash. Begin at your leisure, Tormentor. End this fool's mockery of our court with cleansing agony.

Enter the Device and other implements of torture. Drovalid begins administering agonizing pain upon a stoic Larazod.

DENTRIS

Fools, my good master may be a fool of a tiefling, but if you think to wrack his spine, and wheedle mewled recantation from his black lips, you are even greater fools than he. Larazod is no coward, and he sneers in the face of pain with true faith in Asmodeus—he cannot waver. He faced Abyssal Tyrants and hordes of their slime-ridden minions in battle. His coal-black soul did not quake then. He stands resolute now. You cannot break his spirit.

DROVALID

Recant half-breed. Admit your twisted falsehoods, serpent-tongued traitor!

LARAZOD

Even an ocean of agony cannot turn truth to lie.

LARATIA

Oh, Brother! Be strong!

More bone-crunching, skin-flensing torment.

DROVALID

Recant and end this trial! Swift death shall embrace you and Asmodeus smiles upon those who admit their falsehoods—he may not rend your soul completely, may leave some semblance of your spirit intact.

LARAZOD

I recant... nothing! Grind on, honeyed torment. Sing sweetly as I may, no cries of "recant" shall you hear. I hate lies, as I hate demon-loving traitors.

More torture.

LARAZOD

Had enough, Magistrate? Can you withstand it any longer? Please give in and recant, for the only torment I cannot bear is your continued duplicity. Recant, Magistrate! Recant your own lies, and Asmodeus may have mercy on your slimy soul.

TYBAIN

Ha! Even in the face of soul-crushing pain, he taunts this ridiculous Magistrate of Hell. Hear me, Aroden, if Asmodeus has such as Larazod in his employ, all our efforts are doomed.

Would your white fist command such steadfast loyalty as this one here, who laughs at death and grins at the grimmest pain.

ILSANDRA

(Aside) Such a sweet voice. I long to hear his screams more—ah, but to elicit them myself, with a soul-burning kiss, and an aching embrace. This torture is most stimulating, though I do hope the Tormentor doesn't mar the tiefling's choicest parts. Leave off those! They belong to me alone!

DROVALID

(Exhausted) Recant!

LARAZOD

Never! Lash every inch of flesh from me, leave only a bloody ruin where I stand—that skinned wreck of a man will gurgle only truth and never recant.

Drovalid ends torment and casts down his whip.

DROVALID

He is as unbreakable as a marble tide—dragon's scale would have shattered long ago—and yet he stands unbowed. No lie can evade this unholy lash of mine, gifted to me by Asmodeus himself. Larazod must speak the truth!

HAANDERTHAN

Fool! Continue the trial, you've yet to probe deep enough into his soul's painful lies!

DROVALID

My work is done. My findings true. You have never doubted my hand before. Why do you so now? Could it be this tiefling speaks true? Are you allied against our august master of darkness?

HAANDERTHAN

Mind your place, Tormentor! You speak blasphemy in the face of this land's own Magistrate Maleficarum. Beware, your words endanger your very soul. Take you this half-breed's part? Then you would join him on his trials? Don't be a fool.

DROVALID

If Asmodeus wishes it so then my soul stands with his. If my hand has failed you, then I shall burn for it. I shall face the remaining five trials at Larazod's side.

HAANDERTHAN

So be it, traitor. Your rending death, and his, shall be my vindication. Bring on the second trial!

Act 3: Trial by Pleasure

Enter the bailiff bearing four vials and four curved flensing knives. He hands one of each to Dentris, Tybain, Larazod, and Drovalid. He hands nothing to Laratia, much to her and Haanderthan's surprise.

HAANDERTHAN

It is said that a liar's pain is easy to bear, but pleasure steals truth from even the most well-tended fortress. So let it be with ye, Larazod. Here before you now are the Flukes of Asmodeus. Their bite more pleasurable than the caresses of a thousand succubi (which you no doubt have enjoyed, you treacherous Abyssal-loving fool). Taste of their deep burrowing bliss. Their rapturous journey through your body shall explore the deepest, darkest pleasures any mortal has ever known. Their soul-shuddering wanderings end in your skull, where they plant their young who consume you in an orgiastic frenzy—leaving you an empty husk of a thing—a spent lover, drooling in blissful oblivion forever. Unless, of course, you can resist these god-bending pleasures. This time, the trial is not yours alone to bear. Let us see if your trusted companions' faith remains as unshakeable as yours. Who shall be the first to die in spasms of ecstasy?

ILSANDRA

Oh, how I long to face this judgment!

HAANDERTHAN

But what is this? Why only four instead of five? Where are the flukes offered for Laratia to endure?

ILSANDRA

Gracious Magistrate, have you not ordered Drovalid, the tormentor, to enter the trials at Larazod's side? Indeed, you have declared a substitute for her, it seems. The child Laratia is no longer bound to the trials, by my reckoning.

HAANDERTHAN

(Aside) Again, I do not wish to allow this. Surely Larazod will submit with her torment... except for this daughter and her 'substitutes'.

LARATIA

I do wish people would stop calling me a "child!" Can you not all see, as of today in fact, I am clearly –

DROVALID

(Interrupting) Indeed, magistrate, I offer myself in substitution and choose to stand by Larazod throughout the remaining trials.

DENTRIS

Certainly, magistrate, the law is, as discussed, being fulfilled now with these very actions?

HAANDERTHAN

(Angrily) Very well. The child shall have a replacement.

LARATIA

I am not a child!

Laratia is dragged off-stage and emerges moments later in the witness booth with the court, seated alongside Ilsandra who quickly comforts the distraught child.

ILSANDRA

Welcome, child. Make yourself comfortable, and we can watch the sweet torments of your brother together. Be still and safe, and if your brother fades, I will watch over you in his stead.

LARATIA

I'm not – I'm of age! I'm – Ugh!

(Aside) I will not sit in comfort and watch my brother face torment. He may not be alone, but I would face all the torments of hell at my brothers side, for his sake, and for mine.

DROVALID

Master Larazod, most unholy saint of our dark Asmodeus, please allow me to prove my devotion to your cause. To think my biting lash flayed your chaste red skin, and cracked such a noble hide as yours. I shall be first to face this trial, if you so wish it.

LARAZOD

Your courage is beyond question. Show this lickspittle Magistrate the meaning of devotion, my friend.

Drovalid administers the fluke, convulses in sheer orgasmic ecstasy, but as it crawls up his arm he suddenly plunges a flensing blade beneath the skin, skewering the fluke and removing it.

DROVALID

Asmodeus bear witness to my devotion. This half-breed speaks only truth!

Likewise, Larazod applies the fluke to his flesh, where it hungrily burrows beneath the surface. Larazod shudders in pleasure.

ILSANDRA

Oh, to be that fluke! To burrow into such sweet flesh!

LARATIA

(Aside) And for all reasons to be unable to face the trials, sitting beside this horny fiend is not the legacy I will leave behind.

LARAZOD

I sing only of the joy of supplication to our dark lord. This pleasure is only a gift of Asmodeus's truth. I would gladly die at this fluke's bite, but alas, my duty here is yet undone, and so I scorn this pleasure with a bleeding blade. I shall not relent until your lies are revealed, foul Magistrate.

Larazod cuts out his fluke.

Dentris applies his fluke.

DENTRIS

Oh! It has been so long! Sweet, aching ecstasy!

Improvises a rendition of the Tallis and his Three Wives, and then cuts away the fluke when it is nigh in his neck.

DENTRIS

(Sourly) Between you, my hideous half-breed young master, and a dream of three succubi's frolics on my flesh—a hard choice, Larazod, but somehow your sweet countenance won out.

TYBAIN

My turn, I suppose.

Tybain applies his fluke and begins giggling uncontrollably.

TYBAIN

Ooooh! Aaaaah! I know not this feeling!

DENTRIS

Ha! Watch the virginal knight squirm!

TYBAIN

It is as if a thousand feathers assault my flesh—especially my most... tender... parts. What strange pleasure is this!

LARAZOD

Ah, Aroden's servants, so like sweet children they be. Hold true, my dear friend!

Tybain suddenly tears loose his fluke.

TYBAIN

I am well, though I may never be the same.

HAANDERTHAN

Curse your persistence. All lies eventually reveal their ugly fangs. I shall draw them as venom from a wound.

LARATIA

(Aside) I wonder of what he dreamed? A touch? A kiss? A dark forbidden thing? Who is to say he did not dream of me? I wish I could feel those things I see only in my dreams, if only I had not been forced to watch alone. I need a plan to rejoin them...

Act 4: Trial in the Belly of the Beast

Larazod, Dentris, Tybain, and Drovalid await the courts return with further tortures.

DENTRIS

Such horrors. What next?

LARAZOD

Hold true, old man.

DENTRIS

Easy for you to say! Youth laughs at death as a stranger. As you grow older you come to know it well—and fear it.

DROVALID

I have seen young and old break before this court. They all share one thing: a weak and watery eye speaking to a frailty of spirit.

Your eyes are like grit and sand, obstinate even in the face of the storm-fraught sea. You cannot break, old wizard.

DENTRIS

Perhaps not, but tell me, Tormentor—what fresh horrors await?

DROVALID

Here follows the Trial in the Belly of the Beast. A great terror, gifted to this court by a Duke of Hell, the Beast is a hideous thing, whose stomach is a nest of acid-spewing serpents. It shall swallow us whole, and wash us clean in its acid well.

DENTRIS

Where is the “trial” in this!?

DROVALID

If we are innocent, and speak no lies, then the Beast’s Belly will leave us unscathed.

TYBAIN

Madness!

LARAZOD

Hold fast, my dear friend. Have faith in Asmodeus.

TYBAIN

But I do not!

LARAZOD

Well then you better learn to swim.

The court returns and takes their seats, while Laratia grins wildly. Before long, Haanderthan gathers his notes and speaks.

HAANDERTHAN

An accusation of misconduct has been made. Ye, who speaks for the half-breed, the lone traitor on the council who speaks against my august personage – you have been accused of corruption, of staying this mans execution and wasting the courts time with these trials out of no reason other than fiendish lust.

ILSANDRA

Corruption? Why, I have followed all the infernal laws of ivory hell to the letter in every way. Of course, I stayed his judgement because he has a pretty face, but that is well within my right!

HAANDERTHAN

So you confess putting your lust before the court’s justice? The next trial demands a great sacrifice. You must brave this trial, and all that follow, alongside the accused.

ILSANDRA

(Laughing) Gladly! I stand at this tiefling’s side, or at his back, or him at mine, or perhaps I should bolster him up from below or allow him to do the same to me. You shall see how devotedly I

attend his pleasure, for he speaks the truth. Besides, I know it is you that accuses me, and I have the right to make my accuser face the trials with me to prove their side as well! So come down and face your own scourging!

HAANDERTHAN

I did not accuse you, not would I dare accuse any member of this court. But your words are true, and you will have the accuser stand alongside you. Cast down the child Laratia for condemning a member of this court!

ILSANDRA

Damn! Why would she accuse me? What could she gain from such baseless words?

LARATIA

At last! I am to be free to endure with my brother!

ILSANDRA

(Aside) Of course...

HAANDERTHAN

(Aside) And at last there are no more wardens for Larazod's sister. He shall break now.

(Aloud) Then burn with him.

Laratia and Ilsandra join the companions, and each embraces Larazod one at a time, Ilsandra last and with a fiery kiss. He surrenders to her pleasures.

LARATIA

Brother! I have come to be with thee!

LARAZOD

I wish you hadn't for I long for your safety, yet I hold to Asmodeus!

LARATIA

Worry not! With you by my side, I'll be fine!

LARAZOD

I've done naught but follow Asmodeus' will.

ILSANDRA

Know the gifts of Asmodeus, dear child. You have earned great boons by your devoted service, and I shall pay them all with interest. But soft, what terror approaches? Our pleasures must wait.

Enter the Beast.

LARATIA

What is this monster! Where are the flukes from before, and why are they replaced with a beast of caustic malice?

LARAZOD

(To Laratia) Worry not, sister. Our blood is brimstone and our faith a fire. No beast of the earth can break us.

(To The Beast) Come, horror, I shall tear my way from your gizzard with the white-hot blade of my truth.

DROVALID

Die though I might, melted to a puddle of liquid flesh in the bowels of the Beast, I cannot think of any greater man to join in death. I am honored to die at the side of a man so filled with truth.

DENTRIS

Come and have a bite, Old Beastie. These old bones shall stick in your craw and choke the life from you.

TYBAIN

My holy flesh shall burn all the way down. Aroden's blessings upon my soul ensure a most unpleasant meal for this Beast.

The Beast devours them. They fight their way free from his gizzard.

Act 5: The Birthing Trial

HAANDERTHAN

You have crawled from the maw of the Beast. Let us see what blasphemous lies slither from your treacherous insides. Show them.

The Bailiff brings out five crimson eggs.

DROVALID

Dear Asmodeus! Spare us!

LARAZOD

What means these strange crimson eggs?

DROVALID

Oh horror beyond nightmare! The eggs, they burrow deep within us. They hatch deep in our insides, churning our guts to paste and slurping them through gritted devil teeth. They feed on our souls. When these foul devils have eaten their fill, they tear their way free—terrible things! Hideous devil-children bearing our own faces, but filled with hate for all we are. We are mothers to twisted things and look upon our own visage as we die by their taloned hands.

HAANDERTHAN

Shall you recant now, or will you give birth to abominations of your very flesh?

ILSANDRA

Do your worst, fool of a mortal. I am a princess to hell, and no child born of my black soul shall bear malice against me.

Larazod lifts the Bailiff off the ground by the throat with one mighty hand.



LARAZOD

Ha! Give me your egg, you lickspittle. If Asmodeus wishes it, I shall choke the life of my own devilish child with glee. I gulp this egg down before this court and our dark lord's very eyes.

DENTRIS

Well, give me mine. Not much good it shall avail you. The real Dentris Maltrada was killed ages ago at my own devilish hands when I was born from his old soul. I am a child of this egg.

TYBAIN

Truly?! I had no idea!

DENTRIS

If only everyone was as naïve as ye, paladin.

LARATIA

I had hoped to get to the fun part before the more difficult one... alas...

Tybain places a hand on Laratia's shoulder.

DROVALID

It will be okay. Though I be nervous as thee, we shall do this together, and face whatever comes of it, Madame.

Laratia looks at Drovalid in awe, being the first to treat her as anything other than a child.

TYBAIN

I like eggs! Red, white, or otherwise. Hand me mine! I'll eat it raw!

The companions eat their eggs and hideous devil children are born from them. They battle the devil children valiantly. Ilsandra, amazed that her daughter attacks her, lashes out with ferocity.

ILSANDRA

No! My child! Forgive me! You'll pay for this, Haanderthan—with your heart's blood, and with every shred of your soul.

As the children accost the companions, Laratia is knocked prone and Drovalid moves in to her defense, fighting both her child and his own until Laratia can return to her feet.

Act 6: Trial by Combat and Love

HAANDERTHAN

(Aside) How can this be? Four trials broken, and still they prevail. Asmodeus smiles upon them. Does the Dark Lord truly know of my compact with the Abyss? It cannot be, or I am utterly undone. True or nay, I must try the last. I shall plunge their faith in pitch and acrid stew, and see if they hold to the cause.

(To The Companions) You sickly whelps profess undying devotion to one another. Another smoldering lie flung from your dark holes. You but conspire to confound this court and our Dark Majesty. 'Tis ye who contract with demon-spawn and seek my undoing, in service to some slimy mistress or master of the putrid Abyss. Your vile benefactors have thus far warded off justice's dark hand, but let us see if you hold steadfast before the promise of oblivion.

DENTRIS

More? I cannot last. My old heart gives out. Go on without me, master. I served your father faithfully. Alas, I am found lacking in the face of his half-breed son. The challenges, ever dire, cleave my soul from me. May Asmodeus keep me.

LARAZOD

No foolish talk, old wizard. Haven't you claimed immortality a thousand times to any bent ear? Old Dentris Maltrada cannot die, ye said. I've eaten the heart of an ancient Red Wyrn, and warmed by his fire, my soul burns eternal. Get up, my dear friend, more father to me, than ever any father was. Your duties are not abated. Your task is yet undone. And you, good friend dwarf, I thank thee.

TYBAIN

Let him die. He's suffered long enough, and we've suffered his blustery speeches even more keenly. Kick off, old bag, and be done with ye.

DENTRIS

Why you shiny beetle! You quivering pall-o-dine of a young whelp-turned-demigod! You plump kettle! I'll bring the all-encompassing powers of a thousand worlds crashing down upon your head! The keening song of dead gods warble at my command. I'll leave your mind a tatterdemalion of a sad rag. Die! Die, you say! Nay, not till I've seen the last oafish breath squeezed from your lungs by tongs of fire—you simpering Aro-din-din!

TYBAIN

Looking more lively now, aren't we?

LARAZOD

Peace, old man. The pall-o-dine works a righteous healing upon your old bones—applying the only balm your withered heart desires—spitting ire and uncouth rage. Bile for balm, bile for balm—what a wolfish old man, a terror to kings and angels. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Dentris Maltrada. He knows no equal.

LARATIA

(To Drovalid) I thank thee, good sir. You saved my life.

DROVALID

(To Laratia) Most beauteous lady, I shall gladly guard thee again; 'twas my honor to but spend my life for the delight of such as thee.

Looking lost in his eyes, Laratia takes his hands.

DENTRIS

Enough, pup! I am much abused. Lay not your hands on me, pall-o-dine! I'll rise without your young god's urgings. I've work left indeed.

ILSANDRA

Strange old wizard, loyal and dear heart. He'll join us in the marriage bed and one last night of bliss will be his for the taking!

LARAZOD

A lovely sentiment, my princess of Hell, disturbing though it may be.

DROVALID

Enough. It is time. I am not long of your company, but know that I would stand by you all through six hundred trials. Take hands with me, half-breed. My sins and yours are one. Our destinies intertwine, and I walk your path with you to the bitter burning end.

LARAZOD

I'm honored.

LARAZOD

Thank you, my friend. I've relied on your strength for all our friendship and battles and you've been an ally in this one. And Laratia, I'm sorry for harm to you, but your presence and love is grand.

LARATIA

I am thrilled, my Brother! And I may well have found something else important here, too...

HAANDERTHAN

How touching. These sentiments of yours are nothing but dreamy clouds, soon to be shred by Asmodeus's blasting winds.

LARAZOD

Face of hazy dream-like bliss, kiss like fire. I burn for you, princess. Cling to me, dig your talons into my chest and touch my heart with white-hot caress.

ILSANDRA

I am yours for one thousand blissful years. Drink my sizzling blood from my wrist, or anywhere else you like—let us seal this sinful compact and consummate our love in the heat of battle.

TYBAIN

Dentris, you old cur, dog curled by your master's feet. I can't call you friend, but a truer servant I've never known. Loyalty is the mark of greatness. Know that my sword is yours even as your spells bend to Larazod's cause. We stand as one, and we always shall.

ILSANDRA

Great Tormentor, Drovalid Vorclune, let it be said a man who can bear the vicious ministrations he renders upon his foes is a great man indeed. Though I am pledged to this young half-breed, know your courage sends shudders through my loins.

DROVALID

You do me sweet honor, great lady. I stand in awe of your passion, and these worthy nobles' unshakable courage. Even this milksop of a pall-o-dine stands hard against the torments of Hell—harder than the fiercest witch.

The companions fight off a legion of devils. Laratia lies dying at the end of the battles, having been mortally wounded.

TYBAIN

Laratia! Why did you take that last blade for me? I had commanded you to live!

LARATIA

I... suppose... I... rebelled... one... last... time...

TYBAIN

Even in rebellion, you served well. I mistook you before, you are a child no longer. Now, rebel once more, at the touch of my hand, and live!

LARATIA

No... do not waste it on me, I am too far gone. Save your healing for yourself and my brother, and for Drovalid, though I have not known them long. I... thought about you for so long, but I loved no one. But now, I think, I do. Do well by me; remember this instead of as I was. Lie about me to yourself, I beg, until you think of me as more than the child I was before.

TYBAIN

I shall remember you well.

Laratia dies and her body is removed from the stage.

DROVALID

(*Aside*) Foolish girl! I had wanted you to live, to learn and love, to be with me perhaps. Instead, you perish, and with it, my first love. Good night, child. Perhaps I will join you soon.

LARAZOD

(*Aside*) Oh dear sister of mine, how I wish you had listened to me and stayed out of this. How can I go on without you? I press forward only because I know Asmodeus's justice will vindicate her in death as he does us in life!

All the companions weep for Laratia except for Tybain, who instead shakes with fury.

TYBAIN

(*Furious*) I shall see you pay, false 'magistrate'. No matter the cost, you shall suffer the torments of hell, and your falsehoods belayed before his own honest ones. I swear it.

Act 7: Trial by His Own Dark Hand

HAANDERTHAN

The final trial is at hand. Your souls shall be quenched at long last.

LARAZOD

This trial is yours, Magistrate Maleficarum. Asmodeus is the only true judge here. Bow before him.

HAANDERTHAN

Insolent dog! Asmodeus shall scour your soul as sauce from a pan. Ash for bones, and waxen souls melted by the dark lord's flame to puddle at his taloned feet.

LARAZOD

We shall see who is judged!

THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS enters in a burst of foul colored flames and shrieking, crimson skinned imps and offers Larazod a choice. His devils hang silk scarves around all the companions' necks—one of red, one of crimson. Each is handed a contract written in blood, which bursts into flames when read.

PRINCE OF DARKNESS

Choose. A true heart shall beat strong for all eternity at my side, a false one burns to cinder in an instant.

Larazod and his companions choose the crimson scarves and the red ones burn away. Haanderthan cries out in terror as the Prince of Darkness turns on him.

PRINCE OF DARKNESS

Treacherous magistrate who lords false justice over true souls. Your soul shall burn for all eternity—an everlasting torment awaits you.

Prince of Darkness carries Haanderthan into the mouth of Hell. Exeunt.

